

# Life and death

## Oakland County Medical Examiner searches for the truth

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From death, a medical examiner's job is to unearth answers about life.

As Oakland County chief forensic pathologist and medical examiner, Dr. Ljubisa J. Dragovic brings a great deal of compassion and expertise with equal doses of suspicion.

"There's a little bit of Dostoyevsky in all of us," said Dragovic, referring to the Russian author named Fyodor whose works delved into philosophical issues of crime and murder.

Dragovic, at the request of Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home Director Mark Ziegler, spoke before the Farmington Exchange Club Wednesday.

Dragovic gave an example of an 86-year-old woman who was found dead in her home. She had bruises on her arms, but authorities, thinking her death was a result of natural causes, allowed her body to be released to a funeral director.

Police later implicated her great-grandson, who was nabbed trying to cash her personal checks. Police believe the woman was suffocated with a pillow.

### EXCHANGE CLUB

"We're in the business of being suspicious. We're paid to be suspicious," he said. "That's our philosophy. We trust a lot of people, but we still look into things."

He gave an overview of Oakland County's new medical examiner facility, which handles 1,200 bodies a year.

The building takes into account projected county growth, which is already a contributing factor as traffic fatalities increased 47 percent from 1995 to 1997.

Separate areas also exist for funeral home pickup - to prevent mix-ups leading to costly settlements - and for families to identify remains.

A more efficient process allows for quicker harvesting of organs for donations. Time is vital when corneas and skin grafts are involved.

For instance, a cornea is only good 12 hours after a death, Dragovic said.

"By the time people (at the eye bank) in Ann Arbor find out about that death, the window of

opportunity is gone," Dragovic said.

Exchange Club members, who had just finished lunch, listened curiously, if not cautiously, thinking the topic might make them squeamish. It didn't.

One audience member asked Dragovic what makes an autopsy necessary.

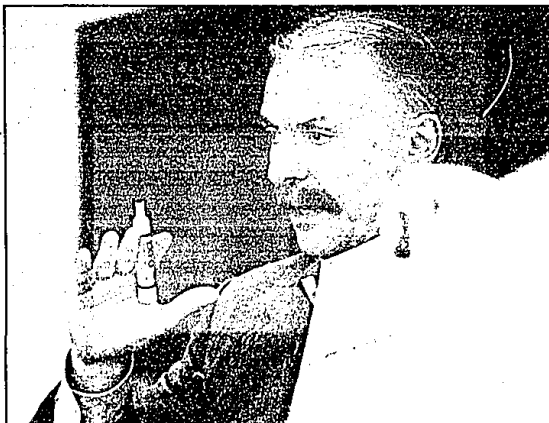
Post-mortem exams are required if cause of death cannot be answered with scientific certainty, Dragovic said. "Otherwise, we'd be doing autopsies on 5,000 people a year," he added.

Autopsies are a small part of the medical examiner's job. They rely on toxicology reports and do extensive investigation at the scene if necessary.

Dragovic is often asked to consult and do pathology work on criminal cases in other states. His research has been published in many journals.

Before coming to Oakland County, Dragovic worked in the Wayne County Medical Examiner's Office where dealing with the remains of 800-plus homicides alone wasn't uncommon. He also did work in Monroe County where then Heeney-Sundquist's Mark Ziegler did an apprenticeship.

"He's a super guy," Ziegler said.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREKLER

Clues: The Oakland County Medical Examiner, Dr. Ljubisa J. Dragovic, explains the process he uses to determine causes of death. He spoke before the Farmington Exchange Club recently. He also gave an overview of the new county facility.

## French students taste Americana

BY TIM SMITH  
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French bread isn't the specialty of the house at Great Harvest Bread Co. in Northville. Caramel apple bread is.

But that didn't bother a group of young visitors from France, who sunk their teeth into a slice of Americana during a recent tour of the Main Street bakery.

The Great Harvest tour enabled owner Ray Novelly to show the baking facilities to 16 students from College Jules Romains in Paris, a school located in the shadows of the Eiffel Tower.

The visitors, on spring vacation, spent more than two weeks with Duncel Middle School students as part of the "Back to Back" foreign exchange program. (Another 11 French students stayed at the homes of Power Middle School youngsters.) The 26 Americans - who were not on vacation - previously spent two weeks in Paris for the first half of the program, said Duncel parent coordinator Kathy Casteel.

"We just wanted to have them see the difference between how French bread is made and how American bread is made," said Casteel, who coordinated the Farmington Hills half of the program. "They seem to think it's very interesting and that it's different. Theirs is long and has a hard crust. Here, the inside is a lot softer and so is the outside."

If the bread-baking process fascinated the visitors, so did having a chance to experience fast-paced American life and the freedoms that go with it.

"It's almost like they don't know what to do with it, there's so much freedom," said another Duncel parent, Debbie Gabriel.

Several French students, who were not accompanied on the tour by friends, commented about what they thought about America.

"Very good," said Zineb Lazrak. "I like the houses, because in France, there are no houses, just apartments. But I think there are too many cars. And I think the shops are not like Paris. Here



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREKLER

That's good: Students Laura Meener, Yann Levenan and Alexa Kloehendler enjoy a tour of Great Harvest Bread.

they're bigger."

"In America it's too far" to go anywhere, said Paola Cazenave de la Roche. "You have to always take the car."

Alexia Kloehendler said American people are "very sweet." She also was surprised by how it is "cheaper to buy things" than she anticipated.

"It's very, very big," commented Gabriel Lanselle. "Shops are good and big." Gabriel also liked the group's trip to Niagara Falls. "It's very beautiful."

Novelly, who later this year will open a Great Harvest store in the Downtown Farmington Center, detailed for the students how baked goods - except French bread - are made from scratch. "We don't make French bread."

Why? Because French bread requires the use of special oils, which Novelly refrains from using in his kitchens.

It didn't seem to bother them. According to Casteel, the French kids loved the bread at Great Harvest. "They even bought some."



Americana: Dan Novelly, owner of the Great Harvest Bread places hot loaves on cooling rack while students from College Jules Romains in Paris watch the process.

## French students have an itinerary while here:

The tour of Great Harvest Bread was only one of many activities students from College Jules Romains in Paris, France, participated in last month, during their visit to Duncel and Power middle schools. Following are some of the highlights:

■ April 20: Visits to the Motown Museum; Masonic Temple.

■ April 21: Tour of the University of Michigan.

■ April 22: Attended a Detroit Tigers baseball game.

■ April 23: Tour of the Daimler-Chrysler auto plant.

■ April 24-25: Weekend trip to Niagara Falls.

■ April 26: Visited the COSCI Science Hands-on Museum.

■ April 28: Morley's Candy factory tour.

■ April 29: Trip to the IMAX theater in Detroit.

■ April 30: (Duncel only) took part in a Michigan Memories scrapbook class; (Power only) played laser tag at Zap Zone Extreme in Farmington.

## timely finds



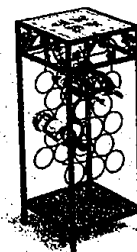
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