

Skiing: It can be local, world adventure, 1D



North wins by one, 1C

High-tech advances make city safer, 3A

# Farmington Observer

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## Farmington FOCUS

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**THREE** cheers. Farmington Hills councilman Ben Marks lauded the Farmington school board for a job well done Jan. 19. "I don't think anyone in this room gives them enough credit," the council liaison to the school board told parents at a town meeting about redistricting proposals. "Don't wait until you have a selective situation," he challenged parents. "Don't wait until you're threatened. Get your fannies out and to those meetings."

**BENEFIT** hoops. Farmington Department of Public Safety officers will take on a team from WCZY-FM in a basketball game to benefit the fight against cerebral palsy Thursday, Feb. 11. The game will begin at 7:30 p.m. at Farmington High School, Shilawasee at Orchard Lake. Tickets are \$1 and can be bought at the public safety department, the high school or at the door.

**EASING** flooding. Farmington's storm water drains reached capacity during a recent rain, causing some local basements to flood and some local residents to complain. Future improvements to Orchard Lake Road will deal with drainage in both Farmington and Farmington Hills and "may handle some of their problems," city manager Robert Deadman said.

**FOOTNOTES:** One year ago this week — Agnes Mansour, former state Department of Social Services director and a former Mercy nun, was named executive advisor to the Mercy Health Services Special Initiative for the Poor in Farmington Hills.

## what's inside

- Around Farmington . . . 3B
- Classifieds Sections C, E, F . . . 8E
- Index . . . . . 8E
- Auto . . . . . 8C
- Real estate . . . . . 2E
- Employment . . . . . 8E
- Creative living . . . . . Section E
- Crossword puzzle . . . . . 2D
- Entertainment . . . . . 5E
- Obituaries . . . . . 6A
- On the agenda . . . . . 2A
- Police/fire calls . . . . . 4A
- Sports . . . . . Section C
- Street scene . . . . . Section D
- Taste . . . . . Section B

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

## Moment of remembrance

North Farmington basketball players stand single-file during a moment of silence prior to Friday's game at Farmington High School to remember former teammate Matthew Leiter. The Raiders played their first game since Tuesday night when Leiter, a North

Farmington junior and reserve forward, died unexpectedly following a game with Westland John Glenn. The Raiders pulled out a victory in the final minute Friday, 53-52. See Page 1C for game details.

## Player's love of life recalled

□ Teammates react to loss of a friend, 1C

"Life is too brief Between the budding and the falling leaf . . ." — from Matthew Leiter's eulogy

By Casey Hans and Bob Sklar staff writers

There were prayers and tears Thursday, as hundreds gathered in Southfield to pay tribute to 17-year-old Matthew Leiter.

Family, friends and teammates recalled the youth's love of basketball, his warmth and his humor as they offered each other comfort. "It's ironic that he died through his heart, because that's where he gave the most," his older sister, Michele, said last week. "I was honored to have known someone as beautiful and as wonderful as him."

Matthew Leiter, a North Farmington High School junior, died Tuesday night following a varsity basketball game, the first in which he had played following a year on the junior



Matthew Leiter 'He loved basketball'

Please turn to Page 2

## Budget chief He helps manage state money

By Loraine McClellan staff writer

At 34, Shelby Solomon is one of the youngest appointees of the governor to direct the Department of Management and Budget.

The management part of the title makes him manager of all state contracts, facilities and purchasing. "There hasn't been any big overhaul of reorganization here, no big shifts in policy," he said, speaking of the four months since he took the position. "There hasn't been time. The governor was forced to veto some legislation and re-enact some pieces of the '87-'88 budget when I came here.

So I've been working on the '87-'88 and '88-'89 budgets at the same time."

**THE PUBLISHED** and bound copy of the proposed \$8.6 billion, 1988-'89 general-fund budget made the deadline after "non-stop" work, Solomon said. He believes it will be passed by the Legislature in June. In putting together the budget, his job is to reflect the governor's views. He's also responsible for the \$2.4 billion school aid fund budget.

