

Suburban Life

Lorraine McClish editor/477-5450



Thursday, May 2, 1991 O&E

(F1C)

Paws With a Cause

Transportation needed to spread word about her service dog



SHARON LEMIEUX/staff photographer

Donna Hebal-Fica and her mother, Betty Hebal, recount their pleasure when they learned the 1974 graduate of Harrison High School had been chosen the Sweetheart for Milford's Knights of Columbus-sponsored Sweetheart Ball.

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

DONNA HEBAL-FICA needs a van with a lift. She wants the transportation to fulfill her goal of traveling throughout the state telling others with handicaps about "Paws With a Cause" and encouraging them to keep on keeping on no matter what the disability.

"I've had a (physical) problem since 1977. I've been wearing knee stabilizers since I was 14 and it was only in the last year that I heard that I could have a dog to help me," she said.

"Paws With a Cause has no money for advertising," she said of the Grand Rapids based agency. "They get their clients by word of mouth and I can spread that word by traveling to talk to different groups, but I've got to get that lift to do it."

Hebal-Fica's dog is trained to graduate from his 16-month training and be delivered to her this month.

"I just knew that dog was for me and I think he knew it too, and so did my children," she said. "I was lucky. Some have to wait for a year or two for the right dog."

Hebal-Fica's dog will be able to pick up things as small as a dime for her, items she can't reach because her leg braces don't bend in too many directions. He will pick up the phone for her. He will turn door knobs that her hands aren't strong enough to grip. In short, life will be a lot easier.

HER PHYSICAL problems started when she suffered her first bout

with arthritis when she was a student in Harrison High School, and they never stopped. Life kept dealing her one health setback after another.

In school she earned six letters, in gymnastics, tennis, and softball. During a softball game in her senior year she suffered an injury that cost the full use of her legs.

The arthritis became so severe nine surgeries were performed. Lupus set in to complicate and cause more problems. She now wears dark glasses over the dark glasses, full braces on both arms and legs and walks with the use of a cane.

Hebal-Fica gets around now with an electric cart that weighs 300 pounds. To get that cart in the car, equipped with both arm and leg controls, takes two or three men. The big problem is that two or three men are not always handy.

Even so she is a volunteer for her daughter's Girl Scout troop. She is a volunteer in a mother-tots program for Oakland Family Services, helps out at school and church when she is needed, sings in the church choir and drives her children back and forth to school in Huron Valley's year around program.

"My husband and my kids keep me going," she said of her husband, Ted, and her three children, Abigail, 7, Jason, 5, and Jennifer, 3.

"I have wonderful support from them even when I have a flare-up. And I've always gotten whatever support I needed from my parents as well as all my brothers and sisters through all the weeks and months spent in the hospitals."

"My mother would remind me of the little Ernie 'The Gully' even when I was in my teens, and it



'She is so enthused about getting her dog now and wanting to tell others how to do it. We wanted to help her do that.'

— John Rogers
Knights of Columbus
Milford

helped," she said of her mother, Betty Hebal, who remains a resident of Farmington Hills.

MILFORD REGENTLY more support has come through the Sweetheart Ball, an annual event sponsored by Knights of Columbus Fulton Sheen Chapter in Milford where the Fica family lives. The ball benefits one Milford citizen each year.

John Rogers has been chairman of the Sweetheart Ball for the past nine years, and can expect at least a dozen nominees each year for the Sweetheart who will receive the money that the ball raises.

"We knew Donna was going to be our Sweetheart early on," Rogers said. "It was not only her need, but her spirit, her attitude, her humor, her determination to get out and do

things rather than sit around and cry. I swear she is the toughest woman in the valley. It has been a great pleasure working with her and an honor knowing her."

"She is so enthused about getting her dog now and wanting to tell others how to do it. We wanted to help her do that."

The ball raised \$5,500 that is earmarked for Hebal-Fica's van and lift. She will need much more.

"Her medical expenses are unbelievable. Her leg braces alone cost \$2,000 each. So we're still taking donations for her," Rogers said.

Checks are to be made payable to Knights of Columbus Bishop Sheen Council, and sent to the council, 3101 Sands Court, Milford 48380, marked to the attention of John Rogers.

Appeal pending

Flamboyant attorney ready to defend death by choice

By Shirlee Rose Iden
staff writer

If Southfield attorney Geoffrey Fieger had embraced an acting career as he once planned, life couldn't have afforded him a wider stage, or more attentive audiences.

Murder, malpractice, and more matters have kept the tall, long-

haired attorney, 40, in the limelight he obviously relishes.

When Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak refused to pay a \$425,000 malpractice award to a man whose jaw had been permanently injured during treatment, Fieger moved decisively. "I closed down the hospital for a few hours," he declared, and thereby gained a quick round of le-

gal celebrity and his client's judgment.

Fieger won a \$1 million malpractice award in 1982 that landed him on the national network news when he had only been in practice three years. "It was the first \$1 million judgment in the world," he said.

His flair for the flamboyant has created a visibility most people only

expect in Perry Mason or members of a certain LA law firm.

INDEED, Fieger's reputation and celebrity brought him the most important client of his career by his own assessment. His defense of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, the Royal Oak pathologist who assisted in the suicide of a woman (Janet Adkins) with Alzheimer's disease, made him an instant international legal star. "Kevorkian read about me and contacted me in August," he said.

"Judge Alice Gilbert said he should get an attorney. He had been representing himself. Now I am his mouthpiece."

With Fieger orchestrating the defense for Kevorkian, murder charges against the pathologist were dismissed in an Oakland County court without even going to trial.

