

## CHAT ROOM



SUSAN FEITEN

## New York: Changed world

Getting off the plane in New York, things did not seem too different. The airport was busy, people coming and going and except for the few National Guard soldiers posted at security, it did not seem like a changed place.

Our trip was one for shows and shopping; doing our "patriotic duty," as it was. Walking through the streets of Manhattan, people seemed a little less bothered by the presence of visitors, even a little interested to see visitors in their city. Perhaps it was just my imagination. Broadway shows had full houses. People were enjoying the tall, fragrant flower arrangements, the grand architecture and tall ceilings of the Palm Court and the Oak Room. The museums holding precious treasures still had many visitors, television studios still had long lines of excited audience hopefuls. Street vendors hawking their hot dogs and fruits were still in the same old places that I remember. Shops normally full of souvenirs touting the Yankees and Mets had found new heroes: FDNY and NYPD. Vendors were selling photos of the New York City skyline from what seems to be a different age, now the skyline with the twin towers still standing.

■ A little farther south, the subways seemed a little different. Some lines were closed off. As we exited the subway and headed for Ground Zero, the streets were torn up as workers repaired water and utility lines. Many shops and restaurants were closed.

In Little Italy and Soho, our usual stomping grounds, restaurants and shops were also busy. We stopped for lunch at the Balhazar restaurant and within five minutes, the tables were filled with people laughing and having fun. New York seemed to be going on with life.

A little farther south, the subways seemed a little different. Some lines were closed off. As we exited the subway and headed for Ground Zero, the streets were torn up as workers repaired water and utility lines. Many shops and restaurants were closed. But then I saw a sign, "Big Joe's now reopened for business!" and "We're back!" We stopped in one deli to buy some breakfast. We were greeted with friendly smiles.

We now were closer to Ground Zero, and I noted a kiosk with a little cover. The rain cleaned off the lower part, but on the part covered by the tiny canopy, there remained the thick, light colored dust from the collapse of our World Trade Center. Instead of business people rushing to work, there were mostly visitors coming to see the devastation. The old church at Fulton and Church Streets has become a shrine. The fence erected in front of the church was filled with posters, signs, candles, flowers, origami birds, and messages from all over the country and all over the world. A message in thick green marker said, "We will never forget. Firefighters, Lima Peru." I added my message to the many, "Pray for Peace." Ground Zero is now leveled.

All of the World Trade Center buildings that were damaged are now gone. Workers have carefully sifted through, and cranes and trucks have taken down and hauled away the remnants of many lives, and a part of our heritage. The place where movers and shakers dealt business and free commerce ruled. Devastated by evil

Please see CHANGED, C10

## Ha-ha, Inc.

## Comedian finds niche in corporate humor

BY PAUL R. PACE  
STAFF WRITER  
ppace@oe.hometown.com

The saying when a door closes, a window of opportunity usually opens has worked pretty much to par for one area man. Working out of a cubicle in his early 20s, Bill Thomas of Novi knew his job was not making him happy.

"I just thought this is not what I want to do with my life," he said.

When the company faced lay-offs, he saw his chance to perform stand up comedy full-time and he left without ever looking back. Since then, Thomas has opened for such famous acts as Chuck Berry, Engelbert Humperdinck, Gladys Knight & the Pips, Jay Leno and Ray Charles.

While many comedians use vulgarities to get a quick laugh, Thomas said with pride that he always worked "clean." The "40-something" Thomas always admired comedians who didn't have to resort to dirty jokes for a cheap chuckle.

With his deep, smooth voice, it's not surprising Thomas has worked in front of the microphone.

He hosted "The Bill Thomas Show" for Detroit radio station WXYT for five years and enjoyed poking fun at the news of the day.

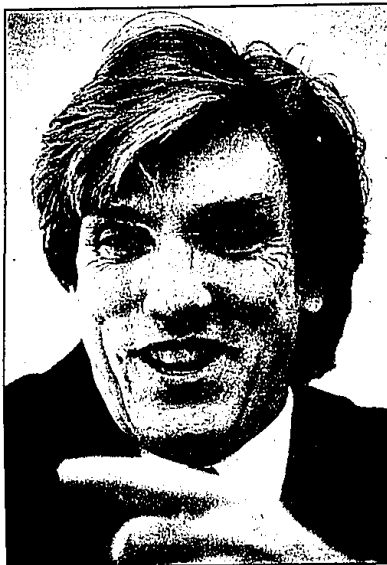
"I'd make fun of everything," he said. That job ended when the station turned to a sports radio format in recent years, but he still does some fill-in talk show host work here and on the east coast where he grew up.

When WXYT changed formats, a window of opportunity opened again, he said. Thomas decided to go back to stand up, but along a different avenue.

Today, he bills himself as a corporate humorist, meaning he performs at corporate functions, association meetings and even church gatherings.

Thomas typically does most of his work in the metro area.

"One thing I like about churches is they don't



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL REMER

Make 'em laugh: Humorist Bill Thomas has moved from the world of stand-up comedy to providing humorous presentations in corporate board rooms.

think they are allowed to laugh sometime," he said.

