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THE WEEK AHEAD

Early haunts: Farmington Jaycees Haunted House is open 7:30-9:30 p.m. tonight on Orchard Lake, south of 14 Mile.

MONDAY

Council doings: Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils both have regular meetings tonight. Farmington's starts at 8 p.m.; Hills at 7:30 p.m.

TUESDAY

Say cheese: Farmington High students will have a chance to retake their school or I.D. pictures today.

WEDNESDAY

Senior patrol: Farmington Hills Police Department's Senior Police Academy takes place 1 p.m. today at the William Costick Center.

THURSDAY

Money matters: Eldermed and Botsford Hospital will present a free financial and estate planning seminar 2-3:30 p.m. today at The Botsford Inn.

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Ellis relishes opportunities, challenges

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Amid acrimony over developments and placement of cellular towers, Farmington Hills councilman Jerry Ellis saw only two things: Opportunity and challenge.

"It's an opportunity to do something and do it correctly and a challenge to do it without hurting the surrounding areas," Ellis said. Ellis, who won a special election in August 1996 to fill a vacant council seat, put his opportunity/challenge philosophy into action in his freshman year on council. Ellis is one of four people seeking one of three four-year council terms Nov. 4.

The Farmington Hills attorney tackled the seemingly unwieldy issue of cellular tower placement and designed an ordinance believed to be one toughest in the



Name: Jerry Ellis
Age: 63
Resident: 22 years

Jobs: attorney
Community: one year on city council, former parks and recreation board member
Family: married, two sons

Please see ELLIS, A4

Bouncing back: Melissa Garr's recovery from a traumatic brain injury that left her in a deep coma continues to astound those around her. She is able to talk and communicate with visitors, and has started physical therapy in St. Joseph Mercy Hospital's Coma Rehabilitation Unit.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DEASLER



MELISSA'S MIRACLE

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

"I can talk now..." The sights and sounds of Melissa Garr's miracle become more astounding every day.

Melissa pressed her index finger over the small tracheostomy opening in her throat and had a simple prediction as to who was going to win Saturday's football game between Farmington and North Farmington. "Farmington!" the 16-year-old said from her hospital bed in the coma rehabilitation unit at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, just after returning from another successful round of physical and speech therapy.

A nurse then asked Melissa who painted Halloween-esque colors on her finger nails?

"Danielle," said Melissa, referring to close friend and Farmington High School classmate Danielle Wright, who regularly visits Room 1130.

Inside the small room are stuffed animals and Melissa's favorite videotapes, including "Aladdin." On the walls are items meant to trigger memories and stimulate thought: photo collages; newspaper articles about Melissa's accident and the quick, life-saving CPR action of lifeguards Laura Hryczyk and Melissa McKay; and construction-paper stars of varying sizes, made by FHS band and color guard members and containing inspirational hand-written messages.

Then, Melissa said another thing, albeit in somewhat garbled form. "Say hi to my friends" at her school, Farmington High. She lifted her hand and gave a semi-thumbs up sign.

"Who brought you the balloons?" queried her dad, Mike Garr.

She quickly replied, "The press."

Her mom, Susan, asked the teen whether she wanted her to deposit money from the "dollar jar" in her room. The money was put in her room to help keep Melissa thinking about that red Mustang car she wants to drive, not the severe pain she still feels in her lower legs.

Signs of hope

Melissa smiled, and flashed fingers on both hands, to communicate the digits of her credit union savings account.

"It's hope," said Susan Garr, smiling herself while watching her daughter's hand signals. "Every time she remembers an incident, or a phone number... they're all hopeful signs that she's going to continue to

progress. It just warms my heart."

The words, smiles and hand signals are seemingly insignificant by themselves. But they represent just how far Melissa has progressed since a freakish poolside accident at Farmington Glen Aquatic Center on July 23. That day, a heavy tree branch fell 40 feet and struck her on the head, breaking her skull and knocking her into a deep coma that medical experts doubted she'd ever escape. Despite the heroics of lifeguards Hryczyk and McKay, Melissa's prognosis was as bleak as can be.

"I remember talking to Pastor Terry Dumas (of Old St. Patrick's Catholic Church near Ann Arbor) the day of the accident," Mike Garr, a lieutenant in the Farmington Hills Fire Department, recalled Wednesday. "He said, 'Put this in God's hands.' But I kept saying, 'Why is this happening?' This is a good person who has touched a lot of lives. It can't be that her work here on earth is done at 16."

