

It's a 'Blue Ribbon' day for FHS

State board chief Straus presents award

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Kathleen Straus already knew all about the quality of education at Farmington High School. But just in case the state school board president forgot, she was welcomed Monday by a giant blue ribbon hanging above the front door arch.

Straus visited FHS to present Principal James Myers, staff and students a plaque honoring it as a Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School.

"We think the public needs to know the quality of education that goes on in Farmington High School," said Myers, giving Straus a tour of the building following the presentation. He wore a blue ribbon on his lapel to celebrate the occasion.

With hopes of promoting the "successes" of public education, Straus is making the rounds, visiting several of the 14 Michigan exemplary schools who recently were selected to receive the state's top honor.

This year marks the first time a Michigan school board president is making the rounds to present schools with their awards.

Earlier Monday, she stopped by another winning school, Abbott Middle School in the West Bloomfield district.

"I just felt it was very important to do this," said Straus, "to highlight successful schools. ... And this is one of them."

Straus said the 14 state exemplary schools serve as positive examples and benchmarks to other school districts in Michigan, some that she conceded have work to do.

"I want people to really know



STAFF PHOTO BY DEAN MATHIELL

Congratulations: Michigan State Board of Education President Kathleen Straus presents a plaque to Farmington High School Principal James Myers during Monday's ceremony honoring FHS as a Michigan Blue Ribbon Exemplary School. Straus is visiting all 14 winning schools, of which 10 are located in metropolitan Detroit.

that public education is succeeding. It's crucial to our democracy. Now, we know there are some schools that aren't succeeding. But we want to spread the word about what works."

Asked about what put Farmington High School over the top, Straus listed a few reasons.

Those included leadership from building administrators and a "disciplinary approach to learning. They combine subjects, they make everything real to their students."

The state award is a source of pride for the district and for FHS students, said senior Jason Justman.

Source of pride

"Absolutely," Justman said. "It's one of the things I can look at and say this is something Farmington Public Schools should be really proud of. It shows the teamwork here."

Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield and school board Secretary Priscilla Brouillette also were thrilled about the recognition, and that Straus thought enough about the school to present the award in person.

"We're doubly pleased," said Maxfield, "because Mrs. Straus is such an unabashed advocate for public education. She

"I just felt it was important to do this, to highlight successful schools."

Kathleen Straus
—president, state school board

believes this is a system that can work and does work. Brouillette said "It speaks volumes about the quality we have in our district that she made the trip to give us the award."

Farmington High School is now eligible for national exem-

plary school status. Winners won't be announced until May said Michigan State Board of Education spokeswoman Deb Small.

The high school was judged in seven major areas, including: delivery of instruction; physical makeup of the campus; test scores; philosophy of integrated subject material; and how the school addresses students who are either low or high achievers.

Past state exemplary winners in the Farmington district include Highmeadow Common Campus, Kenbrook Elementary School and North Farmington High School.

Banner celebration for board

The yellow banner behind the Farmington Board of Education said it all about how students view their elected officials.

"A World of Thanks From Us to You!" was unfurled on the wall, a poster created by students in Beechview Elementary School's multiage/multicultural program. Countries represented on the banner included Iran, Iraq, Japan, Korea, Russia, Albania and Israel — countries of those "newcomer" students who this year came to the United States.

One new student, who had been here only nine months, went up to the podium and addressed the school board, during its meeting last Tuesday, Jan. 6.

"We made this banner to thank you for your help," the student said. It will remain on the wall behind the board table for the rest of the 1997-98 school year.

The banner was only one of the thank you and appreciative gifts presented during the meeting, to commemorate School Board Recognition Month. Highlights included:

Forest Elementary School third-graders said they recently studied the Farmington community, including the school board, and made keepsake books for board members to take home.

A video made by Power Middle School students, "The School Board Rap," had verses for each board member.

Most inventive was a verse about Cathy Webb, identifying her as a fan of the Rolling Stones and for her "beautiful hair. ... Do you have a lot of comb?"

Students in the Farmington High School choral group Cantabile offered a sweet a cappella rendition of "Sing We Enchanted."

Plaques were presented by students in the district's "Special Olympics" program.

Robbery suspect changes plea

BY GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

In an abrupt about face, one of the men charged with robbing the Tapper's jewelry store in West Bloomfield last May withdrew his "no contest" plea.

