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Shpiece says,

Trustees knew of buffer machine defect

By RON GARBINSKI

At least six Farmington School Board members were told last week by school administrators that the buffing machine at which a 13-year-old East Junior High School student was electrocuted while operating, had a problem several days before the incident occurred, says Board Trustee Michael Shpiece.

"The buffing machine reportedly was not operating at full speed a couple of days before the electrocution. So the machine was checked out and nothing was found to be wrong with it. Apparently the person who checked it out felt the problem was in the electrical box to which the machine was hooked up to and not the machine itself," explains Shpiece.

"At that time, the shop instructor opened the machine and examined it for shorts. It is my impression that shorts are sometimes really difficult to find," he says. "So it was assumed the problem was not with the machine, but with the electrical box."

It appears that several days before the electrocution, there was an attempt to diagnose the problem, but the problem was misread, Shpiece recalls of the briefing by administrators.

"As well as I can recall, the instructor took the machine apart and looked at it, but he did not meter it. He tied the buffer into another electrical box

and it worked fine, so he changed boxes.

"Apparently, as we know it now, the machine was defective and not the electrical box," he says.

At the time of Robert Kourjian's electrocution, Shpiece said the administrators told board members that the buffer was not on the electrical box which was thought to be defective, but it was on a new electrical box in the shop area.

Shpiece said the briefing was attended by at least six board members and "those administrators that usually attend school meetings," such as the superintendent, assistant superintendents, business manager and the district's lawyer.

As of Friday night, neither Shpiece nor Board President William Corliss knew of any citations issued for violating any state safety law.

Lewis Schulman, assistant superintendent of secondary schools, said the shop area in which the youth was electrocuted 11 days ago will be opened for class today.

"The shop area has been checked and rechecked and it has been released back to us by authorities investigating the incident. It has been decided that the room is safe for students to re-enter," Schulman said.

"The engineering firm we hired to certify the room has finished its investigation and said the kids now will

have a safe atmosphere in which to work again."

"S.F. Sork Associates (of Novi) went over the room with a fine tooth comb and reviewed everything inside. They made several recommendations to us and we have complied with every one."

"They made some recommendations that needed to be corrected immediately and we corrected them (last week)," Schulman continued.

They also made several recommendations to correct various other defects later on and Schulman said the district will make sure it corrects those problems soon.

"But the important thing is that the engineering firm made their inspection of the shop area after local and state inspections were made," he explained. "So we are making doubly sure that the shop area is safe for the students to use. There should be no immediate dangers."

As for violations in the shop area, Schulman said there were several reported "small or minor" violations, but most of those were corrected last week.

The Farmington Hills police, State Police crime lab and the Occupational Safety Standards Commission are still continuing their investigations into the electrocution and equipment used in the shop area at East Junior High School.



Though classical language department head Marisa Petrella (left), has seen the puppet show many times, she can still laugh when student Marisa Petrella and her puppet come up with a fast pun from Plautus. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)



Michelle Grohowski (left) and Tara Hanley were members of a Mercy High School advanced Latin class which turned the dead language into living, rollicking theatrical comedy. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Students brighten classics by letting puppets do the work

By CORINNE ABATT

Advanced Latin students at Our Lady of Mercy High School in Farmington Hills have discovered that comedy in the Roman Empire in the third century wasn't a whole lot different from 20th century Westerns.

Calling themselves the Plautus Puppets after the Roman playwright, the students, under the direction of department head Sr. Marjorie Elizabeth Allen, translated a Plautus comedy, "Captivi" into modern English and titled it "The POW's."

Sister Marjorie likes the use of comedy in a tragic situation to the "Hogan's Heroes" TV series.

Describing "The POW's" as a typical Plautus play, she says, "It is full of puns and action. There is a lot of running around and not much plotting. In a word the characters are stereotyped like those of a Western movie. There's the same set of characters in every Plautus play."

The students went beyond translation. They built a stage, made puppets, produced the play and offered to do it for area schools. Only one, Bethan Junior High, accepted the offer, but it also was done for fellow students at Mercy.

However, the project was taken to the Junior Classical League Convention in Ann Arbor on Mar. 27 for a workshop program.

JUNIOR MARISA PETRELLA who supervised making the paper mache puppets says, "Plautus had a slapstick sense of humor."

She says translating this humor to the modern idiom was a challenge. She recalls the decision to leave one line as it translated literally, "Watch out or I'll denude your legs."

"We thought it was funny so we left it in."

Senior Tara Hanley, a four-year Latin student, gives an example of

how some of the lines had to be changed.

There was one line, "I wouldn't give a talent for a Thales of Miletus." Thales of Miletus was a famous mathematician of the time—a name audiences would have recognized. We changed it to "I wouldn't give a dime for an Einstein."

Michelle Grohowski lists the Plautus stock characters, "The old man, the young man, the cook and the parasite—freeloader is probably a better title for the parasite."

Sister Marjorie says there are usually three women in the Plautus comedies. "But, we don't see much of them. They are usually rushing across the stage to go into a house, never to be seen again."

