

## Raccoons from page A1

she feels is an act of immeasurable cruelty will pay.

"Even if no one holds them accountable now, judgment will come," she said. "We were put here to protect what was in the Garden (of Eden), not destroy it. We don't have the right to judge what deserves to be here and what doesn't."

A number of questions will have to be answered before the state can press charges. There's even some question as to whether any law was broken.

Citizens are allowed to get rid of raccoons and their offspring if the animals are causing damage to their property, Morgan said. However, traps can only be set on private property, Nitschman was told the locals who allegedly killed the animals set the traps in the woods, not in their own yards.

While Farmington Hills has ordinances on the books about animal cruelty, city attorney John Donohue said he doesn't think officials have any control over trapping, except as it regards the fur trade.

"In terms of nuisance animals," he said, "I don't think the city has any regulations beyond cruelty."

A Livonia resident, Nitschman said she was invited to a Hills home by a man who had told a mutual friend he had "found" the baby raccoons alongside the road. The friend called

Nitschman and gave her the telephone number of the rescuer, but told her not to ask him any questions.

"She didn't want him to get scared off so I wouldn't get the babies," Nitschman explained.

The story the man told her over the phone sounded a little fishy, and Nitschman took a friend along with her for a midnight trip to the man's house. The man had asked her to come right away because he would be gone in the morning.

As she prepared to leave after picking up the animals, the man told her the truth about how the babies had come into his possession. He was with the trappers and the only reason he was able to rescue the animals, he said, was that the men who had killed the others thought these were dead as well.

"He said, 'I did tell them it was wrong,'" Nitschman recalled. "I told him those guys will pay. I said there isn't a sparrow that falls from the sky (God) doesn't know about."

The DNR still has to prove a crime was committed before it can take action. Morgan said that while the cruelty is disturbing, wildlife rehabilitation can be problematic as well.

Morgan said nearly 90 wildlife rehabilitators have been permitted in her district, under a program that is not funded. She had to close down the program earlier

this year because of numerous requests for permits.

When animals are rescued and released back into the county, the problems associated with crowding into populated areas skyrocket. Nitschman said she's taken vacation time from work because she started getting so many calls so early this year.

Taking care of the 45 raccoons she has now is a full-time job. She's up at 6 a.m. and spends four or five hours cleaning cages and caring for the animals, then puts in two hours for their afternoon feeding. She doesn't get to bed before 1 a.m.

"I work for my babies and my mortgage," she said.

The raccoons seem to know that. Though the babies she rescued Friday had a disastrous experience with human beings, they cling to her like a mother. Nitschman hasn't been able to do much except feed them and try to keep them safe and quiet.

She has nothing but praise for Dr. Glenn McClure at Strong Veterinary Hospital, who has provided medical treatment Nitschman couldn't afford, like splinting limbs and administering life-saving medications. Her work isn't supported by any organization; people who deliver animals occasionally will contribute money for their care.

Despite the long hours and the financial burden, Nitschman can't see herself ever quitting.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL ENKLEKE

**Taking care: Denise Nitschman of Livonia is a wildlife rehabilitator.**

As she stands in the middle of her garage, among cages stacked three deep around the inside, she talks to the adult raccoons in a soft, loving voice, calling them by name.

When the adults have recovered or when the babies have grown sufficiently, Nitschman said, she releases them into the

wild, on a large, undeveloped property owned by a friend.

It's not easy to say goodbye, but Nitschman said helping animals heal and then returning them to their natural habitat is more than just a job.

"My job is what I do," she said. "Who I am is a wildlife rehabilitator."

For more information or to help, call Nitschman at (734) 425-7129.

Anyone with information about the Hills incident involving raccoons may contact Lt. Morgan at the Department of Natural Resources, (734) 953-0241.

## Ballot from page A7

vouchers under this section."

A spokesman from Kids First '98, the organization that produced the petition language, said tests haven't been developed yet and that task would be left to the state Legislature.

As for funding, the petition says: "Beginning in the 2001-2002 state fiscal year, the state shall guarantee that the total state and local per pupil revenue for school operating purposes for each local school district, as adjusted for consolidations,

**■ 'This would mean the difference of, at least, hundreds of millions of dollars.'**

**Laurie Cummings**

**—Analyst**

annexations, and boundary changes, shall not be less than in the 2000-2001 state fiscal year; provided the school district does

not levy a millage rate for school district operating purposes less than it levied in 2000."

Proposal A guaranteed the amount wouldn't dip below 1994-95 levels, so this would be a major increase in guaranteed funding, according to the House Fiscal Agency. Exact numbers aren't available.

"This would mean the difference of, at least, hundreds of millions of dollars," said Laurie Cummings, a House Fiscal Agency analyst.

## Dammans to celebrate opening

The "new" Dammans Hardware will celebrate its Grand Opening noon to 3 p.m. Saturday with a sidewalk barbecue. Sort of.

As part of the celebration, a representative of Weber Grills will demonstrate a grill, by cooking and cutting up tasty samples for customers and interested passers-by.

The event will take place in the sidewalk area between the

**■ A sidewalk barbecue will help celebrate the store's grand opening.**

hardware store and the Shoe Carnival, in the Downtown Farmington Center.

Earlier this month, Dammans moved from another location in the strip mall to the former Farmer Jacks supermarket. The space that was vacated by Dammans in making the move is expected to soon be occupied by the Dollar Castle.

Downtown Farmington Center is located east of Farmington Road and south of Grand River.

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