

# Keen eye, action spell heroics

When something didn't look right to Paul Cassatta, he decided to write down a license plate number.

Farmington Hills police said he did the right thing. Through his simple act of taking down a plate number, police were able to arrest two culprits in numerous air bag thefts in the Farmington Hills area. One thief inadvertently led authorities to a Detroit business — already being monitored — where they found \$1 million worth of stolen auto parts.

"I've always tried to get involved in whatever I see and try to help whenever I can," said Cassatta, who is honored with a Farmington Hills Police Department Citizen Citation June 10. "I guess it's the nature of what I do. To be observant or try to be observant."

As he was pulling into Harrison High's parking lot on Nov. 10, a Ford Escort stuck out. The car wasn't in a parking spot, and someone was waiting behind the wheel.

Suddenly, Cassatta caught a glimpse of a man hunched over

and holding something. He ran out from between the cars and jumped into the waiting Escort and sped off.

Cassatta recorded the license plate number. "Obviously, it looked kind of weird," said Cassatta, who is a Farmington Public Schools occupational therapist.

Upon further inspection, his suspicions were confirmed: A window was shattered and the air bag was missing.

Cassatta immediately contacted the police.

With the license plate number, Farmington Hills police tracked the suspect to a Westland address. Investigators contacted Westland police, who informed them that a man who lived at that address was believed to be involved in several air bag theft cases.

An hour after the Harrison High break-ins, Hills police watched as one of the men took the airbag to an auto parts store in Detroit. Police made an arrest and found several air bags that were traced to Hills car burglaries.

Cassatta's quick actions made all the difference, police said.

"You always get the calls two or three days after the fact where you have someone saying, 'I saw someone in the bushes, I saw someone crouched in the bushes.' You're thinking, 'Why didn't they call us?'" said Sgt. Tim Swanson of the Farmington Hills Police Department Investigative Bureau.

"If they've got a gut feeling that something isn't right or just feels wrong, we want them to call us. We welcome those calls."

As Cassatta found later, the license plate number gave police all they needed. Detectives asked him to try to identify those people, so they really didn't help out much there," Cassatta said.

A few numbers and letters is enough to hone in on a perpetrator, Swanson said. Armed with only a license plate number, Hills police solved a murder case a few years ago.

"Sometimes it's difficult to get a visual description of the individual, but a car license plate helps us. It at least leads to



Cited: Paul Cassatta (left) is congratulated by Farmington Hills police Chief Bill Dwyer.

where the individual lives," Swanson said. "In this case, it pretty much led us to a pretty big operation in Detroit."

During the June 10 ceremony, police Chief Bill Dwyer congratulated the school district employee with a police pin and baseball cap along with the citation.

"It was nice to kind of get a little bit more information as to what it led to," Cassatta said, "and to know it helped."

# Top member to drive free



Farmington Hills-based Weight Watchers Group Inc. and Buick have selected Mary Elise Fernandez of Dearborn as their "Member of the Year."

She was selected based on her essay answering the question: "How has Weight Watchers changed my life?"

For her effort, Fernandez was awarded a two-year lease on a special edition 25th Anniversary Buick Regal at Bill Cook Buick in Farmington Hills. The presentation was made by Roger Adams, Buick Regal branch manager and Florine Mark, president and CEO of the Weight Watchers Group, Inc.

**Financing college**  
"Funding Your Child's College Education" will be a free seminar presented by A.G. Edwards & Sons, Inc. which

focuses on how to comfortably afford college education costs for your children.

The public seminar will be from 7:30-9 p.m. July 22 and 23 at Nine Mile and Haggerty in Farmington Hills. Reservations are required. Call Scott Woodward at 888-311-0331.

**'Stand By Me'**  
McCabe Funeral Home of Farmington Hills is launching "Stand By Me," a charity drive to assist the Farmington Goodfellows in their ongoing effort to collect necessary household items for needy families.

Items such as non-perishable or canned foods, cleaning products such as laundry detergent, floor, window and carpet cleaners, personal care items such as shampoo, soap, toothpaste and deodorant, and children's items such as diapers and baby wipes will be accepted.

The community is invited to drop off donations between 9 a.m. and 9 p.m. at McCabe Funeral Home in Farmington Hills or Canton, now through Thanksgiving.

# Birthday from page A1

are the musical providers.

Dancers need not worry about rousting up a hootenanny of a tummy ache with the after dinner aerobic.

"He (caller Jim Tait) starts you off kind of slow," said Sherrie Stewart, who is organizing the Botsford dance. "He provides the instructions at first. I've danced with him before. It's a lot of fun."

Iverson Bakery is donating a 25th anniversary cake while Fresh Approach is providing

table decorations. Botsford proprietor Crean Smith is providing use of the coach house at the historic inn where automaker Henry Ford held many a celebratory equestrian dance.

History will also be the theme of Saturday's events at Heritage Park's picnic area.

Former Hills mayor and historian Jean Fox will be the keynote speaker at the ceremony, which honors history contest winners, centenarians and those

residents who have lived in the city the longest. The ceremony runs noon to 1 p.m.

Pomp and ceremony will give way to pony rides and other interactive displays of Farmington Hills' rural past at nearby Spicer House. Exhibits include model cars, rope making, historical photos and farm equipment.

A musical highlight will be the Farmington Area Philharmonic Orchestra performing at 3:30 p.m. in the park.

On Sunday, Hills officials will dedicate the ground-breaking of what will be Memorial Park on the southwest corner of 11 Mile and Middlebelt. The land, which Hospice of Michigan donated to the city, will be a quiet nature area for people to reflect.

With everything outdoors, weather is always a worry. Early forecasts predict thunderstorms for this weekend. "We're going to have to work with it," said Sherrie Stewart. Rain delay dates are Sunday, June 28.

# Hills to honor longtime residents

Farmington Hills officials will honor 26 longtime residents of the city — and the township before 1973 — during its 25th birthday celebration in Heritage Park Saturday.

Those honored and their number of years as residents include: Leon Marsh, 84 years; Dorothy (Lehr) Bracken, 83 years; Bob Washin, 79 years; Kay Briggs, 78 years; Clinton Spries, 77 years; Florence Spries, 75 years; Howard Legg, 75 years; Caroline Pascke, 74 years; Garneth Smith, 73 years; John Murphy, 69 years; Leola Cairns, 68 years; Evelyn Lee, 68 years; Marian Wik, 66 years; Glenn Griffin, 64 years; Catherine Byrne, 62 years; Anthony Ferrante, 62 years; Beth Graham, 62 years; Mark Farrell, 61 years; Mary Lou Melvin, 61 years; Norma Kelly, 60 years; Clara Knight, 60 years; Vincent D'Ambrosio, 60 years; Mary DiPonio, 58 years; Alta Davis, 56 years; and Wayne Eichler, 56 years.

Prior to that, Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi and Councilwoman Nancy Bates will present awards to Pat Pacitti, 105 years old; and Albert O'Connor Sr., 103; in a ceremony at American House.

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