

At left, a woman uses a computer to call up a case number at the Oakland County Circuit Court records office. A name is all that's needed to find out whether a subject has been involved in a circuit court case. Below, Lady Justice, blindfolded and well-balanced, stands guard in front of the Oakland County office building, home of the Oakland County Circuit Court, in Pontiac. Lawyers, investigators and suspicious lovers find a great resource in the Circuit Court records office.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

## They can be dirty — but records are public

By James Radebaugh  
staff writer

**W**ANT TO DIG up some trash on someone? Or check out a potential spouse? Or just have a good time immersing yourself in true-life drama?

Oakland County Circuit Court makes it fun and easy. Many county residents are unaware of the information available to them, just for the asking.

Court records, for instance, are part of the public record. They're there for anyone. And thanks to a well-oiled organization, they're relatively easy to find at the county's circuit court.

JUST SHOW UP at the records depart-

ment on the lower level of the county office building at 1200 Telegraph. All you need is a name, though a case number is better. Step up to the computer terminal on the counter, follow the not-so-simple directions, and you can pull up information on any Oakland Circuit Court case your subject has been involved in, either as a plaintiff or a defendant; juvenile cases are the exception.

The computer will tell you the type of case, whether criminal or civil, the date it began and the nature of the offense or suit. It'll also give you a case number, which when passed to the clerk behind the counter is what puts the whole case file in your hand. For a fee, the court will make photocopies.

"We just work real hard at being friend-

ly," said Stephanie Schroeder, chief deputy county clerk. "That's how Mr. Allen (as in county clerk Lynn Allen) wants his office run, and that's how I run it."

For the record, a recent check of Observer and Eccentric editors came up blank, except for a case involving... well, nevermind.

Actually, the court records office is pretty businesslike. Most of the people who pull records are attorneys and private investigators, Schroeder said.

**BUT THERE ARE** exceptions. Schroeder, who has worked for the county for 18 years, said women sometimes call up records to check up on their boyfriends. Apparently it's not uncommon for married men to tell their babes on the side that

they're divorced. The babes are disappointed when they find out no record of the divorce exists, according to Schroeder.

And, occasionally, the office gets calls from people outraged that elements of their legal past have come to light. They're usually disappointed to find that the courts and what happens in them are public information, Schroeder said. Ah, but what would democracy be otherwise?

But if dealing with circuit court is easy now, it's getting easier. Court administrator Judy Cunningham said the court's staff held a retreat in June to consider ways to improve service.

As a result, jurors are now being paid on the same day they serve and the court will soon implement telephone technology that

will allow litigants to receive pertinent information about cases by relaying case numbers to a telephone answering machine.

In the meantime, basic information about a case can, as always, be obtained by calling the court. "We can just punch that up on the computer," Cunningham said.

Court officials acknowledge that a visit to circuit court often brings at least one major headache: finding a place to park. A lot of people don't know where to park, or where to go afterwards, according to Cunningham. They're working on the problem, she said.

"We respond to the public," Cunningham said. "We serve the public."

### police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

#### ● FELONIOUS ASSAULT

A 14-year-old Farmington boy was hospitalized for psychological treatment Oct. 25, after threatening family members with a crowbar and knife Oct. 25.

According to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report, the boy became violent at his family's home on State Street after being told he could not watch television at about 7:30 p.m., and started breaking items in the house. He picked up a crowbar and used it to damage his bedframe and threatened his sister. He then dropped the crowbar and threatened her with a knife.

He was restrained by his uncle until police could arrive. The boy was taken to St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Pontiac for evaluation. Police have also filed paperwork with the Oakland County Probate Court, juvenile division.

Police report several previous contacts with the boy, and recommended medical help, according to the report.

#### ● INDECENT EXPOSURE

Two anonymous Farmington Hills residents have reported incidents of indecent exposure on East Huntsman Street.

One woman reported she observed a man twice last week standing naked in his front window, fondling himself about 9 a.m. She said she has seen him like this before, standing in what appears to be a den or library, as she walked on the street.

The first woman told police she is concerned with middle-school age students who stand and wait for a school bus nearby.

#### ● BURGLARIES REPORTED

A number of break-ins have occurred in the area during the past week. They include:

- A Farmington Hills resident in the Streamwood Condominiums at Middlebelt Road and 10 Mile reported a break-in Oct. 30. Stolen were boxes filled with jewelry, worth \$1,055.

- The owners of two Haggerty Road businesses found money missing when they opened for business the morning of Oct. 30. Romano's Pizza and Catering, 31134 Haggerty, reported \$900 in cash was stolen and \$200 in damage to the front door lock. Also, about \$100 was missing from a cash drawer at Robert Arthur hair salon, 31130 Haggerty.

