

Easter, Passover observances, 1B



All-Area hoops, 1D

Students pile in for bus safety class, 3A

# Farmington Observer

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## Farmington FOCUS

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### WHAT kinds of people seek housing rehabilitation loans?

Says Carol Boyd, a Farmington Hills Rehabilitation Loan Board member: "These people are working people. They're poor. They pay their bills. Some of them are what you call the working poor. They don't want charity. They know what they can afford to fix. And with these 3 percent loans, it makes some of these repairs affordable, where they wouldn't be affordable at the banks."

**LIGHTS out.**  
Street lights in downtown Farmington will be turned off beginning March 30 so Detroit Edison can work on repairing and refurbishing them, according to information from the Downtown Development Authority.

Five temporary lights will continue to light the downtown until the Edison project is finished.

**WALK to help feed the hungry.**  
To fight hunger, Church World Services will host a 10-kilometer walk Sunday, May 15, through the sidewalks of Farmington.

Last year, 200 people raised \$12,000.

**FOOTNOTES:** One year ago this week — A waitress was ticketed and the management was issued a Michigan Liquor Control Commission violation when a 19-year-old Farmington Hills police cadet was served a glass of red wine at a local pub March 27 (1987), police said.

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## 'All I do is vegetate'

### Prisoner, awaiting murder trial, endures repetition

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

In his jailed world of monotonous repetition, Jon Vermeulen is in the ironic position of looking forward to relatively more freedom if he is convicted of the murder of his pregnant wife.

Vermeulen, 42, of Farmington Hills has been held in the Oakland County Jail without bond for more than two years while waiting for legal battles to end so that his trial can begin.

Although he has not been tried for his wife's death, his incarceration is more confined than if he were convicted. He describes most days of the past 27 months as a numbing hell in which 23 hours of the day are spent in a 50-foot-square cell.

"Every day is identically the same, a photocopy of the day before. All I do is vegetate," he said, holding up his left arm and displaying an inch-wide, red, plastic wrist band.

The band means Vermeulen is in maximum security and entitled only to "non-contact" visits. Inmates are

Deception pervades events in shooting death, 6A

separated from visitors by a floor-to-ceiling cement wall with a small glass window. A small opening in the window permits muffled conversation. Both inmate and visitor must stand.

VERMEULEN ADMITS to being responsible for the death of his wife, Urline "Renee" Lewis, in what he says was a botched attempt to kill himself. At the time of the shooting, Vermeulen said Lewis was five to six weeks pregnant.

She was killed Dec. 26, 1985, in the couple's Farmington Hills apartment with a .44-magnum pistol that had been issued to Vermeulen while he was serving with the U.S. Army Special Forces in Vietnam during the late 1960s. He also shot himself twice.

After spending nearly two months in hospitals, first in Botsford General

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## Marriage rights crucial to case

By Janice Brunson  
staff writer

Can a wife testify against a former husband if she was legally married to him at the time he was charged with the murder of a woman he had married while still wed to the first?

This question concerning the so-called marital privilege, which prevents one spouse from testifying against another, is scheduled for oral arguments next week before the state Supreme Court.

Appellate attorney John Lazar of Farmington Hills, arguing for the defense, says such testimony by a spouse should be barred. "The law is very clear. You can't carve holes in it just to get testimony that is badly wanted."

Oakland County prosecutor Michael Modski agrees the law is clear, but said the privilege is not applicable if the marriage has broken down and no marital relationship exists. "We're arguing it doesn't make sense and is not reasonable if there is no viable relationship."

At issue is testimony by Sharon Vermeulen of Redford Township, who had been married 21 years to

*"The key is what was the legal marital status at the time of the communication. There are no exceptions to the law."*

John Lazar  
attorney

Jon Vermeulen when he was charged with shooting and killing Urline "Renee" Lewis in Farmington Hills on Dec. 26, 1985.

