

IN THE PAPER TODAY

Decided: Police investigating a death in a Farmington Hills apartment initially thought it was a murder. It's been ruled accidental./A2

COUNTY

Equal treatment: New court puts family cases on same level as crime, civil issues./A5

COMMUNITY LIFE

Safe look: A former Farmington Hills firefighter offers home safety videos./B1

SPECIAL SECTION

Auto show preview: See special section inside today's paper for a close-up look at the Detroit Auto Show, including exhibitions of today's production cars and concept cars of the future.

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Florist frets over pending store move



BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The handwritten sign taped onto the front door at Farmington Center Florist says it all. Linda Trzcinski's 28-year-old business is moving to another spot in the sprawling Downtown Farmington Center.

It means that what has been rumored for months apparently is coming true. Whether people pay attention to the business shift is another matter.

"My (store) sign is up on the other building," said Trzcinski on Monday. "I'm moving, they say, on the 20th. There's a lot of work that needs to be done, though."

"They're remodeling the whole place, they gutted it and turned it into a flower shop."

The "other building" is just a short walk away from where Trzcinski has long sold bouquets and gift baskets. The pink sign on the front door says just as much.

Her independent business is moving from the now-vacant former H&R Block site—located directly across from Farmer Jack and the Shoe Carnival. The change, presumably, is to make way for national coffee house chain Starbucks, although no one will officially confirm it.

But Trzcinski is understandably worried and uneasy about the move, no matter how much she does to let people know about the

Please see FLORIST, A2

Teen nabbed for 'clone phones'



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills police arrested a 19-year-old Detroit man after finding two "clone phones" in what is believed to be a growing criminal activity that bilked nearly a billion dollars from cellular providers and customers last year.

The teen was charged with possession of a counterfeit telecommunication device and arraigned in 47th District Court on Jan. 5. If convicted, the felony carries up to four years in jail and/or a \$2,000 fine.

A 16-year-old Detroit male was also taken into custody but later released after police found two tampered cellular phones in a 1991 Pontiac Grand Prix parked outside Marvelous Marvin's on Orchard Lake and 14 Mile Jan. 4.

The scam is prevalent in the Detroit area and involves taking a cellular phone—usually stolen—and reprogramming it with new mobile identification and electronic serial numbers.

Electronic serial numbers, or ESNs as they're known in the industry, are similar to vehicle identification numbers. And like VINs, it's illegal to alter them.

Serial numbers are matched up with mobile identification numbers, or MINs, and are provided by the cellular company to activate service. Through scanning airwaves or tapping into the cell phone's internal mechanism, phone schemers confiscated valid ESN-MIN numbers and put them into stolen phones.

The scam is behind the epidemic rise in cellular phone thefts, phone officials say.

"They get this valid ESN-MIN pair and replace the ones in the stolen phones and use it until it's exhausted or until we shut it off," said Charles

Please see PHONES, A5

Farmington's fire calls answered in short order

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

When it comes to quickly answering the fire bell, the Farmington Public Safety Department has the right number—2:07.

According to a recent survey of metropolitan Detroit fire departments, Farmington boasted the most-rapid response time in metropolitan Detroit. On average, it only takes two minutes and seven seconds for public safety officers to answer a dispatcher's call and go to the scene of a fire. The slowest response time was the Novi Fire Department, with more than 7 1/2 minutes, according to the report by WKBD-Channel 50.

Farmington's small size (about three square miles), the central location of the fire station and the fact that cross-trained police/fire officers are

Please see FIRE, A10



Fast trackers: Farmington Public Safety Fire Marshal Joe Schornack (from left), Director Gary Goss and Officer Duane Couger are proud of the department's accomplishment of having the quickest average response time to fires in metropolitan Detroit.

Puck drops on prep hockey debate

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

To parents such as Chris Modrack Guest, forming a "pay-to-play" prep hockey team incorporating Farmington's three high schools ought to be as simple as Steve Yzerman scoring an empty net goal.

"I do think it's our job as parents and educators to create, invent and plot ways for kids to feel connected to their school," Modrack Guest told the Farmington Board of Education during Monday night's regular meeting. "At the high school level, this kind of program can make a really big difference in the

lives of these kids."

"... In my mind, when you have students who want to participate, how can you say no to them?"

Despite reservations from some, the board was generally receptive to the proposal outlined by North Farmington teacher Rick Jones and parent/Farmington Hills Hockey Association coach Dennis Patterson. Part one defines the criteria for adding and deleting varsity sports; part two specifically deals with adding what would be a 20-member hockey team with players from Farmington, North and Harrison high schools.

