

Male

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EDUCATION UNDER FIRE

mended the school board approve the hiring of Vondrasek for the Gill year-round program, to become the school's only current male classroom teacher.

Such discussions don't happen very often, at least when it comes to filling vacancies on elementary school staffs. At best, only a few men are on staffs at schools with maybe 18-20 teachers, not including specialized "male" positions such as gym instructor.

In fact, there are fewer men teaching at Gill today than 25 years ago, when learning center teacher Dennis Place started his career there.

"No status, no money," Place lamented. "You can't raise a family."

Filling a void

And yet, male elementary school teachers are needed today much more so than in 1973. Many children come from single-parent households, and lose out on the male perspective and presence at home, let alone in school.

Williams said that about 30 percent of students in her classes are raised by their moms.

"There's a lack of males in children's lives," Williams said. "It's important for them to see real male role models."

Even parents of families where both the mom and dad are home recognize the need for more men to take jobs teaching kindergarten through fifth grade, when young minds are molded the most.

"I'd like to see more (male) role models in elementary school, for the boys, particularly," said Lon-

gacre Elementary School parent Andrea Forrias, whose son Michael is in the second grade. "Studies show it is very important for little boys to have a strong male role model. It's important for children to see the male perspective."

Or to hear a male voice coming at them, said the 23-year-old Vondrasek, known to other Gill staffers and students as "Mr. V." "I don't yell at them, or anything like that," Vondrasek said. "But I have a louder voice. A male voice is coming at them... A father comes across differently than a mother, anyway."

One of his students said she didn't notice any difference learning from female or male teachers. But as far as Vondrasek is concerned, being a man in what traditionally has been a woman's world leads to extra glances, even double takes, from parents.

Who's he?

"I got kind of double takes walking around the hall because parents aren't used to seeing a young male teacher," Vondrasek continued. "And when I did meet them for parents, they said, 'It's great, my child has never had a male teacher before, ever. We think it's great if you can bring that to the classroom.'"

Several educators insist men and women elementary school teachers go about their jobs the same way. But still, as put by Beechview Elementary School third grade teacher Scott Stautler, "Women are wired differently than men."

Because of that, children who experience male and female teachers during elementary school attain an equilibrium that spurs emotional stability and educational development.

"There needs to be a balance," said Duff. "... The male role model plays a real important



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BARKER

Genders: Gill Elementary teacher Jon Vondrasek believes that male teachers are needed, especially in the lower grades.

part in the development of children's minds and also socialization. We're always talking about diversity. But it's also important to have the genders balanced among elementary school staffs.

Concurring was teacher Bobbie Blazo, one of Stautler's female colleagues at Beechview. But she added a little twist.

"It's important to show chil-

dren that teaching is a male career and a female career, just like nursing is," Blazo said. "In the '90s, people are seeing you can be anything you want to be." Blazo doesn't think children learn differently from men than they do from women.

"Every child has a different learning style," she said. "It's important that the teacher's

style and the child's style mixes, whether they are male or female."

They go elsewhere

Beechview teacher Michele Meyers doesn't agree with Gill's Place about whether salaries are sufficient or not. Yet the fact remains that men gravitate elsewhere, to business and industry.

And they still go in those directions instead of elementary school education, even at a time when male educators are needed and jobs are becoming plentiful. Over the next decade, projected heavy retirements will open up even more positions.

Males apparently decide early on that teaching, at least in elementary school classrooms, isn't the profession for them.

If they pick education, it's usually middle school and high school.

Duff's personal theory is men like teaching specific subjects, such as history. So they tend to go into secondary schools. In grade schools, "You need a person who can see the bigger picture of the teaching and learning process."

Vondrasek said his male friends at Michigan State Uni-

versity opted to pursue careers where big bucks were on the horizon, such as engineering. They certainly weren't in his education classes, usually comprised of "three or four" men and about 20 women.

"But I'm getting paid as much right now as some of my friends starting at other jobs," he said.

Foundations

Of course, the money wasn't why Vondrasek decided to go into teaching. "I chose education because I wanted to pick a field that I'd stick with."

And it didn't hurt to hear the positive opinion of a female friend about his chosen path.

"She said, 'You're going to be shaping minds,'" he said. "I thought that was such a great way to put it. Because once kids get into high school, maybe they have their minds made up about whether they are going to be a student or not."

