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Outages spark anger – again



Clean up: Gordon Lacy trims broken tree branches at his Gary Street home.



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER
loconnor@homecomm.net

When the Singers moved into Farmington Hills seven years ago, they couldn't understand why all their neighbors had generators.

Now they know.

After going without electricity for 27 hours, the residents in the Rumblewood subdivision are buying a generator themselves. Said Janet Singer, who has become accustomed to the grinding sound of generators around her: "It's ridiculous."

Singer is upset with Detroit Edison. She and her neighbors can stand in line with Hills City Manager Steve Brock.

Some 9,000 customers were affected by Saturday afternoon's thunderstorm, Detroit Edison officials said. By Tuesday, 80 homes were still without power.

"I'm tired of carrying their water," said Brock, whose office fielded complaints from residents angry about the latest batch of blackouts. "I've got people calling asking us to put them up in a hotel room."

Replied Detroit Edison spokesman Lew Layton: "Did he notice there have been continuing storms?"

On Friday afternoon, Farmington Hills city officials – including the police department – experienced a power outage.

"We've had brown outs and all other kinds of weird things happening," Brock said.

Detroit Edison officials conduct public meetings in Farmington Hills. The last gathering at Hills City Hall largely dealt with Y2K preparedness.

It's not the first time it's happened, and with the community's history, it won't be the last that power goes out following a storm. But residents and some city officials are reaching the end of their ropes with the outages.

See related story page A6

The agenda will likely deal with the latest rash of power outages at the next meeting in September. City and Detroit Edison officials have yet to set a date.

Wherever it falls on the calendar, Singer and other residents plan to be there.

"I tell you it's probably going to be ugly," Brock said.

Detroit Edison contends its spent \$51 million for maintenance and in improvements in the Farmington area during the last five years.

Brock credits the utility for trying to work with residents. More preventive maintenance and equipment updates are needed, the city manager said.

"Every time a storm kicks up, people get nervous," Brock said. "People shouldn't have to live like that."

The high number of trees in the area contribute to the outages following storms, Layton said. Underground wiring is not a panacea, either.

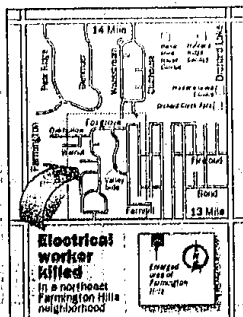
Customers would have pay \$100-\$150 more a month to put wires underground.

"If you have an underground power line problem, it's much more difficult to find," Layton said.

To the Singers, power outages are as much a Michigan phenomenon as the auto industry and Vernors. The family has lived in New Jersey, Massachusetts, Illinois and New York, and never experienced similar problem.

Please see STORM, A7

Residents tried to save worker



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER
loconnor@homecomm.net

Two residents in a northeast Farmington Hills neighborhood possessed the needed life-saving skills. But even their combined efforts couldn't revive a utility line worker who was electrocuted.

Douglas Ray Rayre, 32, of Orionville died from injuries sustained after he grabbed what he thought was a lifeless wire Sunday afternoon, police reports said. With emergency crews en route, neighbors on Foxgrove Street immediately went to his aid.

Craig Hihner, who lives across the street, responded after hearing a commotion when the victim's work partner ran to his truck to call for help.

"I just heard him yelling into the radio. 'We have an emergency.' He was yelling loudly and it got my attention," said Craig Hihner, who was joined by a neighbor's son in providing cardiopulmonary resuscitation. "He I went over ..."

Hihner learned CPR several years ago but, until Sunday, never had a chance to use the life-saving skill.

Neither had Vijay Singh, who is a second-year medical student at Northwestern University. Vijay was working in the front yard when his father Nirmal alerted him about the accident.

With their combined knowledge of CPR, Hihner and Vijay converged to help the victim.

"Luckily, we didn't hesitate," Hihner said. Hihner provided mouth-to-mouth resuscitation while Singh applied chest compressions on the man. The pair performed CPR until two Hills police officers took over.

Please see DEATH, A4



Work: Detroit Edison workers continue work on power lines downed by Saturday's storm.

Two men burned in pizzeria fire

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

An early Monday morning fire at a Farmington pizzeria is being investigated as suspicious, according to the Farmington Department of Public Safety.

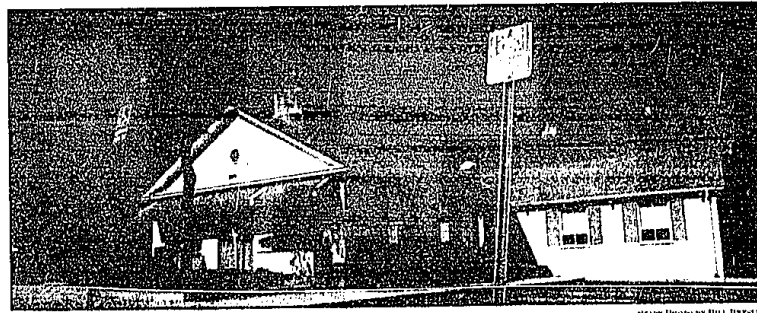
The fire reportedly started in the cooking area of Antonio's Pizzeria, 20772 Farmington Road, near Eight Mile at about 12:22 a.m.

FARMINGTON

Deputy Director Michael Williams said they are still trying to determine a cause and origin as of Tuesday afternoon. Two male victims, both in their 20s, were hospitalized and in critical condition. They reportedly suffered burns to their hands and faces. They were the only people injured.

One victim was transported to Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills, the other to St. Mary Hospital

Please see FIRE, A7



Closed: Loyal patrons of Bill Knapp's restaurant on Orchard Lake, north of 12 Mile, were disappointed when the restaurant closed.

Orchard Lake Bill Knapp's closes

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER
loconnor@homecomm.net

Herb Diefenbaugh, 87, found the Bill Knapp's on Orchard Lake as the perfect place for a meal.

He liked the food; the price was right, too.

When the Farmington Hills resident went to the eatery, the doors were shuttered. A note on the door read the place had closed and suggested patrons try the Bill Knapp's on Grand River in Farmington.

"That's quite a ways to go," said Diefenbaugh, who still drives.

A Bill Knapp's spokesman said the restaurant didn't have enough dedicated customers like Diefenbaugh to stay open.

Salon were below par at the eatery next to the Old Orchard Theatre, which has also closed.

At the end of its lease, Bill Knapp's officials decided it was time to close the eatery that had been there for 22 years.

"It was not a surprise. We knew we were not going to renew our lease," said John Bowman, Bill Knapp's restaurant director of marketing and real estate.

While the closing of the Old Orchard Theatre didn't help, Bowman said movie goers didn't make up a substantial part of Bill Knapp's customer base.

"Typically, theater crowds tend to eat afterwards," said Bowman, noting Bill Knapp's closes at 10 p.m. weekdays and 11 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays. "So often times we

Please see CLOSE, A5

Cities eye contract renewal

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

Could competition from another cable company be in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi's near future?

CABLE TV

That was one scenario discussed at a special Farmington City Council meeting Monday at which council discussed whether to renew its contract with Time Warner Cable, the provider for Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi.

An official decision has to be made by Aug. 26. A recommendation about whether to approve or deny is expected to come from the Southwest Oakland Cable Commission, consisting of elected and appointed officials from Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi next week.

Farmington Mayor Pro Tem Bill Hartsock is on the team. He declined to discuss specifics of the negotiated contract but said he was optimistic.

"We're hopeful we're going to be able to wrap this up," Hartsock said.

Tom Bjorklund, regional director of

Please see CABLE, A5

