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School hit 3rd time by vandals

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Master keys to classrooms at Farmington High were stolen in a New Year's Day break-in at the school, the third break-in in four months at the facility.

Nearly every classroom in the school was entered by the thief or thieves; however, very few items were taken. It appears that the suspects were looking for cash in teachers' desks, as drawers were left open and their contents thrown on the floor.

A vending machine that dispenses pens was smashed, its cash drawer was removed, and pens were scattered over the floor. Blue paint was emptied in a custodian room, but school officials say that was the extent of the vandalism.

Locks were cut with bolt-cutters to gain access to the upper level of the school.

"We know one thing," said Gerald Potter, school principal. "They weren't interested in typewriters, computers, radios, audio-visual equipment and those type of things."

Potter said it was also fortunate that the intruders didn't vandalize the school "in terms of kicking over desks or destroying things."

Officer Joseph P. Schornack of the Farmington Police Department noted in his report that the school has a security problem that could get worse now that the master keys have been stolen.

KEYS WERE apparently used in a Dec. 7 break-in at the school in which a soda pop machine was thrown into the school pool along with several kickboards, benches, a swimmers' table

clock, folding chairs, a shower curtain and a metal shopping cart. The pool-bottom tile was not cracked by the impact of the vending machine.

Many of the items that ended up in the pool were kept locked in a store-room, police said. All doors leading to the pool were locked again when police investigated the break-in.

More than \$1,200 worth of band instruments were stolen from the school Oct. 7 when the school was entered by a thief or thieves who pried open a window.

The building doesn't have an alarm at present, and Potter said he will be discussing the need for one in an upcoming report to the superintendent of schools.

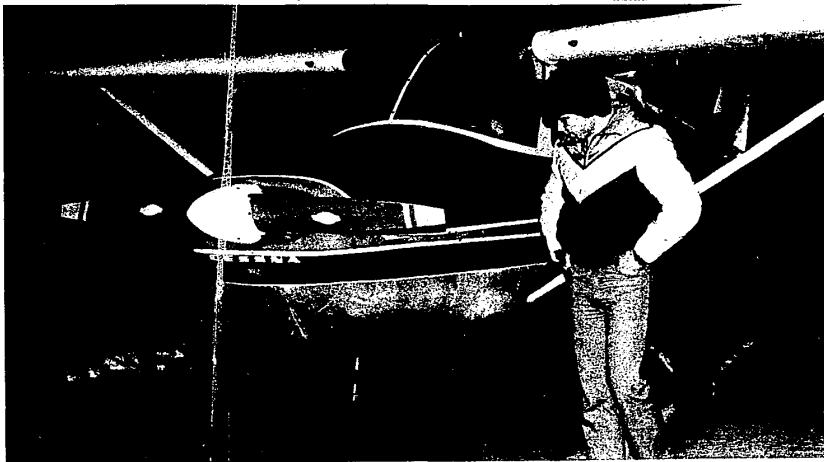
In the New Year's Day break-in, police noted that a door in the breezeway corridor of the school was left unlocked.

"This door is commonly left open by sports coaches to allow students access into the pool and gym area," Schornack noted.

OUTSIDE LOCKS were being changed at the school Tuesday. Potter said in his report to the superintendent he would discuss other security measures such as a possible increase in surveillance by members of the maintenance staff.

"The building is used from 7 in the morning till 11 at night six days a week," Potter said. "Teams are in here, there are athletic events. When coaches leave do they double-check all doors? We're looking into all this."

"That's what makes the problem so difficult to solve. Who's doing it? Is it our kids, outside kids or neighborhood kids?"



Drivers on I-275 probably wondered if they were still feeling the effects of a New Year's hangover when they spotted pilot Brian Brunt, 18, of Farmington Hills coming in for a landing on a roadway New Year's night.

Brunt pulls stunt

Chooses exit ramp for runway

By Gary M. Calce
staff writer

A Farmington Hills pilot was forced to make an emergency landing on I-275 in Plymouth Township Friday night after his takeoff from Canton's Mettetal Airport.

Brian Brunt, 18, says the Cessna 172 he was flying lost its engine power at approximately 500 feet.

"We were too far away, too low and there wasn't enough power to make it back to Mettetal," says Brunt, who's been a pilot for six months.

"Traffic on I-275 was fairly light. I wasn't as worried about the traffic as I was about watching for power lines, expressway signs and bridges," Brunt says.

The plane slowed down to approximately 50 mph, so it could merge with traffic while making the landing, he says.

"Once on the ground, Brunt taxied down I-275 to the Ann Arbor Road exit."

"I was looking for a place to get clear of the road. I was worried about a car hitting the plane because they couldn't see it," he says.

The plane is owned by Larry Thompson and was on loan to Brunt and Thompson's son, Ken. Also on board were passengers Lynne Miles, 18, and Mary Ann Swanney, 17, both of West Bloomfield.

After Brunt parked the plane on the exit ramp and contacted police, he was escorted back to Mettetal.

Police blocked the roads and let the plane taxi back, rather than having it dismantled and transported back.

Brunt says, "We went back right through the streets. I never imagined I would be doing something like that. I got a lot of weird looks."

Brunt met with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials Tuesday, but doesn't expect any repercussions. The FAA is investigating the incident.

"There wasn't any pilot error. It's not like we ran out of gas. They just wanted to look at the plane's records and find out what happened," Brunt says.

Despite the emergency landing, Brunt plans to fly again. He says the probabilities say he might have to make another emergency landing sometime in the future.

"But maybe I got it out of the way for the rest of my life," he says.

Brotherton criticizes local assessors for practices

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Municipal politicians have been criticized for assessing property at "artificially" low rates to gain favor from local voters while at the same time seeking to garner additional state funds.