"In elementary school, I get to reach them and hopefully affect them in a positive way and get them excited about school all the way through. If you can't get excited about that..."

He didn't have to finish the sentence.

Testimony resumes Friday for man accused in murder

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A broken down car, debt and, not the least of which, having the virus that causes AIDS may have triggered the rampage that led to the brutal stabbing of a Farmington Hills man.

James Summerville, 28, is charged with first-degree murder in the slaying of Mikhail Ellis, whose body was found in his Independence Green Apartment with more than 40 stab wounds May 11.

Summerville's sister testified during his preliminary exam Wednesday in 47th District Court that her brother phoned her around 5 a.m. May 3, the morning after police believe Ellis was murdered.

At Wednesday's hearing, she testified that she had been driving her brother to and from work while his 1987 Sable was being repaired. She will return to the stand 8:30 a.m. Friday when preliminary exam testimony resumes.

"I said, 'Do you want me to pick you up or don't you want me to pick you up?' He seemed to get upset. He said, 'That's OK. I'll get home myself,'" said Shirley Summerville, recalling the early morning phone call.

When he returned home later, his sister even offered to help him get his car fixed. He declined.

Police arrested James Summerville in Minneapolis, Minn. May 14. He was driving the victim's green Jeep Cherokee.

At the victim's apartment, investigators found a blue blood-stained work shirt missing a button in a washer with James Summerville's name on it. The shirt was entered into evidence along with a button, which was found underneath victim's body.

Police discovered Ellis' body in his bedroom after a friend and coworker reported the Farmington Hills man missing.

Officers found three knives — two of which were broken — near the partially decomposed body. Two condom wrappers were also laying near the victim, police testified Wednesday.

A friend of Ellis recalled seeing him the night of May 2. The pair went to dinner at a Chinese restaurant and then watched "He's Got Game" at the Star Theater in Southfield.

When they returned to Ellis' apartment on Roosevelt Court, the victim didn't park his Jeep Cherokee in his usual spot, Leroy Allison testified.

"We started watching television and he started acting strange," said Allison, who didn't

recall seeing anyone else in the apartment. "We were talking and then he'd start sweeping and mopping. ... I left."

The pair agreed to meet for church at 11 a.m. the following morning. Allison phoned Ellis, but no one answered.

He didn't get a response when he later went to the apartment and knocked on the door. He noticed the Jeep Cherokee was gone and left after three hours waiting for Ellis to return.

Ellis had mentioned a former acquaintance to Allison.

"He said he was having problems with him," Allison said. "He said he had loaned him money, and had problems getting it back."

According to Allison, Ellis talked about suing the man.

Ellis' planner with his credit cards was stolen along with jewelry and a computer, Hills police officer Stacey Swanderski said. She also noted there was no signs of forced entry.

A neighbor who lived below the victim recalled being awoken by a loud noise from above around 1 a.m. May 3. He said he was about to phone police when the racket stopped.

"At first I thought someone was having a seizure, bumping and thumping along the floor and the walls," Albert Wilson said during testimony. "At the end, we heard a low moan, but we weren't sure."

He recalled occasionally seeing a second person with Ellis, whom he identified as James Summerville in the court room.

Summerville's sister said her brother moved into her Warren apartment in December. He'd previously been living with Ellis, she said.

The two had been involved in a relationship for two years and had split up.

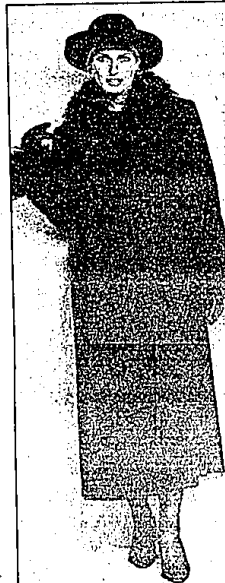
Her brother still kept in contact with Ellis, who Shirley said used to do her taxes.

"Mikhail was still a friend of mine," Shirley said. "They just had some differences. They were still friends."

Since his arrest, Shirley said she's talked to her brother, who remains in Oakland County Jail.

She testified that she was upset with news reports, which indicated Ellis had been stabbed more than 40 times and that her brother had HIV.

"What I really wanted to know is did he have the virus," she said. "He said, 'I got the terminal illness.' I picked up on that."



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