

Carrier of the Month Farmington



Jeffrey Matheny

Jeffrey Matheny, 14, is November's Carrier of the Month for the Farmington Observer.

He is the son of William and Judith Matheny and is in ninth grade at East Junior High School, Farmington Hills.

He maintains a B average in school and enjoys speech and math classes. In the future, Jeffrey plans to enter radio broadcasting. Outside of the classroom he enjoys baseball and listening to music. He is a member of Hope United Methodist Church, Southfield.

If you want to be a Farmington Observer carrier, please call 591-0500

Group speaks out for rights of divorced dads

By JACKIE KLEIN

Alan Lebow of Southfield traveled to Washington to march in the Father's Day rally because, he said, "I love my kids."

Lebow, president of Fathers for Equal Rights of Oakland, Wayne and Macomb counties (ERF) was one of about 200 divorced men from across the country who spent last Father's Day rallying on the steps of the U.S. Capitol protesting "sex-biased" laws on child custody.

ERF, which meets in Stevenson School, Southfield, the third Thursday of every month, is a non-profit organization devoted to helping fathers gain equal rights in divorce matters, Lebow said. Courts generally award child custody to mothers, he said.

A crowd of divorced fathers gathered in the school last Thursday to hear the Oakland County Friend of the Court and speakers on bankruptcy and programs for single parents. Lebow said the group has been in contact with the American Civil Liberties Union and the

Southfield-based Michigan Citizens Lobby to discuss possible action.

"Kids have been brainwashed and the courts don't seem to care," Lebow said. "We support joint custody because the child has the right to enjoy a relationship with both parents."

ERF supports Senate Bill 254, which was introduced in April and referred to the Committee on Judiciary. The proposed legislation would amend portions of the Child Custody Act of 1970.

THE ACT, according to ERF, states that the best interest of children shall be the controlling factor in a child custody dispute with no presumption of favor of either parent. Despite this act, ERF members claim many courts still cling to the notion that the mother is the best parent. She's entitled to custody even though family history indicates otherwise, Lebow said.

The bill defines equal custody as supervision and control of a child and gives each parent the physical presence of the child for the same length of

time until the son or daughter is 18 years old.

Joint custody is defined as supervision and control of a child which requires both parents to concur in all decisions affecting the welfare or development of the child which could have a lasting impact.

In a dispute between parents, the bill states, it is presumed that the best interest of the child is served by awarding joint or equal custody. The measure also calls for equal visitation rights. Beginning in April, Oakland County Circuit Court Judge William Beer said he will refuse to grant divorces to couples who can't agree on joint custody of their children.

UNDER BEER'S conditions for joint custody, parents would share decisions in raising the children no matter with whom they live. Beer said his policy is based on the welfare of children, who are the real victims of divorce.

Beer's practice allows parents to jointly decide such things as where the children will attend school, which doc-

tor they'll see and at what age they may start to drink, smoke and date.

Beer said his decision also makes it easier for ex-partners to obtain their children's school and medical records and requires the parent with physical custody to get the court's permission before moving to another state.

When a divorced father goes to school to show interest in his child's work, the principal may not allow him to discuss it with the teacher, Lebow said. Sometimes divorced fathers aren't allowed to attend their children's graduation ceremonies, he maintained.

ERF CHARGES that divorced fathers who fail to pay child support go to jail, charged with contempt of court. Many fathers are financially destitute after the divorce, according to the group.

One of the most unfair and illegal divorce issues, ERF members say, is a court order throwing a husband out of his house without a hearing.

"Most men think they're alone in their battles with the courts," Lebow

said. "But they feel better when they learn nearly all divorced fathers are discriminated against and treated unfairly. The courts favor mothers, even though they may be incapable of caring for their children."

ERF is open to all men and women who share the following goals:

- To create a presumption of joint and equal custody upon filing of divorce papers by either spouse.

- To gain equal custody rights for fathers where joint and equal custody isn't practical.

- To remove contested custody and visitation matters from the courts and establish a group of experts or a panel of peers to determine the best interest of the child.

- To eliminate the use of the contempt powers of courts to jail a man for being behind in support payments.

- To eliminate the unconstitutional ex parte order (forcing a husband to leave his home without a hearing.)

For information about the next ERF meeting, you may call 822-1700.

Symphony performs

Concert pianist Flavio Varani will perform Beethoven's Concerto No. 5 ("The Emperor") with the Oakway Symphony Orchestra at 4 p.m., Dec. 2 in Southfield-Lathrup High School, 12 Mile west of Southfield Road.

The orchestra will be under the direction of Francesco Di Biasi. Varani made his debut at Carnegie Hall and has appeared with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Brooklyn Academy Orchestra, the Newport Music Festival and the Meadowbrook Symphony.

He is artist-in-residence at Oakland University in Rochester.

Rounding out the Dec. 2 program will be selections from Aaron Copland's "An Outdoor Overture" and Rimsky-Korsakov's "Scheherazade."

Tickets are available at the door. General admission, \$5; student and senior citizens, \$3. Tickets may be purchased at Hudson's Northland, Westland and Oakland, Madonna College and Hammel Music, Livonia.

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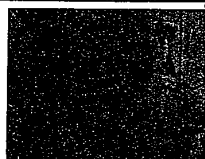
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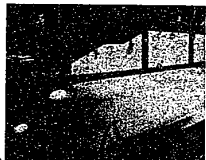
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