

Cheerleaders aren't shaken by hit-mom

By Susan Buck
staff writer

HIGH SCHOOL cheerleaders are too busy practicing their moves to concern themselves with the story of the Texas mother convicted of trying to hire a hit man to kill the mother of her daughter's rival for a cheerleading squad. That's the consensus of some area cheerleading coaches.

While the coaches and their colleagues have discussed the incident in detail, the squad members haven't.

"There's not too much reaction," said Mary Cumming, who's been the head cheerleading coach for Southfield/Lathrup High School for 10 years. "They probably think the concept is ridiculous."

"We're talking about cheerleading," she said. "This is not a career. We lose perspective."

"This is a child we are talking about. We don't have the typical cheerleader stereotype," Cumming said. "These are NHS-quality (National Honor Society) people."

It's the worst day of Cumming's life when she posts the squads. "Feelings are hurt. I hate it," she said.

SOME PARENTS yell at Cumming. "Parents can be nasty," she said.

Cumming's varsity squad cheered Sunday at the Silverdome during the Detroit Lions-Green Bay Packers game.

All schools have cheerleading tryouts; some schools compete more than others.

"I rely heavily on comments and recommendations of staff members," Cumming said. "Staff in the building is very open. I look at kids I can get along with and who can get along with each other, who are able to take criticism and who are academically sound."

Most don't go on to be college

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— Wendy Poelke
Farmington Harrison
cheerleader coach

cheerleaders, Cumming said. "We're not a competitive squad. When they (cheerleaders) are not cheering or studying, they have jobs."

When the Texas incident occurred, one of coach Wendy Poelke's Farmington Harrison cheerleaders clipped a newspaper article and brought it in.

"We joked about it," Poelke said. The coach playfully added the phrase: "Don't get any ideas" next to the clipping.

"If they don't make cheerleading, it's not a matter of life or death," Poelke said.

It just happens that this incident is with cheerleading, but it could happen with any other activity, Poelke added. "When a girl becomes a cheerleader, she must remember classes are a priority."

BECOMING A Harrison cheerleader involves skill, four teacher evaluations, leadership qualities, character and spirit, Poelke said.

Emotion sometimes overshadows reality when parents evaluate ability, said Poelke, who's coached cheerleading for 10 years at Harrison.

Last year, Harrison took first place in the league's cheer dance competition.

"None of my girls have even mentioned it (the incident)," said Victoria Peurach who's coached cheerleading at Birmingham Groves High school for two years.

"I see my girls every day and not one has brought it up. The girls are really close."



JOHN DSCHER/staff photographer

Wendy Poelke (right) works with Farmington Harrison's cheerleaders. "If they don't make cheerleading, it's not a matter of life or death."

Previous to coaching at Groves, Peurach coached cheerleading at St. Bede school in Southfield.

Peurach, a 1985 Groves graduate, also cheered for the school when she attended. Then more than

100 girls tried out for the squad, she said. That number has dropped to about 70.

"They (Groves girls) have different interests now," Peurach said. Cheerleading is not one of the

top notches on their list, Peurach said.

She held tryouts two times a year. Girls must be passing at least half of their classes. A "C" average was required when Peurach was a

cheerleader.

"Attitude is the strong thing," Peurach said. "They must be able to perform under pressure. Cheerleading is a sport. I have girls who really work hard."

School officials again raise skateboarding concern

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Farmington school officials will target specific areas they say are being damaged by skateboards and single-bladed street skates and, again, ask for help from the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills in enforcing the rules.

"It needs to be done," said Don Cowan, director of building and student services for the district. He said the district simply wants the facilities to be used as they were originally intended, and is concerned about the district having to spend money to repair them.

"Nobody's trying to usurp somebody's playing area," he added.

School officials are most concerned about revamped school tracks, which could be easily damaged, and tennis courts, which some young people are using as a roller-

blade hockey court. They are also concerned about damage to black-topped play areas, and benches and other items which are sometimes used for skateboard jumps.

At the district's request, the Farmington City Council introduced an ordinance in August restricting such activities and included school properties, but Farmington Hills City Council members did not consider the district's request. Farmington tabled any action at a Sept. 3 meeting, awaiting a more specific request from the district and is trying to cooperate with them.

COWAN SAID HE will, again, approach both cities about the issue. Although no major dollar damage has been logged in school facilities to date, Cowan believes it will if trends continue. "This is really more precautionary now," he said.

The skateboarding issue began when Debbie Cornwell — then Longacre Elementary PTA president and currently president of the Farmington Area PTA Council — voiced her concerns about damage and safety issues to the Farmington City Council. She said older teens were driving to the school and skateboarding, causing some damage and driving younger children away.

The city told her they could not enforce anything on school grounds without an ordinance and a specific request from the school district. The district then requested such an ordinance from both cities.

