

THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY

Play cards: *The Farmington Single Professionals play euchre and pinochle from 6:30-9:30 p.m. at Cowley's Old Village Inn in downtown Farmington.*

TUESDAY

On display: *The watercolor paintings of Marjorie Chellstrop, 2000 Artist in Residence, will be on display through Friday at the Farmington and Farmington Hills city halls.*

WEDNESDAY

Blood drive: *The Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills will hold a blood drive from 2-8 p.m.*

Baseball: *Farmington American Legion action takes place at 6:30 p.m. at Farmington High School.*

THURSDAY

Unveiling: *The 2001 All-Observer baseball team will be named in Thursday's Observer*

Exchange golf: *The Farmington Exchange Club will hold its annual golf outing at Glen Oaks Golf Course in Farmington Hills. Tee times are at 10:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m.*

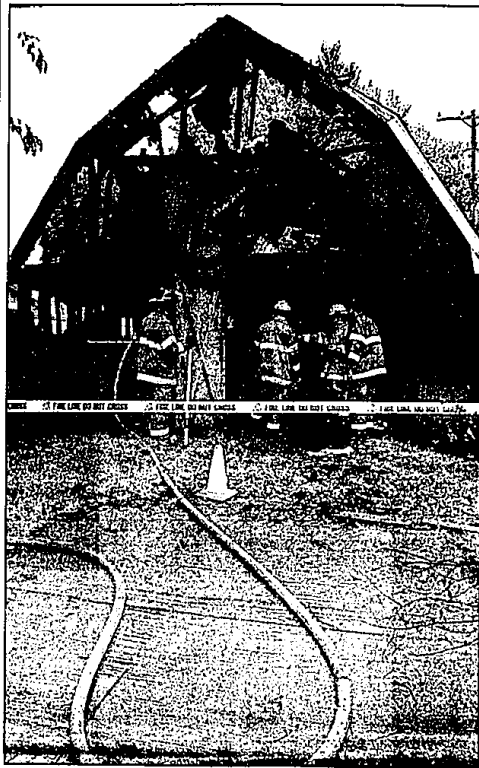
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What happened?



Staff photo by Bill Bezzler
Closer look: Farmington Hills firefighters investigate the scene of a suspicious garage fire on Ontaga Street.

Latest fire leads to increased concern

By ALICE ASHMORE
STAFF WRITER

The latest in a series of fires at a Farmington Hills home has left Police Chief Bill Dwyer feeling nervous — uneasy enough to prompt him to contact area media about the presence of a teen-age arsonist in the city.

"It's somewhat of an unusual step to take, but I felt it was necessary for the safety of the neighborhood," Dwyer said.

Police say the fire was set Tuesday morning by a 16-year-old boy next to a garage at his home on Drake Road. It was the fourth such fire in a year in a half.

Police and fire responded to the fire and observed the boy running from the garage, Dwyer said.

Charges are pending further investigation by the Oakland County prosecutor's office.

The previous fires were set in the

foyer of the home on Dec. 20, 1999, the child's bedroom on Feb. 17, 2000, and on March 9, 2000 in the basement of the home.

"Two of the fires caused significant damage to the home," he said. Dwyer said charges were filed in Oakland County Family Court against the young man on Oct. 12, 2000.

He pleaded guilty to the March 9, 2000 fire in May of 2001 and was placed on probation, said Dwyer.

"This young man desperately needs help. We are concerned this could escalate to loss of life or more property damage. There is a serious problem in that neighborhood," Dwyer said.

Farmington Police Chief Rich Marinucci said such incidents are not common in Farmington Hills. "It is common throughout the country, however. I see reports like this all the time."

He recalled the last situation of this

Please see ARSON, A5

More money issues on way

By SUE BUCK
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Having cast their votes for both a local school millage renewal and an Oakland Community College millage June 11, Farmington and Farmington Hills voters are now asked to decide two other issues.

The Farmington Public School Board passed a resolution June 19 supporting county millages for special education and vocational education that will be brought to Oakland County voters Tuesday, Sept. 25.

An intermediate school district special election is divided into two separate millages for a county charter millage enhancement of 1.1704 mills for special education and .2279 mills for vocational education.

The cost of providing special education services continues to escalate without adequate increases in state or

federal funding, say Farmington school officials.