Jon Vermeulen had married Lewis six weeks earlier, on Nov. 11, just 10 days after filing for divorce from Sharon and three months before the divorce was final in February 1986.

SHARON'S TESTIMONY is based on conversations with her then husband during the week of Dec. 19, after Lewis had separated from Vermeulen. Lewis, unaware her marriage was illegal, was planning to file for divorce on the day she died.

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## Council eliminates most lot-splitting restrictions

By Joanne Maliszewski  
staff writer

A citywide moratorium on splitting lots has been lifted except for a few scattered areas with acre-sized lots that Farmington Hills planning commissioners will consider rezoning.

After lifting the wholesale moratorium, the city council put a hold on splitting lots in certain areas where zoning allows the larger acre lots to be split. The council also requested the planning commission to study these areas and consider rezoning.

The council's action followed a report from David Call, assistant city manager, who mapped out those areas in the city where zoning allows lot splits in areas that historically have kept large lots.

In the RA-3 zone, for example, lots can be 12,500 square feet and in RA-4, they can be 6,500 square feet. But in the RA-1 zone, lots must be a minimum of 20,000 square feet. Lots in the areas to be studied by the planning commission range from 20,000 square feet to 60,000 square feet.

THE CITY council also will ask the planning commission to consider rezoning lots adjoining Moran, Stockton and Linden to RA-1A, which is even more restrictive than RA-1. The council's action followed residents' requests for that consideration as well as a petition bearing signatures of residents on those streets.

"The zoning would be in conformity with the neighborhood. The rezoning would also stop the deterioration of our neighborhood. It would provide for the proper land use in conformity with the area," according to the petition.

Moran, Linden and Stockton residents also requested that the council withhold building permits in the area while rezoning is considered.

notice that the development in the neighborhood must be in conformity with the area," according to the petition.

But council did not withhold building permits. City attorney Paul Blau told the council that "I think you have to have facts supporting doing that. And I really haven't heard any."

**SPECIFIC AREAS** under the moratorium that will be reviewed by the planning commission are:

- A small area between Ambeth and Salisbury, west of Tuck.
- An area north of Nine Mile, east of Middlebelt and south of El-don. This area also includes four large lots just south of Nine Mile, across from Karen Place.
- Moran, Stockton and Linden, just west of Middlebelt.
- An area east of Power and just south of 11 Mile. The area also includes lots north of 11 Mile and east and west of Power.
- Lots east and west of Park Hill, west of Orchard Lake Road.
- Lots owned by Oakland County Parks and Recreation south of Clairview, west of Northwestern Highway.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Jon Vermeulen spends 23 hours a day in his Oakland County Jail cell while awaiting trial for murder.

## Hills man recounts Flight 288 wing fire

By Bob Sklar  
staff writer

An otherwise boring flight turned dramatic for a Farmington Hills man when a fuel flareup prompted passengers to initiate evacuation of Northwest Flight 288 Sunday at Detroit Metropolitan Airport.

"When people yelled evacuate and somebody yelled fire, people began pushing to get out," said Dennis Shoup, 44, a Michelin Tire original equipment salesman returning from a three-day business trip in San Diego.

Although Shoup smelled smoke, he never saw flames. But a fellow passenger told him she saw an orange flash from the residual fuel burn in a backup engine beneath the right wing.

Four of the 144 passengers on the plane were treated for minor injuries. Seven crew members also were aboard.



Dennis Shoup

Shoup's evacuation was routine "more confusion than panic." "Within a few minutes, it didn't seem the plane was in any imminent danger of exploding," said Shoup, a Navy fighter pilot in Vietnam. "After the initial confusion, the evacuation went fairly routinely."

THE BOEING 737 touched down at 6:20 p.m. after a four-hour, non-stop flight from San Diego.

The plane was on the taxiway awaiting clearance to approach the terminal when Shoup, sitting in a center seat near the front of the coach section, heard commotion behind him.

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