Fieger's next assault would be against the judge's injunction preventing the doctor from ever offering his "suicide machine," which Fieger called "laughable." His appeal is pending in the Michigan

Court of Appeals.

FIEGER, AT 25, already had two degrees in theater from the University of Michigan, when he decided neither acting nor teaching drama were what he wanted to do over the long haul.

"I liked using my mind, so I tried law school. My dad, Bernard, an excellent attorney, encouraged me and I was very good. I already knew the language of the law and it became like a food you never knew you liked. However, and it was meant for me."

In 1973, he was graduated from the Detroit College of Law and quickly passed the bar in Michigan, Florida, and Arizona. "I asked my dad what area would I be good in and he came back 'litigation'."

Fieger said his father, "a very combative guy," met his mother while at Harvard Law School. Father and son practiced together in the Southfield office, where he still hangs his shingle and many mementos of his now deceased father and his own career.

Like a bizarre sculpture, Kevorkian's "suicide" machine, a thing of valves and wires, said to have cost about \$30, sits near Fieger's desk among awards, diplomas and fine art. Often, the suicide machine travels with Fieger as the attorney fulfills his rounds of speaking engagements, and other obligations.

"We're protecting everyone's civil rights in this case," said Fieger.

"Every person alive could face this situation. Janet Adkins died in her sleep of her own choice. We're talking about the meaning of life, of the joy of living being removed. There are times when death is more beneficial."

"The secret of Jack Kevorkian is the option to terminally ill patients to end their lives. This provides the feeling of control. Having that option allows them to die with dignity."

FIEGER EXPLAINED he had no doctrinaire philosophy about assisted suicide when he was retained by Kevorkian, but has come to like the doctor and respect him.

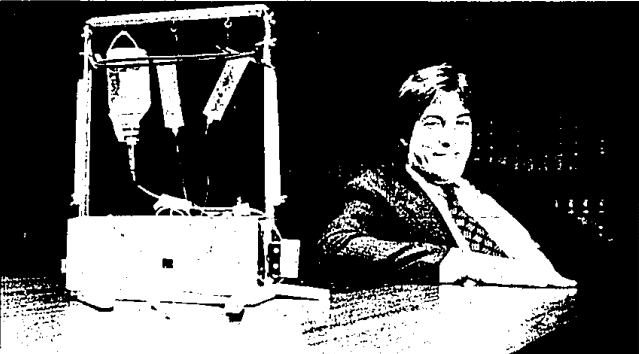
"He's a brilliant man and a self-taught artist," Fieger said.

"There is no reason to oppose death by choice for the terminally ill," he said. "This should be a highly controlled medical specialty and a person should be mentally competent to make such a decision."

"A living will and assisted suicides are the same. Why can't you say this, as well as write it in a living will? There is no difference."

With Harold Klawans as co-writer, Fieger is completing a book he said will be auctioned to publishers this summer.

In the long run of things, this case will have as much impact as Roe vs. Wade or the Scopes Trial, Fieger said. "And I never believed that Jack Kevorkian is either a danger to anyone or belongs in prison."



JIM RIDER/staff photographer

Attorney Geoffrey Fieger talks from his Southfield office about his defense of Dr. Jack Kevorkian and the pathologist's suicide machine.

Summer Potpourri '91 benefits group homes

"Summer Potpourri '91," subtitled "Artistic Expressions & More" is sponsored by the Volunteer Committee of Community Living Centers to continue its residential program, as well as maintain and repair or replace the worn furniture and household items in the group homes for mentally retarded adults.

The event is scheduled for Saturday and Sunday, May 4-5, in Plymouth Radisson Hotel, 14707 Northville Road. Show times are from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday.

On show and up for sale are arts and crafts for the discriminating buyer. The event offers watercolors, apparel, dried flowers, pen and ink work, baskets, woodwork, jewelry, weaving and pottery.

There will be door prizes, a 50-50 drawing, demonstrations and entertainment throughout the show hours.

Community Living Centers is deeply committed to the philosophy of normalization and to providing the best possible living environment where each resident can grow to the maximum of his or her potential.

MARY WAGNER, the organiza-

tion's founder and executive director, began the group home concept in a former nursing home that housed eight young men, in October, 1969, and then another eight young men in March, 1969. At the time she was teaching in the special education department of Farmington Public Secondary Schools and had a mentally retarded son.

"The second group of eight men were on a waiting list that seemed to grow from the first month Community Living Centers were opened," said Karen Kraft, who is a member

of the Volunteer Committee and has a relative living in one of the homes.

"I know, first hand," she said. "The happy, loving and encouraging environment the centers provide for its residents."

Over the years the organization became involved with other county and state agencies who were working toward the goal of a normalized living environment and employment for the adult with retardation. Because of this the program expanded to include a home for senior adults and more recently the Supported Independent Living Program.

The center's homes are staffed with trained personnel who provide 24 hour supervision. In each home there is a manager, program coordinator, domestic aide and program assistant. Whether in the home or in the community, the residents are supervised at all times.

"The staff has deep involvement in the daily life of each resident, providing program planning, medical attention and assistance in daily living needs as well as personal counseling," Kraft said.

"Our administrative staff consists of a director and an assistant. The

office is staffed by a secretary, book-keeper and area supervisors."

KRAFT WANTS it known that Community Living Centers is a state and federally tax exempt private non-profit organization, so any contributions are deductible for income tax purposes.

Admission to the show is \$2, seniors are admitted for \$1.50 and children under 12 will be charged 50 cents. There is free parking and refreshments will be available throughout show hours.