That was the charge made by state Rep. Sandy Brotherton, R-Farmington, who addressed a group of senior citizens Tuesday at Farmington Hills' Mercy Center.

"Afterwards, when the county comes

along and reassesses property at realistic levels," said Brotherton, "taxpayers are forced to pay a second assessment which ends up as added funds in the coffers of cities and townships."

Communities which have been "having their cake and eating it too" will be penalized under a set of proposed legislation, according to Brotherton whose district also includes Farmington Hills and Southfield.

"Say the county comes in and increases assessments by a factor of two," Brotherton said, "under the laws

(called 'truth in taxation' and 'truth in assessing'), schools and colleges still would get the benefit of those added funds. But cities or townships would not.

"They will be forced to accept only the revenue received under the assessment they levied."

A POPULAR misconception regarding the state's role in property tax relief also bothers Brotherton.

"So many people come to the state, thinking it is in the best position to do something about property tax relief," he said.

"The truth is, we never see a penny of it. Those taxes are levied, collected and spent locally by school boards and city councils."

Brotherton added that as a single member of the Legislature, he has less control over local tax rates than do most any citizens who gathers 400 or 500 people together to make an issue of taxation.

"It doesn't take that many votes to sway a city council," he said. "But local people never really feel inclined to do it that way — I don't know why."

BROTHERTON had "good news" as well.

During the last two years, despite a 27.5 percent increase in inflation, the state government has reduced its staff by 700 employees, he said.

"As the economy improves, we'll be able to make further cuts by releasing welfare and unemployment workers. We've also reduced spending," he said. "because it's now recognized that most citizens feel it's costing too much for the government to support itself."

Under the Headlee limitation which restricts government spending, the state this year is spending \$1 billion, or 10 percent, less than allotted, Brotherton added.

"Spending for road maintenance and improvement also is decreasing despite last year's intense campaign to raise funds for that purpose," he said.

"Maybe next year we'll get the OK from you folks."

AN ECONOMIC development plan and workers' comp reforms also were cited by Brotherton as evidence of progress. Under the economic plan, special breaks will be given to industries which locate in automotive-dependent cities like Pontiac, Flint and Lansing, Brotherton said.

"We want to let the older cities help themselves with a little boost from the state.

"If new or expanding businesses provide part of the necessary investment and hire half their work force from high unemployment areas, they'll be eligible for state assistance on a loan basis," he said.

The plan includes a program Brotherton has worked on for several years that will provide funding for "high technology centers."

"We want to have as much expertise and assistance available as possible in Michigan in the areas of high technology and robotics in order to encourage new businesses to locate here," Brotherton said.

NURSING HOME reform, another pet project of Brotherton's, was also discussed.

"A policy I've preached on for many years was recently established by the Department of Public Health," Brotherton said.

Instead of making "pests of themselves" in nursing homes, state employees will begin to leave well-run homes alone while helping the problematic ones.

"We'll be giving them some help and straightening things out — but not fining those homes," he said.

If operations in a home are a disgrace, we'll be as tough as necessary and spend as much time as we have to improve the situation."

PUBLIC UTILITY legislation expected to be enacted soon will hold accountable utility firms which raise rates to consumers at will, Brotherton added.

"Right now, companies go unchecked until after they've begun to charge more," he said.

"If Consumers Power's costs go up, your costs go up. Under the law, increases will have approved by the Public Service Commission before they are passed on to customers."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

State government is cracking down on municipalities that double dip residents by assessing their property twice, according to State Rep. Sandy Brotherton.

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Test drive the last ride for Blazer owner

A Livonia youth trying to sell his car was robbed of both the auto and his wallet Saturday evening in Farmington by a man who was taking a "test drive" of the car.

The suspect pulled a gun and took the youth's 1976 black Chevy Blazer and his wallet, which contained \$60 in cash, police said.

The youth, Mauro Petrucci, 16, said the suspect was test driving the car south on South Duncan Street with Petrucci in the passenger seat when the robbery occurred. The suspect pulled over, produced a blue steel revolver and told Petrucci to get in the back seat quickly and put his face down, police said.

No suspects in break-in

Farmington Hills' resident Tom Green, 51, returned to his home at 35721 N. Grandview in the Mulrow Apartments after ushering in the new year to find that not everyone shared his good spirits.

His bedroom was ransacked, and missing was a \$250 watch, a gold wedding band, other jewelry and \$100 cash.

According to police, the apartment was entered through a rear sliding door that was locked, but unsecured with a bar.

There are no suspects in the case.

THE SUSPECT drove to the parking lot of Christ Community Church, where he allegedly took Petrucci's wallet and handcuffed him to a tree behind the building.

The suspect then asked for directions to Pontiac and drove off. Petrucci waited until the robber left the scene, then slipped out of the handcuffs and called police.

The test drive had started at Little Tony's bakery/pizzeria on Orchard Lake Road in Farmington, where Petrucci is employed. The suspect, who identified himself as Sam Allen, had contacted Petrucci two weeks earlier, expressing interest in the Blazer, which the youth had advertised in a newspaper. The suspect then had told Petrucci he would be back in touch after checking a few more cars.

THE SUSPECT, 6 foot, 2 inches tall, weighing about 160 pounds and in his 20s, reportedly was dropped off Saturday at Little Tony's by a black male in a Trans Am. He entered the store, telling Petrucci he wanted to buy the Blazer but first wished to test drive it.

Petrucci agreed, and the two entered the car and headed east on 10 Mile, turning south on South Duncan. About one-quarter mile down the street, the suspect pulled the gun.

The suspect reportedly called Little Tony's shortly after the incident to give Petrucci's whereabouts.

Both he and the driver of the Trans Am remain at large.