By next semester Sister Marjorie will have another project going to keep Latin alive and well at Mercy High School.

It will be the third time she has of-

fered an archaeological dig in conjunction with another school. Even now, her students are contemplating ways to puzzle the other archeology team—this year a group from Catholic Central.

Sister Marjorie explains, "We create a culture and artifacts and bury them out in back. The other school will do the same thing."

Each school digs up the other's artifacts and tries to decipher the samples to piece the culture together. Two years ago, Mercy classical language students created a culture from Europe in the 15th century. One of the items they buried was an albino doll—white hair, white skin coloring. The other team didn't analyze the doll and came to the conclusion that people make dolls that look like themselves—therefore the people they were seeking to understand were all albinoes.

How district intrigues dropouts

By RON GARBINSKI

The belief that high school dropouts are stupid, unmotivated or that teachers have failed them in the classroom is "pure rubbish" according to a Farmington School District administrator.

"On the contrary, national studies have shown that high school dropouts are usually of average intelligence, but somewhere along the way they encounter personal problems," says Lewis Schulman, assistant superintendent of secondary schools.

"Kids drop out of school because they have certain problems, not because they are failing as students. It's based not just on their performance in the classroom, but on a whole package of things."

"The student's personality, attitudes and habits play just as big a role in his leaving school as do several other factors, including the school itself, teachers, financial problems and the community he comes from."

"But a good, comprehensive school system will offer a variety of programs that will meet the special needs of potential dropouts. It will try to retain the students with interesting and exciting programs," continues the assistant superintendent.

"We believe the district offers such a good mix of programs that satisfies the needs of almost every student."

SCHULMAN HAS CONFIDENCE in the attitudes of the district's schools

in their treatment of potential dropouts. While all school districts have students who drop out, it is a mark of a good system to provide an easy comeback for the student once he has left the system.

"I feel the district provides for a successful re-entry for a student back into high school. We contacted every student who dropped out last year to see if they wanted to come back," says Schulman. "We do this all the time. If a dropout is too old to fit back into the high school scene, we can provide him with an adult high school equivalency program."

Overall, the district's dropout rate compares favorably with its immediate neighboring districts. The dropout rate for the Farmington district during the 1973-74 school year was 3.88 per cent as compared to the total rate of 5.99 per cent for the 28 school districts in Oakland County.

As of Dec. 15, 1975, there were 59 high school dropouts in Farmington. Of the 1,573 students at Farmington High, 23 left school. Twenty dropped out from North Farmington, a school with 1,328 students, and 11 left Harrison's 1,301 student body.

"Our dropout rate is not all that bad considering the number of students we have in the district," says Schulman. "And I believe a lot of the potential dropout's needs are met through many of our special needs programs."

The district has several of these special educational programs, but just be-

cause a student is part of the program, does not necessarily mean he is a potential dropout, he says.

The special needs program, for example, helps about 90 students who may be unsuccessful in basic educational needs.

"Other programs such as our coop retailing, nursing and office programs have more than 300 students out working in the community. It does not mean they are potential dropouts, but only that the district is meeting some special need they desire," Schulman says.

More than 300 students in the district attend the Southwest Oakland Vocational Education Center. They are bused to the center daily and return to attend afternoon classes at their respective high schools.

THIS SCHOOL PROVIDES students with specific programs that individual districts cannot financially offer, such as diesel mechanics, data processing, dental assisting, food service and many more.

"I don't really like the word dropout because of the connotations it has picked up over the years. I think school leavers is probably a better description of these students," he continues.

"All school is not for everyone and some probably should leave earlier than others. Some students just mature faster and have different needs and desires in life."

Women to march against abortion

Twenty members of Lifespan in Farmington will spend Thursday, Jan. 22, marching in Washington D.C. The group is an affiliate of the state Pro-Life organization, Michigan Citizens for Life.

On Jan. 22, 1973, the United States Supreme Court handed down a decision permitting abortion on demand to any woman during pregnancy.

The Farmington area women will join others from across the country in front of the White House, march down Pennsylvania Avenue to the Capitol to form a circle as a protest to the Supreme Court ruling.

Last year more than 25,000 women participated in the march and a greater number are expected this year, according to a spokesman in the Oakland County office.

Mrs. Margot Weber of Farmington, one of those who will be in the march says the local group, Lifespan, is pro life.

"We are pro life, against abortion, against euthanasia, pro life."

The Farmington women will fly to and return from Washington D.C. in one day on a special tour rate. Mrs. Weber says many more have indicated they are interested in going.

While there, selected delegates plan to meet with local representatives and urge them to support a human life amendment "which would protect and foster all human life from conception to natural death."

During the day in Washington D.C., the marchers will be addressed by National Right to Life Committee officials and Pro-Life senators and congressmen.

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MODERN LEARNING

Oakland Community College students on Farmington's Orchard Ridge campus are learning about English through an unusual textbook. To see what it's all about, turn to Page 3A.