- A house in the 22000 block of Power Road in Farmington was burglarized Oct. 29-30, with \$1,500 in items taken. Residents told police the thief took a camera and accessories, money, jewelry and a shotgun.

#### ● HALLOWEEN MISCHIEF

Several incidents dampened Halloween spirits in Farmington and Farmington Hills, on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1.

- On Shawwassee in Farmington Hills, someone threw balloons filled with black paint at west side of the house. Damage was estimated at \$500.

- A Wykeshire resident reported \$250 damage to his 1978 Cadillac when his tires were slashed.

- One street west, on Castlereigh, \$60 damage was reported when a tire was deflated on a 1985 Chevrolet. Also, late Wednesday, someone threw numerous eggs at the vehicle and a house.

- On Gloucester Circle, a BB gun caused \$150 damage to the passenger window of a 1987 Dodge Daytona parked in front of the house.

- A five-gallon garbage pail was melted on the Our Lady of Sorrows playing field when someone set the contents on fire Wednesday.

- A decorative skeleton and two pumpkins were blown up on a porch on Loomis during the Halloween holiday.

- The brick wall at the Burger King restaurant, 32740 Grand River, was damaged, causing \$75 in damage.

- The driver's window of a car parked on Flanders was smashed, causing \$150 in damage.

#### ● BAD MUFFIN

Farmington police have contacted the Oakland County Health Department about an incident in which a Farmington Hills woman reported opening a sealed muffin that smelled like cleaning fluid.

She was not injured. The woman told police she had purchased the sealed Sara Lee brand blueberry muffin at a deli, and opened it Oct. 30.

Farmington public safety director Frank Lauhoff said because there was no injury, the incident would be left in the hands of health department officials who would likely contact the muffin producer.

#### ● THEFTS REPORTED

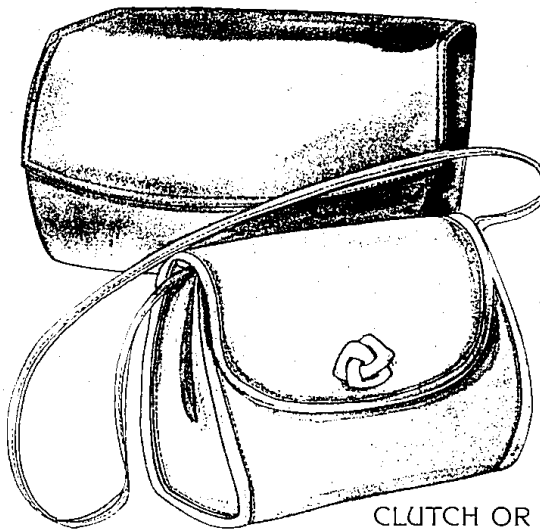
- A diamond wedding ring valued at \$600 was reported stolen from the Racquetball Courts of Farmington, 34200 Nine Mile Road, Oct. 25.

#### ● DAMAGE REPORTED

- A resident reported \$200 in damage to his car, after another car sprayed at him with rocks from the roadway in Farmington Oct. 30.

The incident, which occurred at about 4:50 p.m. on Violet near Astor, was intentional, the victim told police. A Ford Ranger peeled away from a stop, breaking the victim's window with stones.

A second damage incident was reported in Farmington Hills Oct. 31. An estimated \$90 in damage was done when the window of a car parked on Heritage Hills was broken.



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Bottom: Two-compartment bag. Winter white, black or charcoal grey, \$130.

**Jacobson's**

We welcome Jacobson's Charge, MasterCard, VISA, and American Express! Shop until you drop on Thursday and Friday. Endless fun on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Saturday.

### Stores collect food for Army

The Bon Ton Shoppe stores in downtown Farmington Center and Newburgh Plaza in Livonia will hold a collection of non-perishable foods for the Salvation Army on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, Nov. 8-10.

Each contributor will receive a coupon making them eligible to win one of four Bon Ton Shoppe gift certificates. Each store will give away two \$100 and two \$50 gift certificates.

### Mother, baby girl both test positive for cocaine

A baby girl born at Botsford Osteopathic Hospital Aug. 18, who with her mother tested positive for cocaine, has been turned over to the Oakland County prosecutor's office, said Farmington Hills Detective Sandra Rochford.

The mother told Rochford that she used cocaine the night prior to her daughter's birth.

"It was the only time," the mother

was quoted in the police report. "I just got into the wrong group."

The Child Protection Law of 1975 considers such instances child abuse and neglect and must be reported, said Don Mussen, supervisor of Child Protective Services of Oakland County.

No decision has been made on the case.