On an average \$200,000 home, taxpayers will pay an additional \$117 on the special education millage and an increase of \$23 for vocational education.

Local boards of education must meet their obligations for special education by subsidizing special education programs with their general operating funds.

An increase of more than \$3 million would be provided to the Farmington school district, said Shelley Rose, director of communication for Oakland Schools.

That possibility is welcome news for Farmington School Superintendent Bob Maxfield. "It would ease up funding," he said. Special Education services are both mandated and under-

Please see MILLAGE, A4

North grad making it happen for Detroit school

By SUE BUCK
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On a wing, a song, and maybe a prayer, Rebecca Singer who recently graduated from North Farmington High School, is hoping to organize a musical benefit for a Detroit elementary school.

Singer is known to her friends as "Becca."

Her immediate goal is to start a music program at Logan Elementary in Detroit or at least provide the seed money though she has no idea what it will take financially to start such a program. She will leave those details to others.

Singer cited July 12 as a tentative date for the benefit at North Farmington High School. School personnel said Tuesday they haven't been contacted yet to book the date.

Though Singer celebrated her graduation privately with a family dinner, she turned down her family's offer for a larger, open house party. She hopes people will donate money to her cause instead.

She has watched while her friends have raked in graduation gifts.

Singer is trying to incorporate other performers into the show which will also feature her. "More than half are

duets and I am trying to get some instrumentalists to come in and play," Singer said.

Prior to her graduation this year, Singer sang with the 16-member Northern Lights, a North Farmington High School vocal group, made up of mostly upperclassmen. They sing at retirement dinners and for other groups.

They heard about Sweet Dreams Inc. during the holiday season, a group which goes to Logan Elementary in the Mexican Village section of Detroit. "They bring gifts one day before Christmas," Singer said.

The Northern Lights group visited Logan Elementary two other times and became closely tied with the school.

"It's really sad to see it because the kids are so poor and so sweet," Singer said. "When we came around the holidays the halls were empty. We lined up, we were in our uniform, and there was nobody there. We thought, great, we're singing and there is nobody there."

"We started singing and pretty soon the kids started flooding out of their rooms, saying 'What's that noise? What's that noise?' They filled up the halls. We ended up being surrounded by these little kids. They start



Go-getter: Becca Singer, who recently graduated from North Farmington High School, is making plans for a fundraiser for a Detroit school.

singing with you and clapping with you. It's such a wonderful experience with the kids and the look on their faces."

Music is an important part of Singer's life. "It really hurt

Please see BECCA, A5

New school board member awaits challenge

By SUE BUCK
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Pam Christian, the newest elected Farmington Public School board member, wants to engage the community — getting the community involved, educating the community and keeping parents informed.

"When I first started running I was a bit naive, certainly not politically savvy," Christian said. "I've changed in that manner. I wouldn't say I'm the political animal."

Her first meeting as a board member is July 17.

In a community that has long prided itself on its multiple cultures and

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racism, Christian is, from the best accounts, the first African American to hold a Farmington school board seat.

That accomplishment wasn't on Christian's mind when she decided to run, in fact, she hoped the electorate could look past race to ability. "I'm thankful they looked past the exterior," Christian said.

The question of why more members of the Farmington community's racial and ethnic groups aren't seeking office in government and schools was something Christian hadn't thought about before.

Though some of her detractors call Christian "hand-picked" and "anointed," she said the decision to run was her own. She first thought about running when board member Bobbie Feldman decided not to seek a third term.

Christian talked to Prill, a nickname by which she calls board member Priscilla Brouillette. "I had run into Prill many times at the diversity committee and out in the community," Christian said.

She said, "You'd be great."

An active volunteer, Christian worried she might have to give up her Girl Scout activities. "I'm a big advocate of scouting," Christian said. "I thought about which of things I couldn't do and

Prill explained which things would be a conflict of interest." Christian also talked to her husband and children.

"Prill said May would be crazy," Christian said. The month of May about two years ago brought Christian a deep void. Her dad, George Washington Buck, a Flint resident, and "a Harley man who liked to ride motorcycles" died from brain cancer, a little more than a month after diagnosis. She misses him terribly. "The last two Mays have been horrendous times," Christian said.

"I asked Prill when it would all end and she said June 11 was the election

Please see NEWCOMER, A4