Jones and Patterson ran through the comprehensive proposal that was put together by an 11-member committee. But a few questions need to be addressed before the board's next meeting, 7:30 p.m. Monday, Jan. 20. At that meeting, a decision is likely, said Superintendent Bob Maxfield following the meeting.

"The biggest question," Maxfield said, "is the philosophical one that Joe (Svoke) raised about whether one of the criteria should be... is that sport something that is going to advance the positive values that we want our kids

Please see HOCKEY, A2

Gunmen rob 'Uptown' smoke shop

The Farmington Public Safety Department has no solid leads in Tuesday night's armed robbery of The Farmington Tobacco Shop, located in the Uptown Shopping Center.

An undetermined amount of cash and 700 cartons of assorted cigarettes were stolen, said Deputy Director Mike Wiggins.

According to police reports, three men entered the Grand River/Orchard Lake area store at about 6:45 p.m. to inquire about cigars in the humidifier. One of the suspects then pulled out a gun in his right hand and struck the owner in the face with his other hand. The owner was slightly injured from the blow, but did not receive medical treatment.

The suspects drove away in a black pick-up truck and headed westbound on Grand River.

Wiggins said the suspect who held the gun on the owner was described as a black male, 30-35 years old, with a thin build and medium complexion. He was wearing blue jeans, a black sweatshirt, black knit cap, hiking boots and gloves.

The second assailant was described only as medium build male, wearing blue jeans and a red sweatshirt. There was no information about the third suspect.

Anyone with information should contact Detective Christine Schutz at (248) 474-4700.

Teacher moves up to principal post

After years spent teaching fifth-graders at Botsford Elementary, Joe Schiffman has been named permanent principal of the Clarenceville School District school.

Schiffman, who lives on Huff Street, was named interim principal in August when former principal Jesse Baker took a new post in Southfield schools.

"My assessment is that he possesses the skills, instincts, and motivation to be an outstanding elementary principal in the Clarenceville School District," said Superintendent Tom Tattian, who appointed Schiffman last August and recently conducted Schiffman's mid-year evaluation.

"He has convinced me he

can do the job in a manner that will assist us in seeking continuous improvement and quality in our elementary program," Tattian said.

Schiffman, a 1976 Clarenceville High School graduate, started his career at Botsford teaching fifth-graders. He then substitute taught at Botsford before landing his first full-time teaching job, also teaching Botsford fifth-graders.

A graduate of Central Michigan University and Eastern Michigan University, he is married to wife Karen and has three sons. "Now, I'm not confined in one place as a classroom teacher," Schiffman said. "I'm about the whole place. It's a whole new job."



STAFF PHOTO BY JOE JACOBSON

Many hats: Joe Schiffman, new permanent principal of Botsford Elementary, takes a moment to answer a student's question before returning to his duties as designated kickball pitcher during lunchtime recess.

Burrito reunion

Melissa Garr has been waiting a long time for Mexican fast food and a cola Slurpee.

That wait finally ended this week, ironically her last as a patient in St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor. According to Melissa's dad, Farmington Hills fire Lt. Michael Garr, the 18-year-old on Monday passed a swallowing test, thus receiving the medical OK to try soft food for the first time since she was critically injured in July.

"She called me with the good news," Garr said. "Clearance has been given for her to have a bean burrito with cheese and a Coke Slurpee."

Melissa originally was slated to have the burrito-Slurpee combo on Tuesday night. But Garr said she "jumped the gun," with someone smuggling the burrito into her hospital room on Monday afternoon. She washed it down with a regular Coke, though. According to Garr, Melissa would have to wait

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until Tuesday evening to have her Slurpee.

Meanwhile, Melissa will remain on a gastric feeding tube for some time as she is weaned off of the device.

Melissa is scheduled to be released today from St. Joseph Mercy Hospital, where she spent several months recovering from a coma caused in a bizarre July 23 accident at a private Farmington swim club.

Hot fun in the wintertime

Now that the holidays are over your kids are probably longing for something to do. Well, Downtown

Farmington's Winter Fun Series can answer the call for the next half dozen Saturdays.

Programs start at 1 p.m. and last about 45 minutes at the Civic Theatre on Grand River Avenue, just east of Farmington Road. Admission is \$2 per person, with infants 1 and under free.

This week, catch Eugene's Puppet Show. Scheduled for upcoming shows are: Jan. 17, David J. Sasha, magic featuring rabbits and doves; Jan. 24, Zemo brings juggling, magic and yo-yos; Jan. 31, Dough Sheer's "Mysteries of Science"; Feb. 7, "No Veggies for Me," presented by Rick's Puppet Theater; and Feb. 14, The Pippin Puppets present "Looking for Leperchauns."

The event is co-sponsored by Three Onks Furniture, Clothes Encounters and Dubin Optometric.