

THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY

Meet: The Farmington Hills City Council will meet at 7:30 p.m. in council chambers, 31555 11 Mile.

TUESDAY

Agenda: The Farmington Board of Education will meet at 7:30 p.m. in the board offices, 32500 Shiawassee.

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Merchants get their response

By TIM SMITH
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The just re-formed Downtown Farmington Business Association late last week received the written response it wanted to a set of questions pertaining to restructuring of the annual founders festival.

FESTIVAL

At the top of the list of 12 questions posed to leaders of the festival board of directors was why a \$50 fee is being charged to any retailer who wants to display merchandise on the sidewalk during the June 22-24 Farmington Area Family Fest.

Those questions were assembled by Farmington Bakery co-owners Becky Burns and Jeff Pavlik, following the association's first meeting on Thursday, Feb. 17. The list was submitted to Jim Stark, president of Farmington Area Founders Festival Inc., which is the board of directors overseeing the community celebration.

Please see FESTIVAL, A4



Thinking about a new car or a good second car? You'll find a huge selection of auto ads in today's HomeTown Classifieds



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STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BARKLEY

Search: Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer expected to execute a search warrant on Arden Park Friday night.

Child abuse suspected in Arden Park home

By JONI HUBBARD
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A grandmother who wanted only to spare her 14-year-old granddaughter a life of poverty in Cameroon, Africa, may have unwittingly delivered the girl into a life of servitude and beatings in Farmington Hills, police say.

Authorities removed the now 17-year-old from a well-kept, typical suburban home on Arden Park Friday afternoon, after she alleged the couple she lived with abused her. According to Police Chief Bill Dwyer, a "reliable source" told police the girl's story.

"It's my understanding her grandmother met the couple here and was assured she'd be given a good education and be well taken care of," Dwyer said. "She was from a very poor area."

The girl reportedly told police and a Department of Protective Services social worker that she lived in the basement, kept the house clean and looked after the couple's three children. Scars police observed on her body bore testament to regular beatings, and she was only allowed to leave the home on rare occasions, Dwyer said.

The girl never attended school and hadn't seen a health care professional since a trip to the dentist two years ago, Dwyer said.

Neighbors who watched from a distance expressed utter disbelief as news media representatives began to descend on the house. Scott Sugg has lived in the neighborhood for two years.

"They're quiet, and we never had any problems with them," he said, noting he first heard about the allegations from a reporter. "It'll be interesting to see if this comes to be anything. I would never have suspected."

Please see SEARCH, A7

S'fld man charged in child sex case

Police are urging parents to talk to their children about the danger of talking to strangers after two Farmington Hills teens told a police officer about improper contact by a man.

By JONI HUBBARD
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For a week, they watched him. Every day like clockwork, Farmington Hills police say, Jim Thompson, a 55-year-old Southfield resident, would leave his apartment on Carrage Hill and climb into his shiny, red Dodge Viper, then turn the broad nose of the sports car toward fast food places, school bus stops, suburban neighborhood streets.

What happened when he got there, according to Farmington Hills Assistant Chief Charles Nebus, wasn't really the stuff crimes are made of. Simply put, the man would talk to young boys.

"He was always asking the boys questions and tape recording the conversations," Nebus said after the arrest Friday night. "That was his routine."

It may well have been his routine for more than 30 years, Nebus added, given the volume of photos, video and audio tapes recovered.

"It's not illegal to talk to young boys. It's not illegal to take pictures. It's not illegal to tape record conversations," Nebus said, "unless you cross the line. He seemed to know right where he line was."

Still, police say, the man crossed it twice. He was arraigned Saturday afternoon on two charges of criminal sexual conduct in the Farmington Hills police station. Bond was set at \$1 million cash or surety by Magistrate James Brady. A plea of not guilty was entered for Thompson.

One charge - criminal sexual conduct II - is a four-year felony. The other charge, criminal sexual conduct in the fourth degree, is a two-year misdemeanor.

Please see CHARGED, A5

Students struggle with death of friend

By TIM SMITH
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School and police officials Friday were still trying to figure out what prompted Farmington High School senior Christopher David Horton to take his own life sometime Wednesday evening in the garage of his grandparents' Farmington Hills residence.

But there was no denying that the shock waves made FHS a sad, somber place on Friday, said Principal John Barrett, with more than 100 students participating in grief counseling sessions.

"Our goal here is to try to allow students to express their grief in a constructive way," Barrett said. Grief counselors and social workers from all three high schools in the district assisted with the sessions.

"It's a down day at Farmington High School," said Frank Hickey, part-time hall monitor at FHS and a retired teacher. "... The mood is sadder at school. Kids are crying."

Barrett described Horton, 17, who lived in Farmington, as "a likable young man. He had problems like a lot of other students, but he was pleasant to deal with and certainly respected authority."

"... Certainly, our hearts and sympathy go out to his parents (Troy and Mary-Margaret). This has got to be a



Christopher Horton

devastating situation."

Hickey said he didn't know Horton all that well, but that he did regularly see the student in the halls.

"He seemed to always be dressed nice, upbeat," Hickey said, adding that the youngster "seemed like a nice kid."

In a statement released by the family through Harry J. Will Funeral Home at 37000 Six Mile Road in Livonia, where visitation will take place, Christopher

was "an outstanding young man" who was "a wonderful gift given to our family. His short life on Earth has been cut short, but he has had a deep impact on all that knew him."

Christopher, the statement continued, "had great feelings for humanity. He also was a great creative writer."

Grim discovery

According to Farmington Hills Assistant Police Chief Chuck Nebus, the youth's body was found by his father, Troy Horton, at approximately 4:15 p.m. Thursday. It was discovered in the garage of Christopher's grandparents' Farmington Hills residence. The teen

Please see CHRISTOPHER, A2

Coming and going

One store closes downtown, another opens

Family time means more

By TIM SMITH
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Desirous of spending more time with family, Sports Image owners Carl and Becky Thomas closed down their Grand River business after nearly six years.

First of all, they don't want to completely miss out on the high school careers of their children. Sarah, a sophomore at Farmington High School, and Bill, who will be a freshman at North Farmington High School in 2000-01.

"Money is something that comes and goes," Carl Thomas said Tuesday, just a few days before Sports Image shut its



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BARKLEY

Saying goodbye: Becky and Carl Thomas are closing their Sports Image store.

doors for the last time. "But once you lose that time with your family you can't get it back."

Thomas, 41, explained that he and his wife also try to care for their aging

Please see CLOSE, A8

Business is brisk for new owners

By TIM SMITH
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According to the co-owners of Encore Design & Consign in the Downtown Farmington Center, there's something for everyone at their new store.

The home furnishings store, featuring designer furniture both new and on consignment, actually opened at the beginning of the year. But Encore wasn't officially "christened" until a ribbon-cutting ceremony and reception on Friday, Feb. 18.

City dignitaries and business leaders helped celebrate the occasion with co-owners Deanne Doyle, Pam Haase and Laurie McCormick.

"We like the Farmington area and we



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BARKLEY

Open: Deanne Doyle, Laurie McCormick and Pamela Haase opened their new store in January.

thought it'd be an exciting place to start a new business," said Doyle, adding that Encore features items as low as \$5 on up to \$4,000.

Carleigh Flaherty, president of the

Please see OPEN, A8