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THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY

Closed: Due to the Presidents' Day holiday, city hall in Farmington Hills will be closed on Monday, Feb. 15. Therefore, the last day to pay 1998 winter property taxes without penalty in the city of Farmington Hills will be Tuesday, Feb. 16.

TUESDAY

Protect: The Farmington Hills Consumer Protection Committee will meet at 6:30 p.m. at the William Costick Activities Center on 11 Mile.

Beautify: The Farmington Hills Beautification Commission will meet at 7 p.m. in the lower level of city hall.

THURSDAY

Plan: The Farmington Hills Planning Commission will meet at 7:30 p.m. in council chambers at city hall.

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Master rec plan up for discussion

BY TIM SMITH
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Farmington residents are invited to attend a public hearing for the proposed Community Recreation Master Plan to be held during Monday's city council meeting. The meeting will take place beginning at 8 p.m. at Farmington City Hall.

Bill Richards, assistant city manager, said the hearing, and approval of the master plan, is required by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources.

Input for the plan, which is officially revised every five years in order for the city to be eligible for recreational grants, was generated with "considerable public input," from the community visioning process, a joint process between Wayne State University's Center for Urban Studies and the Recreation Advisory Committee. The plan was originated in 1984 and was subsequently renewed in 1989 and 1994, Richards said.

"It's really a revision and updating of the prior plan," said Richards.

At "the top of the list" of changes is the fledgling "Kids World" PlayScope.

Please see MEETING, A4

Happy Valentine's Day



Love and marriage: Lois and Aldo Vagnozzi recently celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary - all in time for Valentine's Day.

It's love

... even 50 years later

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Lois and Aldo Vagnozzi's 50-year marriage not only survives politics, their relationship thrives on it.

The Farmington Hills mayor and his wife share a sturdy platform mixed with current events, fond reminiscing and undying love. The couple celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary Jan. 22, hurdling a few recessions, a divisive Vietnam War and an election or two.

"We disagree to a degree, but that's what keeps it interesting," Aldo said.

Although he "could use a new joke-book" when dispensing wit as an elected official, her husband can still make her laugh, Lois said.

"We were friends first and we're still friends today," she said about her beau whom she met at the Detroit Collegian, a then-daily newspaper at Wayne University in 1946.

Aldo, fresh from serving in World

Love Story, see Page A3

War II, worked as a night editor. He assigned Lois - then a freshman - to write some headlines for the next edition. He kicked them back her first offering.

"I said, 'I don't like your headlines, but I'll take you to a basketball game,'" Aldo said.

Lois countered: "He didn't like my headlines then and 50 years later, he's still not too keen on them."

Courtship ensues

Deadlines and journalism started their courtship, which lasted nearly three years until they married.

The Great Depression made people their age frugal, but they had fun. Staff at the Detroit Collegian would go on picnics and other outings where Aldo would offer Lois a ride home.

What he lacked in money, Aldo and others relied on the currency of

Please see 50 YEARS, A5

Victim's family relieved with guilty verdict

William Marshall Ford, 25, was found guilty in Oakland County Circuit Court for stabbing a Farmington High School student in November outside a gas station.

BY TIM SMITH
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An Oakland County Circuit Court jury apparently deemed the placement of the stab wound in the chest of a Farmington High School student as the crucial evidence in a jury's quick guilty verdict against defendant William Marshall Ford.

The 24-year-old Ford was found guilty Wednesday after a two-day trial before Oakland Circuit Judge Steven Andrews. He was found guilty of one count of assault with intent to murder, stemming from the Nov. 7, 1998 stabbing of FHS student Jacob Dillard, 16, outside a Farmington gasoline station.

"I think the placement of the knife into the heart showed intent," said Farmington Public Safety Detective Christine Schutz, commenting Friday about the verdict.

"He didn't go for any other part of the body. He went for the heart."

Ford is scheduled to be sentenced at 1:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 24. He could face up to life in prison.

Schutz, who originally investigated the incident and who is also police liaison officer at Farmington High, said a dejected-looking Ford

"I think the placement of the knife into the heart showed intent. He didn't go for any other part of the body. He went for the heart."

Christine Schutz
—Farmington Public Safety
detective

was in court for the proceedings.

"He just sat quietly with his head down," said Schutz, adding that Ford's defense attorney (Howard Arnkoff) "tried to show it (the attack on Dillard) was self defense."

Arnkoff could not be reached for comment about the verdict.

Schutz said the prosecution was "very pleased with it (the verdict)." The jury could have convicted Ford on lesser charges, such as felonious assault or intent to do great bodily harm, she added.

The unanimous guilty verdict came as a big relief for Dillard's family, including parents Ruth and Jerry Dillard (who attended the trial) and three siblings.

"The bottom line is we're glad it's all over," said Ruth Dillard Friday. "It's been a mental drain."

Please see VERDICT, A5

Shock, relief will greet homeowners

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Farmington Hills homeowners will open this year's assessments with a mixture of shock and relief.

First the jolt: For some, assessments will jump as much as 200 percent after an Assessor's Office reappraisal of 25,000 residential parcels. Others may see a drop.

But there's a reason to sigh with relief: These seeing a huge mark up won't take the hit, unless the person has bought the house during the past year.

Assessments go out in the mail Feb. 26. The Assessor's Office will accept Board of Review appoint-

ASSESSMENTS

ments March 1-8. The actual Board of Review takes place 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. March 8-9 and 1-9 p.m. March 10.

Otherwise, the tax rate will be no more than a 1.6 percent higher than last year's due to the cap under Proposal A. The Assessor's Office did the reappraisal to bring State Equalized Values, or SEVs, in line with market values.

"We're changing the line in the road and we're using a new brush," said City Assessor Dean Babb. "If

Please see ASSESS, A5

Swan who ran a(fowl) of traffic finds a home

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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The police radio was squawking, horns were honking and motorists were gawking.

All the fuss turned out to be for a swan, whose song created disharmony on eastbound I-696 near Orchard Lake. Thursday morning, Police shut down the freeway for three minutes while animal control folks and a person armed with a fish net captured the wounded bird.

"It was sitting by the cement median and it was trying to get back to the wetlands but couldn't," said Farmington Hills police Officer Brian Harbaugh.

"It was pretty good-sized. It had quite a wing span."

Please see related story, Page A6

Initially, the call to Oakland County Animal Control reported a "goose" loose on the freeway near I-696. The bird found its way to Orchard Lake Road when an animal control officer arrived.

While police cordoned off traffic, the animal control officer tried to use a noose and a blanket to corral the creature. A person, who turned out to be a veterinarian, put a fishing net over the swan's head.

The swan was transported to the Oakland County Animal Control Shelter, who turned it over to a bird rescuer. The swan is expected to recover from minor injuries, mainly abrasions on its torso and neck.

Please see SWAN, A6



Home, sweet home: Michelle Charlong pets a female swan she is caring for. The Farmington Hills swan that crash-landed on I-696 at Orchard Lake glares at both of them.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HENSLER

