



DANIEL LIPPIT/Staff photographer

Jim and Jan Whitcomb are photographed by Farmington Hills police chaplain Richard Karr during Jim Whitcomb's welcome-back party.

Returning reservist welcomed

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After more than six months away, Whitcomb said he considers his Naval work a great opportunity but is glad to be home. "It was a real eye-opener. I told my wife I'm glad to have my mid-life crisis over with. It will be nice to get back into a routine."

Whitcomb returns to his job Monday. When he left for Virginia he was in the department's crime prevention section. He will return as a uniformed officer in the patrol division.

"We're very proud of him and pleased he's back with us," Farm-

ington Hills police Chief William Dwyer said.

The day after Whitcomb returned, the police department hosted a welcome-home party for the reservist and his family. He was awarded the chief's citation and ribbon for services given to the United States, Dwyer said.

Whitcomb joined the reserves in 1986 and received a direct commission. He joined when the reserve intelligence program was looking for people and he thought it would be a good idea.

"IT WAS just a personal thing. I recognized years ago there was a certain advantage that guys in the

military had. They seem to be self-reliant," Whitcomb said.

And a lot of the work and training he encounters as a reservist dovetails into his work as a police officer. "The Navy and police careers have benefited," Whitcomb said.

Whitcomb is proud of his family. "They did as well as anyone could imagine," he said, adding that he and his wife didn't make a big deal with his daughters that he would be leaving for a time.

"Their mother was the star of that show. For the most part, I don't think they had trouble understanding why I had to go."

Officials monitor outbreak of hepatitis at elementary

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March 8. He planned to send another update home this week. "We are working with the county health department and the school nurse," he said. "Every day, we look at the attendance, see who is sick and follow up with a phone call."

"We're treating this thing very carefully."

Hepatitis A is an inflammatory viral infection of the liver which has a 15- to 50-day incubation period, and causes flu-like symptoms such as diarrhea and minor cramping. It can be a problem in a group setting like a school, where children don't always wash their hands, then share food or classroom items.

It is one of three strains of common hepatitis, which are all viral infectious diseases and cause inflammation to the liver, Altamirano said.

Because hepatitis is viral, there is no treatment, except to keep those infected away from others until they are no longer infectious and get family members and friends treated

with shots to bolster the immune system.

WILLIAM GRACE parent Sue Hamilton said her 7-year-old daughter, Shauna, started showing signs of hepatitis on March 10 and was diagnosed with it one week ago. The case last November and both recent cases all came from the same second grade classroom at Grace, although school and health officials stress they have not yet confirmed whether the students contracted the virus from the classroom or each other.

Hamilton said she was informed by the school Monday that a fourth grader in a different class could also have developed hepatitis.

"My pediatrician had not seen a case of this in years," she said, adding that her doctor has not yet told her how long her daughter must stay home from school. "The school says they're disinfecting the room twice a day and not letting students share pencils."

"If my daughter can get it, anybody can get it. People can get test-

ed, or can get the shot."

Hamilton said the rest of her family had received shots designed to boost the immune system.

Don Cowan, director of building and student services for the Farmington Public Schools, said school and health officials are doing everything they can to inform parents and control any problem. He encourages good communication between parents, their doctors and the school.

"We're obviously very concerned about it," he said. "We have our fingers crossed and hope it will subside."

"We don't want the community to over-react, but we do want them to react."

Health officials are trying to rule out any common elements within the school and determine whether students were infected by one common exposure, or whether they are passing the virus from one to another, Blinstein said.

He said the department has seen an increase in the virus throughout Oakland County in recent weeks.

Study calls for school changes

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Committee members said many of the concepts can be accomplished by using current district funding, especially in light of the February operating millage defeat. Some would also become issues at the bargaining table for teachers before they could be implemented, White said.

She envisions some of the items taking up to five years to be fully integrated into the schools.

White will discuss the plan in detail at a School/Community Forum meeting at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 26, at Harrison High School on 12 Mile between Middlebelt and Orchard Lake roads.

SOME OF the new concepts proposed for high schools include:

- Implementing "student forum" groups, which would include 20 students from all grade levels and would exist for all students throughout their high school career. The group would meet for a half hour each day and would focus on areas of self-reflection, interaction with others, academic achievement and community service. Students would receive credit for this.
- Allowing longer blocks of time for some classes, team teaching between disciplines, and time for

teachers to work together in planning teaching methods. An extended day, where additional classes would be offered before or after school, is also proposed. At-risk student needs should also be addressed with a specific program.

• Changing curriculum from rote memorization of facts and traditional testing, to teaching students to apply what they learn and connect it to the real world. Testing and evaluation would be expanded to include districtwide departmental exams, committee evaluation, research projects and a collection of student works showing what they have learned. New evaluations would demand quality from students.

• Getting rid of things like the "senior excuse" and demand a more rigorous academic performance, possibly including increased graduation requirements with the changed curriculum. Marketable skills would be stressed, students would be required to do community service work for credit, and vocational/technical curriculum would be incorporated as a key part of the academic program.

District language arts coordinator John Barrett, who coordinated much work on the study, said some Farmington teachers are already discussing the concepts. "They've bought into it," he said. "Much of this is breaking away from old paradigms."

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