Trustee Susan Hennels suggested last week that the district narrow the focus of its request, even detailing which tracks and schools.

"I think we should revisit how we want to define this," she said. "They will go right down the street if we don't attempt to protect them."

SUPERINTENDENT Michael Flanagan said he is disappointed the issue has not been resolved to date.

"I don't understand what the problem is," he said. "I'm concerned about the buildings and the money we spend on our schools."

Cowan said the district can currently call police and complain about trespassing and other problems. The problems arise, he said, after school hours and on days when school is not in session. Then, he

said, there is no one available to contact police.

Laws in both cities would allow police to come onto school property and handle property damage and other problems without a call from the district.

Specific complaints have been logged at Longacre and Farmington High School, both in the city of Farmington, and also at Forest Elementary in Farmington Hills where kids are playing roller hockey in a

parking lot filled with cars.

Parent Joe Svoke said he was concerned that the skateboarding issue had painted school officials as "bad guys" which he said is not true.

Another parent, David York, said he felt if the district detailed its specific needs to the cities, "I think it (the problem) will take care of itself."

Staff writer Susan Buck contributed to this report

Official wants schools to be in on library talks

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Farmington Public Schools trustee James Abernethy has called for the district to take an active interest in a possible merger of a Farmington-Community Library and Oakland Community College facilities.

Although aware the school district already works closely with the local library system, Abernethy said he is interested in seeing how the school district could get involved in any possible merger. He said bringing all the agencies together could be beneficial.

"I'm interested in having people monitor it (the situation)," he said. "I

would like to see a heightened dialogue."

Officials from the community library and OCC's Orchard Ridge Campus in Farmington Hills are exploring the merger of a new main library with a college library on the campus south 1-96 between Farmington and Orchard Lake roads, because of cramped quarters in the 38,000-square-foot main library on 12 Mile.

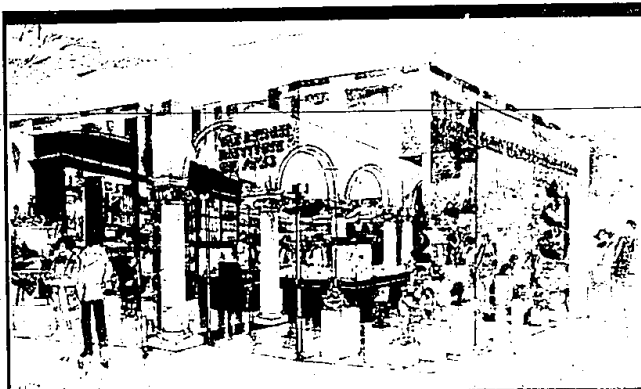
THE OCC LIBRARY also needs work. Officials are awaiting a consultant's report which will detail problems at that facility's library in the heart of the campus.

A \$14.5 million bond issue to build a new main branch for the Farmington Community Library on 12 Mile near Halsted was defeated in 1989, and officials have been looking at other options since. Library director Beverly Papai has said the new library would require 80,000-square-feet of space — more than double what they have now.

Merging the two libraries would allow sharing of book collections, journal subscriptions and technology, officials of both institutions said.

Farmington school trustee Helen Ditzhary said she believes the possible merger and district involvement "has some merit."

Superintendent Michael Flanagan said he meets monthly with Orchard Ridge president Dan Jaksen, and offered to monitor the ongoing talks.



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Three men arraigned in auto chase and freeway shootings

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Three men were arraigned Wednesday, two on felony charges, in connection with an auto chase punctuated with gunfire.

According to police, four men were involved in a verbal dispute outside a rap concert at Joe Louis Arena in downtown Detroit early Tuesday.

They took their argument to Detroit freeways — beginning on I-75 to I-696, then exiting on Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills — chasing and shooting at each other along the way before being arrested

in West Bloomfield, police said.

Just after midnight Tuesday, a Farmington Hills police officer spotted the two cars, a red Camaro and a silver Buick, pursuing each other north on Orchard Lake Road.

Two of the men — Michael Terry James, 18, of Detroit, the driver of the Camaro and Harvey Eugene Johnson, 24, of Pontiac, the passenger in the Buick — were arraigned on the same seven felony charges Wednesday afternoon before Judge Margaret Schaeffer in 47th District Court, Farmington.

JAMES' BOND was set at \$40,000, and Johnson's at \$50,000. They both face a pre-trial examination 1:30

p.m. Thursday, Sept. 11, before Judge Schaeffer.

The two men were charged with two counts of felonious assault, one count of concealed weapons, one count of reckless discharge of firearms and three counts of felony firearms.

A third man, Detroit's Wallace Wildman, 21, a passenger in the Camaro, was charged with furnishing false information, said Farmington Hills Sgt. Charles Nebus. His bond was set at \$2,000. As of Thursday, no pre-trial date was set.

The three are being held in the Oakland County jail.

The fourth suspect was released, Nebus said.