Only the lower brain stem, which controls basic body functions, was shown to be working during neurological tests done in mid-August. Some were assuming the worst, even as 600 people showed up at Heritage Park for a tribute concert by Susan and the Farmington Community Chorus.

All of a sudden, Melissa started to wake up. She began looking at her parents with recognition in her eyes. One day, she laughed when her dad modeled a hot pink Mickey Mouse outfit.

Now, Melissa and her parents talk — as best they can, given Melissa's tube in her throat; she only talks in short sentences — about the girl becoming an official member of that same chorus, perhaps again singing some of the same songs that resonated above the concert shell at the musical tribute.

Reminiscing

"Because she is a singer," Susan Garr explained, "her vocal chords are stronger. She gets a good, strong voice most of the time."

She also has a good memory, right up to the time went to Farmington Glen to babysit three small children at the private pool.

"Danielle Wright (her friend and classmate) came up here Monday night and was polishing Melissa's fin-

Please see MIRACLE, A3

Vandals get the 'boot'

Others receive probation in golf course destruction

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Five teens received sentences ranging from probation to boot camp for their role in a vandalism spree at San Marino golf course during a three-day period.

Three of the five will be considered for Youthful Trainee Act status — which removes the offenses from their records upon completion of probation — but only if they adhere to several conditions set forth by the judge.

The five were sentenced by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Barry Howard on Wednesday.

Conditions range from community service to attending substance abuse and mental health counseling sessions. Judge Howard also forbade the five to have contact with one another.

All five — like the previous five who pled guilty and were sentenced — are expected to pay for damages estimated at \$50,000 during the rampage at the municipal golf course April 2-4.

"If they complete it and do a good job, I'll consider (YTA)," Judge Howard said afterward.

Farmington Hills police detective Ron Shankin asked the judge to reconsider granting YTA in light of the lack of cooperation by the last five charged.

"It made it very difficult. This thing could have been wrapped up a long time ago," Shankin said.

Those sentenced were:

Please see SENTENCES, A4

Rezoning spat heads into study session

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A developer and nearby residents will join city council members in a study session in a final attempt to avoid a court battle over their respective rezoning requests.

Phoenix Land Development asked for multiple zoning that could put anywhere from seven to 10 two-bedroom units per acre on a parcel of vacant land on the south side of 13 Mile and east of Orchard Lake. The council approved qualifications for a planned unit development, which the developer has not acted on.

HighMeadow Acres homeowners want the opposite. They've asked that the land be rezoned from RA-2 to the less dense RA-1 which allows no more than 1.8 units per acre and lots are at least 100 feet wide under the standard plat plan.

HighMeadow has roughly one home per acre. A transition is needed between neighborhoods, a homeowners spokeswoman said.

"What Mr. Schafer builds is two-story boxes. Large houses on small lots; We have small houses on large lots," said Fran Valley, HighMeadow

Please see SPAT, A3

Halloween fun

Get those Halloween costumes out a week early this year.

Downtown Farmington will host its annual Halloween Fun Fest from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, Oct. 25.

Trick-or-treating at the downtown shops runs from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., with youngsters instructed to bring their own bag and be accompanied by an adult. Look for posters in windows — like the Observer office on Grand River — to see places that will have a costume contest.

Kids up to age 12 can also enter themselves or their pets in a costume contest. The Boo Brothers will perform a live Puppet Show at 1:30 p.m. and

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the Civic Theatre will also show a free movie, "Count Varga - Vampire" at 12:30 and 3:30 p.m.

Hills Haunted Hike

Enjoy a self-guided Halloween hike through the haunted hills and woodlands of Heritage Park 7:30-9:30 p.m. Friday, Oct. 24, and Saturday, Oct. 25. This spine-chilling tour will include ghosts, goblins and creatures of the night and is not recommended

for children under 7 years of age. The cost is \$4. Call 473-9570.

Halloween pet tips

Halloween can be a frightening and dangerous time for family pets. Here are a few suggestions to make this haunting holiday a little less disturbing:

■ Keep excitable pets away from the door and out of hearing range of a ringing doorbell.

■ Keep treats out of the pet's reach. Sweets, especially chocolate, can cause a variety of serious side effects.

■ Keep candy wrappings and sucker sticks off the floor. Wrappers don't dissolve and candy sticks can cause obstructions.