



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Following his conviction of first-degree murder, Jon Vermeulen faces a mandatory sentence of life in prison without chance of parole.

Vermeulen found guilty of killing

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maintained Lewis' death was an accident, that he shot himself once, shot Lewis by "reflex" as she knelt to help him and then shot himself a final time.

During closing arguments Wednesday, Oakland County assistant prosecutor John Slevin called Vermeulen's account "a lie," prompting a derisive groan from Vermeulen's 21-year-old son Ray, who attended the final day of testimony.

Slewin said Lewis' death was a "classic" murder and suicide but "in this instance, the suicide was obviously not successful."

Following the verdict, defense attorney Lawrence Kaluzny, a Farmington Hills resident, said jurors "just did not believe Vermeulen. They had legitimate questions."

Central among them was the timing of Lewis' death, whether or not Vermeulen shot her before or after he shot himself the first time. Botsford General Hospital surgeons who operated on Vermeulen at 5 p.m. on the day of the shootings estimated he sustained massive wounds to the chest and abdomen only hours before surgery and not during the early-morning hours when Lewis is said to have died.

Sharon Vermeulen, who now lives in Arizona, testified she spoke with Jon on the phone at 3:20 p.m. Dec. 26 and while he spoke "quickly, in a rush," he sounded normal.

FARMINGTON HILLS police detective David Loe, who assumed

charge of the case last year, said he is "relieved" the trail is over.

"You never know with a jury. They tried to give him the benefit of doubt, to stretch in his favor, but things just didn't match up. It's refreshing to know a jury can see through deceit," Loe said.

Kaluzny said Vermeulen, a former electrical engineer, expected a conviction on charges of first degree. "He expected it. He was stoic about the verdict."

Sentencing is set 11 a.m., April 7, before Circuit Judge Fred Mester, who said he expects Vermeulen to appeal.

"I'm sure there will be an appeal, based on the time between arraignment and when the case came to trial," a period of nearly 39 months, Mester said.

Following sentencing, Vermeulen has an automatic right of appeal, according to Kaluzny, who said "he has nothing to lose by appealing." In the event of an appeal, a new attorney will likely be appointed to the case.

After the verdict, Burns, who had never before served on a jury, said she felt near tears and observed that everyone personally touched by the murder is a victim.

One who has been touched is Sharon Vermeulen. At 15, she married Jon and bore him three children, now ages 20, 21 and 24. She was not permitted to attend the trial because she was a prosecution witness.

Push is on for C'ville millage

By Kevin Brown
staff writer

To gain votes for a millage issue next month, two Clarenceville schools secretaries have even been deputized to register voters.

Superintendent Michael S. Shibley also has scheduled meetings with parents, appeared on the district's cable TV channel, sent home fliers to parents and more — all to gain support for the millage.

"I've met with the parent leaders at each of the buildings," Shibley said, adding he's discussed "why we need to ask for it and what we are going to do with the money."

Voters will be asked April 24 to approve a 3.5-mill increase, to free the district — for a while, at least — from its financial woes.

Shibley said the biggest concern among district homeowners is "what it's going to cost them. They do bring up concerns about the assessments, that they've increased radically."

The superintendent stressed that while a 10 percent increase in assessments last year did force taxes up in the district, that money doesn't go to the school district, by the state school aid formula. Under that formula, as state equalized value per pupil increases state aid payments decrease.

INSTEAD, THE district's budget

was increased by just 2.7 percent by the state — an inflation that doesn't keep pace with inflation.

"You're paying more of the bill but the state's paying less of the bill," Shibley said.

In early April, Shibley plans to meet with more parents at each of the district's four schools. He also plans to make a second appearance on the district's cable channel — with school board president Richard Wood and assistant superintendent for business Ralph Skrocki, in a question-answer format on the millage request.

In mid-April, officials plan to send brochures to district homes explaining the issue.

THE MILLAGE increase vote is the first sought by school officials in eight years.

The district, which includes portions of Livonia, Redford and Farmington Hills, is able to seek the increase due to Redford Township voters' approval last August of a ballot issue changing the governmental status to a charter township.

Money raised through a millage increase and an expected request for a Headlee tax rollback override would.

Head off cuts in K-12 instruction and extracurricular activities.

Give salary increases to em-

ployees whose wages have been frozen since they received a pay increase in the 1987-88 school year. If teachers' wages fall below salaries in other districts, officials say, the district will have trouble keeping good teachers.

Lower class size in grades K-3 from about 31 to 26 students per teacher.

Allow for a full-time librarian in each elementary and at Clarenceville Middle School. This would also boost teaching of computer skills at both levels.

Help the district pay an anticipated \$254,000 increase in costs due to increases in health insurance premiums, data processing costs and more.

LAST SUMMER, the school board reduced operating expenses by \$400,000, as state aid did not keep pace with inflation.

If voters approve the measure, the total general operating millage would rise to 41.4 mills.

Should voters approve the increase, the owner of a house valued at \$60,000 would pay an extra \$5.75 per month or \$105 per year. The owner of a \$70,000 house would pay an extra \$10 per month or \$122 per year.

What effect would rejection of the millage have on Clarenceville Schools? "I'd prefer not to take a negative attitude," Shibley said, adding he's likely seek a second vote in June, if the millage fails.

Alkateeb's successor won't take seat tonight

A change in plans will greet candidates tonight seeking appointment to fill former Farmington Hills city councilman Joe Alkateeb's vacant seat.

Contrary to earlier plans, the new appointee will not take a seat on the council following the appointment process tonight at 7:30 in the council chambers, 31555 11 Mile.

The new appointee will be sworn in by city clerk Kathy Dorman at the end of the council meeting, but will not be expected to take the seat until the next regularly scheduled meeting.

"It would be unfair to expect somebody to step into the council meeting Monday night," Mayor Terry Sever said. "This way, they won't be put on the spot."

The city council will offer nominations and cast ballots for one of 11

candidates seeking to fill the vacancy left by Alkateeb's Feb. 20 resignation. Candidates were publicly interviewed last week. The winning candidate must receive at least four of the council's six votes.

CANDIDATES ARE Lawrence Lichtman, planning commissioner; Martin Krohner, vice chairman for the Council of Homeowners Associations of Farmington Hills; Jonathan Grant, planning commissioner; Richard Corey, board of zoning appeals member; Vernon Kieplinski, council watcher; Mary Avery, planning commissioner; Paul Soverby, chairman, Zoning Board of Appeals; George Sarkisian, a Ford Motor Co. layout technician; Albert Rosen, a Detroit Public Schools English department head; H. Frank Jinlan, a chiropractor; and Larry Bushman, owner of two Farmington Hills businesses.

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