"This is a balcony case," defendant Antonio McKelton told Edward Sosnick, Oakland County Circuit Court judge, at what was supposed to be his sentencing Thursday.

"I should not plea for something I did not do," McKelton said.

McKelton faced up to six years in prison, based on sentencing recommendations. Early last December he had pleaded no contest to the charges of armed robbery, carrying a concealed weapon and use of a firearm in committing a felony.

He has been held in Oakland County Jail without bond since then.

Clearly agitated, McKelton, 26, also said that since being jailed, he has learned he is suffering from cancer. His attorney, Elbert Hatchett, said McKelton is suffering from second stage Hodgkin's disease and is receiving treatment in jail.

McKelton said he should not be held without bond.

"I am sick with cancer," McKelton said. He added that he is being held in jail with murderers and serious felons. "But I'm considering the flight risk. I'm sitting here suffering."

Sosnick did not set a bond, but did set a hearing date to consid-

er the motion to withdraw the no contest plea for Jan. 29.

"We came here today believing there would be a sentencing," Sosnick said, passing over the bond issue.

Hatchett said McKelton had told him earlier that he planned to withdraw his plea. "He has every right to do that," Hatchett said.

McKelton was arrested last July in Dearborn. A second man, Derrick Davis, 26, also is facing charges in the Tapper's robbery. Davis was to have been arraigned on a charge of armed robbery last Thursday before Judge Alice Gilbert but that was adjourned to 8:30 a.m. Feb. 12.

Police said they had a strong case against McKelton because they found a gun with his fingerprint on it next to a car that was abandoned at Walnut Lake and Inkster after a high-speed chase.

McKelton's wallet was found in his identification also was found in the car.

The two were accused of robbing Tapper's in Orchard Mall at about 11 a.m. on May 21. Police said the two robbers fled north on Orchard Lake then east on Walnut Lake to Inkster where their Ford Thunderbird sped off the side of the road.

The two men inside the car escaped into the neighborhood that is a mixture of homes and dense undergrowth. The incident prompted one of the largest manhunt in the history of the county, involving 22 police agencies. But they failed to turn up the suspects.

Davis was linked to the crime through DNA testing of saliva taken from a mask found in the car. The two robbers wore masks as they smashed jewelry cases in the store.

Police searched for McKelton for six weeks and at one point cornered him near a house in Detroit. But he rammed his car into a West Bloomfield police car and escaped on foot. Following up on tips, police captured him at a house in Dearborn.

McKelton had sought to be released on bond because he has no prior criminal record. But prosecutors said he demonstrated that he is a flight risk when he rammed the police car and escaped earlier.

In August, Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer called McKelton a "prime suspect" in the murder of Everisto Dwayne Bosley, 25, who shot during an attempted armored car robbery as he was doing maintenance on an ATM machine at a Farmington Hills Comerica Bank on Nov. 14, 1996. Ballistics tests showed that a 9 mm handgun used in the ATM murder matched the gun found with McKelton's fingerprint outside the abandoned car after the chase. No charges have been filed against McKelton in the murder case.

"I'm confident the Oakland County Prosecutor's office or the U.S. Attorney will be charging him with that vicious crime in the near future," Dwyer said.



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No suspects in Kmart armed robbery

The second armed robbery in five days in Farmington took place about 8:20 p.m. Sunday, when a masked gunman robbed the Kmart store at 37175 Grand River.

An undisclosed amount of money was stolen by a ski-mask-wearing gunman, who pointed a handgun at employees throughout the robbery, said Farmington Public Safety Cmdr. Maria Putt. No injuries were reported.

According to Putt, the assailant surprised three employees who were in a back room, where they had just finished counting store cash registers and locked money in the safe.

The gunman apparently hid inside the Grand River-Halsted store after it closed at 8 p.m. and suddenly emerged in the back room, Putt said.

An employee then was forced to obtain a key and

open the safe. Three large, clear plastic bags were subsequently stuffed with cash, and the gunman exited through a back door. Putt said no getaway car was spotted.

According to police reports, the suspect is described as a white male, between ages 20-30, wearing a beige ski mask, blue/white flannel shirt, light blue jeans and white/black tennis shoes.

Putt said the Kmart robbery was "totally unrelated" to the Tuesday, Jan. 6, armed robbery of The Farmington Tobacco Shop in the Uptown Shopping Center.

Anyone with information on either robbery should contact the Farmington Public Safety Department at (248) 474-4700.

—Tim Smith