

Kroger agrees to van service for senior citizens

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Details are still up in the air, but it appears the Kroger Co. will participate in a van service two days a week to transport senior adults to its new 12 Mile Road superstore.

"It just hasn't been completely finalized," said Kroger spokesman Michael Layne.

In a May 22 letter to Farmington Hills city manager William Costick, Jerry Perun, Kroger vice president of retail operations, acknowledged acceptance of the van program, which comes with an estimated price tag of \$12,480.

"We will be able to support the van on a two-times-per-week basis. We would like to re-evaluate this service at the end of this

year to determine its continued viability," Perun wrote.

The van service stems from complaints from many senior adults after Kroger bought the Great Scott chain and closed two smaller stores in November at the Grand River-Halsted shopping center in Farmington and at 13 Mile and Orchard Lake in Farmington Hills.

A DAY LATER, the new 43,000 square-foot supermarket opened a couple miles away in the Halsted Village Shopping Center, 37550 12 Mile, at Halsted.

The closing of the two smaller stores infuriated some residents, particularly senior adults near the Grand River-Halsted store, who liked walk to do their grocery shopping.

"Whenever a corporation will take the time or the money to help a community or seniors, that's commendable," said Farmington councilwoman JoAnne McShane. "It will help some people. But it doesn't take away the fact that there's residents who want to shop in a neighborhood store."

McShane led a petition drive among residents, particularly senior adults, urging Kroger to allow another grocer to lease space at the former Farmington Kroger store.

The Farmington store has since been leased to Kiddie Land. The 13 Mile and Orchard Lake store is now owned by Kroger, and company officials said in March they would not prevent another grocer from buying the facility.

"I hate to see this just lay. But I don't

know what else what can be done," McShane said.

The estimated \$12,480 van service budget includes the "normal costs" for operating a van, considering fuel, routine maintenance and a driver's wages of about \$120 a day, said Costick, who contacted Kroger on behalf of both Farmington and Farmington Hills officials and residents.

"They (Kroger) would pick up the whole thing," he added.

PRELIMINARY PLANS call for a van to stop at about 10 apartment complexes that are either exclusively for senior adults or have a large number of senior adult residents, Costick said.

The van is expected to be donated by Michigan National Bank's Independence for

Life program. When the program begins depends on when the city receives the van.

"We've got a lot of things to set up yet," he said. "The senior adult staff will get the word out."

Changes are expected once the program is under way because certain pick-up sites may not be the ideal ones or may not draw as many senior adults as would another site, Costick said.

In his letter to Costick, Perun said Kroger also plans to start a 10-percent discount for all senior adults' food purchases on Tuesdays of each week. Perun also wrote that Kroger staff visited nearby homes and apartments and passed out envelopes to senior adults with coupons for purchases and free goods.

Former youth coach pleads not guilty to sex charges

By Alice Collins
staff writer

The parents of the boys whom Garden City youth league coach James William "Bill" Stoller is accused of sexually molesting in his Southfield apartment went to Oakland County circuit Judge John O'Brien's courtroom Monday hoping to hear the defendant plead guilty.

But he didn't.

Instead, defense attorney Jerome Fenton entered a not-guilty plea for his client in all of the 15 cases and 33 counts against him. The alleged victims are six of the boys he coached in baseball and basketball during the past four years.

STOLLER WAS in the courtroom just long enough for the plea to be made and also to be arraigned on 15 counts of being a habitual offender.

"I don't think anybody knew what to expect today," one of the mothers of the boys said after the arraignment. "We had hoped he would plead guilty so the children and their parents wouldn't have to go through this any longer."

A father of one of the children who was formerly a friend of Stoller said he "gave him a quick eye" in the courtroom, "but he did not acknowledge me. I thought if he looked at us he might plead guilty," the boys would be spared testifying at the trial.

FENTON, a Farmington Hills attorney appointed by the court to defend Stoller, said he advised his client not to make any quick decisions on what to do.

"I told him there's no sense in rushing off and doing something impulsive without knowing all the facts."

Both Fenton and assistant prosecutor Jeff Saunders, who's handling the prosecution, said they're planning to go to trial. Both said there would probably be more than one trial.

A pre-trial hearing is scheduled for June 20.

THE HABITUAL offender charges were added Monday because Stoller previously served time in DeWitt, Mich., after pleading guilty to simi-

lar charges, something the officials of the Garden City Youth Athletic Association didn't know when they hired him as coach.

Stoller is accused of befriending the boys he coached, winning the trust of their parents, then taking the youths to his apartment on Shilawsee north of Eight Mile where he molested them.

The first warrants were issued against Stoller on April 7 after the mother of a 13-year-old boy in the baseball league told Southfield police the coach had molested her son at this apartment three days earlier.

Other parents went to authorities to report similar incidents after the first case became public.

The charges against Stoller include counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, each carrying a maximum penalty of life in prison, and counts of second degree, which are 15-year felonies.

FENTON ANNOUNCED after Monday's arraignment that Stoller had been administered a blood test for AIDS and that the results would be available in two or three weeks.

"He has absolutely no fear that he

is carrying the virus," Fenton said. "He wanted me to tell (the public) and he signed the medical release allowing me to do that."

Stoller is getting along all right in jail, Fenton said. Stoller is in Oakland County jail.

"He reads a lot" and is helping to other prisoners in reading. "He's still a human being and a very compassionate human being," he said.

However, security has been high at the jail because of threats reported against Stoller.

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