Solomon has a good understanding of the governor's views because he worked closely with him for seven years when James Blanchard was a U.S. representative from Michigan.

## people

Solomon is the son of Gloria and Ernest Solomon. He's president of Cadillac Insurance Co. and owner of Ernie's Deli and Restaurant, both in Farmington Hills. His sister, Stephanie, manages Ernie's, at Mulwood Square.

**DURING** HIS senior year at Michigan State University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in political science.

Please turn to Page 7

## Hills man on trial for 1985 death of wife

By Casey Hans staff writer

The murder trial of a man accused of killing his wife and setting fire to the family's Meadowbrook Hills house began in Oakland County Circuit Court last week, more than two years after the incident occurred.

The charred remains of 50-year-old Marlene Edwards were discovered after the Oct. 14, 1985, house fire on Rhonwood in Farmington Hills.

Her husband, James Arnold Edwards, 56, is charged with murdering her. He faces three counts:

• first-degree murder, that is, premeditated murder;

• felony murder, murder committed in the commission of another felony, in this case, arson;

• arson, the malicious setting of a fire.

If convicted of the charges, he could face life in prison.

The couple was one month shy of celebrating their 25th wedding anniversary when the incident occurred, Southfield defense attorney Nicholas Smith said.

During the past two years, three autopsies have been done on the victim's body by three medical examiners. One required court-ordered exhumation.

The burden on assistant Oakland County prosecutor Joyce Todd will be to determine the cause of death — on which the three examiners have disagreed during preliminary testimony. Todd also must prove that Edwards set the fire in which his wife's body was found.

"In such a badly burned body, it's very difficult to determine the cause of death," said Todd, in her opening statement to jurors Thursday. "It is not careless smoking, as much as the defendant might want you to believe. I think the notion of an accidental fire will be totally dispelled."

**The charred remains of 50-year-old Marlene Edwards were discovered after the Oct. 14, 1985, house fire on Rhonwood in Farmington Hills.**

"No matter why this tragedy occurred, what happened is that this man murdered his wife and set fire to his house."

Jury selection began Tuesday. The trial is expected to take several weeks. Both attorneys were admonished Thursday by Circuit Judge Francis O'Brien, who recessed to allow them to share potential evidence exhibits and paperwork, to "avoid further delays. The matter should not be trial by sneak or surprise," he said.

Smith chose to offer his opening remarks to the jury, referring to the original Oakland County medical examiner's report, which said Marlene Edwards died of "natural causes." It was "later" changed to "read 'unknown'."

"There was a smoking fire after Mrs. Edwards had her heart attack," Smith said.

Smith also disputed the charge of felony arson, saying "the fire did not cause this death. What we're dealing with is opinions."

James Edwards did not kill his wife. He did not burn down the house he designed."

According to the defense, Edwards and his wife "planned, designed and orchestrated the building" of their Rhonwood Street house, moving in shortly before Christmas of 1973. Both worked for

Please turn to Page 7

## Hills not expecting big water rate hike

By Joanne Maliszewski staff writer

Farmington Hills water users might be able to turn on the faucet without dollar signs on their minds this year.

Though Detroit increased its wholesale water rates an average of 5 percent for 1988-'89, Farmington Hills users aren't expected to feel much. If any, of the pinch, said Dale Countegnan, assistant to the public services director.

"Right now, we're not alarmed by the increase coming from Detroit," he said. "I don't think there's any drastic change for residents than what they paid last year."

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department is increasing water rates from \$5.75 to \$6.03 per 1,000 cubic feet. Last year, based on the average use of 5,000 cubic feet of water used, the average Farmington Hills user paid about \$27-\$33 a quarter.

Last year, when Detroit decreased both water and sewage rates, Farmington Hills residents continued to pay at the higher rate charged the previous year. While other suburban users were paying \$5.75 per 1,000 cubic feet of water used, Farmington Hills users were paying at the previous, higher rate of \$6.25, Countegnan said.

Please turn to Page 7



ROBERT BORST/staff photographer

Michigan Department of Management and Budget director Shelby Solomon, at work in his Lansing office.