

Challenger drops out of school race

BY TIM SMITH
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Mark Mergener thought "long and hard" about running for the Farmington Board of Education and even filed a nominating petition. But the Farmington Hills resident ultimately decided against being a candidate and dropped out before the 4 p.m. Thursday deadline to withdraw. Mergener's withdrawal means incumbents Priscilla Brouillette and Gary Sharp will run uncontested for a pair of four-year terms. The election is Monday, June 12.

Mergener's letter of withdrawal to Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent for business and operations, stated he filed in the first place "because of my concerns over a myriad of issues that need to be addressed relating to teacher/administration conduct, and the presentation of appropriate materials in the classroom."

"These are issues requiring responsible and accountable behavior. My candidacy would focus on the need to address these issues."

But, Mergener's letter continued, he ultimately decided that his views would be "distorted or distorted as a 'grandstanding' strategy for an agenda that would serve one's political ambitions. I have no political agenda and do not wish for my messages to be distorted or misconstrued for anything other than what they are... genuine concerns for the safety, dignity and prosperity of our children."

Asked Friday to elaborate on his

Please see RACE, A6

THE WEEK AHEAD

TUESDAY

Opening: Quizno's Subs, 32515 Northwestern Highway, will celebrate with a ribbon cutting ceremony at 10 a.m.

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KAREN
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CHILD'S LEGACY

HER STORY IS OF
HOPE AND HEALING
AS TOLD BY REPORTER
JONI HUBBARD

More than 35 years later, Karen Austin still vividly remembers details. The smell of rubbing alcohol. The clank of the implements her father gathered in the bedroom. The way the bushes snagged at her clothing as she ran through the woods, trying to escape his advances.

Austin found a way to cope with the painful memories of childhood abuse in a journal, started after she entered therapy at age 34. A few years later, she turned her journal into a docu-novel called "Blind Trust: A child's legacy."

"I wanted to write it because I had a pretty clear memory of what went on," Austin said during an interview at her Farmington Hills apartment. "I wanted to write it from a child's point of view because they have a skewed view of the world."

Medical reports

While her first recollections begin at around age 8, medical reports Austin has seen indicate she may have been abused even as an infant. She describes her father as charming and very good looking, but severely alcoholic. He died at age 49 from cirrhosis of the liver.

"My mother was over-zealous in her religious beliefs," Austin said, "but she never saw the love of God."

Instead, Austin and her three brothers were raised with the wrath of God, as their mother adhered strictly to the belief that the father was the head of the household and, therefore, was not to be questioned or challenged.

"I think she knew about the abuse," Austin said of her mother, "but she felt she had to stay married to him."

Both her parents worked, but never seemed to have enough money to properly feed and clothe their children. Still, to the outside world, her father seemed a charming man, devoted to his only daughter, and her mother appeared to care for her children, always keeping them close by.

Their family secrets remained behind closed doors. Some family members knew nothing of the abuse until Austin's book was published.

"On the surface, to society, it didn't look like a dysfunctional home," Austin said. "I was the good kid in the family... I was afraid to be anything else."

Keeping a secret

The only person who may have suspected abuse was the doctor who repaired the damage Austin's father did. Every so often, scar tissue builds up in her urethra - a condition that still requires treatment today - and has to be stretched.

In her book, Austin describes her mother's rage at a doctor's suggestion about the cause of Karen's illnesses. Because urination was so painful, she frequently had accidents. This time, her mother wasn't concerned about the mess. She had one thing on her mind:

"You've got some explaining to do. The doctor said you've been sticking things up yourself and causing damage to your insides. Now I want to know what you've

Please see LEGACY, A6



Road rage

Hills fumes over motor carrier bill

■ The Farmington Hills City Council is putting pressure on state legislators for support of a bill that could cost thousands of dollars in fines that go to the city.

BY JONI HUBBARD
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Farmington Hills City Council members put the screws to their state lawmakers Monday night, pressing them for support on a legislative measure that could seriously impact the city's motor carrier enforcement program.

"One of our major concerns is that for the first time ever, the state of Michigan has interfered with the local government's budget," said Mayor Nancy Bates.

"That's just entirely inappropriate. Bates referred to the passage of a bill that would re-allocate fines collected from tickets issued to commercial vehicles within the city. Since 1996, all those dollars have gone to the city and have been used to pay for a motor carrier enforcement program and road improvement.

According to Tori Arbenowake, assistant to the city manager, the Senate unanimously passed a bill to split funds 70/30 between cities and libraries. Even though the city would get the lion's share, the situation is complicated because increased enforcement has apparently led to a decrease in violations.

Hills officials initially spent \$150,000 to equip a special enforcement vehicle and train an officer, with the goal of making roads more safe and improving road conditions. Without ade-

Please see MOTOR, A5

It's a go for area merchants

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Downtown Farmington merchants earlier this month decided uniting with the chamber of commerce would be the best way to make sure their needs are being sufficiently addressed.

The merchants, who in February re-formed the Downtown Farmington Business Association to have a voice in pertinent issues such as the Farmington Area Family Fest, "overwhelmingly" agreed to become a chamber sub-committee, said association spokeswoman Deb Watson, owner of Deb's Crafts.

That proposal was made by Carleigh Flaherty, president of the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce, who met with merchants on March 29 at Fun with Plaster to explain the pros and cons of being a sub-committee. After several days of mulling the proposal over, they decided becoming part of the chamber would be better than continuing as an independent entity.

"I think it's a very good move," Watson said. "... Our main goal is to promote downtown and that's what most of the businesses

Please see MERCHANTS, A5

Area artists strut their works at annual fest

BY TRACEY BIRKENHAUER

STAFF WRITER

Only once a year do so many Farmington-area artists get to showcase their talents in one place.

From April 30 to May 7 the fifth annual Festival of the Arts will draw thousands of art enthusiasts to enjoy a variety of paintings, music and children's activities, all at the William Costick Activities Center.

"This event is important because it gives everyone a chance to see what we have available culturally in Farmington and Farmington Hills," said Ellen Kendall, chairwoman of the Farmington Community Arts Council, the group sponsoring the event. "There are a surprising variety of things available."

Last year Kendall remembers a poem about a painting, accompanied by music.

"This is the one place where they can mix mediums like that," Kendall said. When you enter the Costick Activities Center, Kendall said the first thing you will notice is the beautiful art, as in more than 100 paintings.

"You'll just be impressed with the art

Festival of the Arts 2000



that hits you as you walk in the door," she said.

The unique aspect of this event is that it features many arts groups in the area that normally don't interface.

"There will be a whole community worth of art in one spot," said Nancy Coumoudouros, the Farmington Hills cultural arts coordinator. "To have this caliber of art presented in this small area is phenomenal."

The festival is never the same from year to year.

"As interest in the arts grows in the community, this festival gains more and more importance," Coumoudouros said. "It's an excellent community tool to showcase its many organizations."

Please see ARTS, A9



Move: Work on the empty Farmer Jack store continues that will allow Damman Hardware to move a few doors over, while a new store will take the hardware's place.

Dollar Castle to take over Damman's space

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The Dollar Castle intends to treat Farmington customers like royalty after moving later this year into the retail space soon to be vacated by Damman Hardware.

Owner Eddie Denha last week announced that his "supermarket of

the dollar store" is ready to step in as soon as Damman relocates to another spot in the Downtown Farmington Center. Damman is expected to, in June, take over the 20,000 square-foot space formerly occupied by Farmer Jack. As soon as the current Damman store makes the very short move, Denha

Please see DOLLAR, A9