While he had a great time touring the country doing stand up, he said the road can be exhausting.

"When you're flying three or four times a week... Now it's a quality of life issue," he said. Doing corporate gigs is a challenge, considering he sometimes is ordered to provide a routine even during a business restructuring conference, one that could include company layoffs for some people in attendance.

It's a touchy subject, but Thomas said he learns from event organizers what issues to avoid.

"I like to see people at their best," he said of his current job. "I like to ease their pain." The performances are a way to build up a positive, light-hearted mood in a typically tense or boring situation.

"I come out of a business background, so I got a lot of material. I got my own stories about customer service," he said with a laugh.

He also has a wide range of topics in his routine.

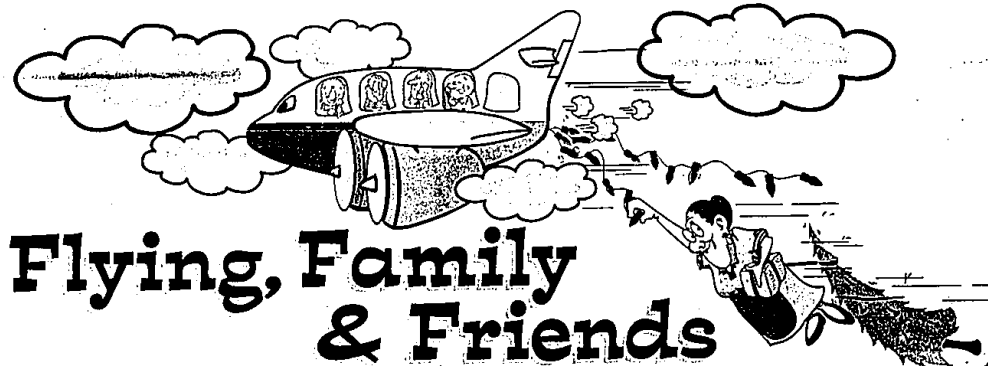
"If you make it broad enough, you can do all types of businesses," he said.

The good thing about working at companies and associations is nobody acts like a jerk," he said referring to his old stand-up days.

Michelle Ryckebusch, manager of local communications for the Chrysler Group in Auburn Hills, said she booked Thomas at a recent corporate conference.

"He's an excellent entertainer," she said. "He's able to bring clean humor into the setting. The audience definitely appreciated his blend of humor."

Humorist Bill Thomas's Web site is [www.comedianbillthomas.com](http://www.comedianbillthomas.com) and he can be reached at (248) 612-2925 or toll-free at 1-877-700-BILL.



## Flying, Family & Friends

## Area seniors win trips to see loved ones

BY RENÉE SROGLUND  
STAFF WRITER  
rsroglund@oe.hometown.com

Thanks to Wayne County and Southwest Airline's recent "Home for the Holidays" program, two area seniors are back home and basking in memories of a visit with loved ones.



Happy winner: Doris Patterson of Livonia (center) receives congratulations from Dan Jorgenson (left), Southwest Airlines marketing manager, and Cassandra Smith-Gray, Assistant Wayne County Executive at the "Home for the Holidays" awards luncheon Dec. 5.

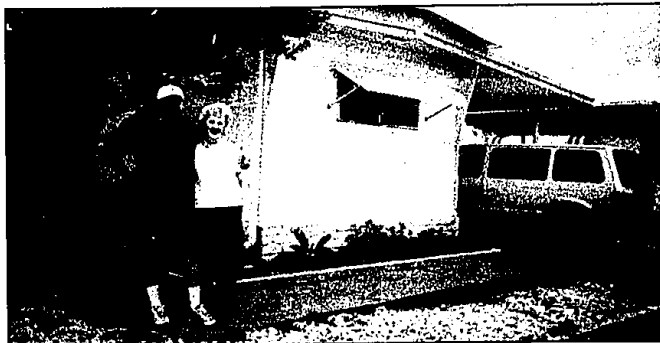
It was she who used to cart him to his doctor's visits in the Penobscot Building in Detroit by streetcar when she was in her early teens and he was just a toddler.

Vera Wolnosky, 72, of Westland and Doris Patterson, 72, of Livonia are two of several senior citizens who filled out Home for the Holidays applications weeks before Christmas.

Winners received complimentary round-trip tickets to visit family or friends between Dec. 3, 2001 and Jan. 26, 2002 in any city served by the Southwest Airlines.

Both women flew to Florida, Wolnosky to visit her brother and Patterson to visit her daughter and granddaughter.

Wolnosky spent a week in Tampa with her beloved baby brother, Jerry. Even though he's 69, Wolnosky considers him just a kid. After all, it was she who used to cart him to his doctor's visits in the Penobscot Building in Detroit by streetcar when she was in her early teens and he was just a toddler.



Brotherly love: Vera Wolnosky of Westland enjoyed visiting with her brother, Jerry Zula, in Tampa, Fla. She won the trip by filling out an application for "Home for the Holidays," a program sponsored by Wayne County and Southwest Airlines.

"I always wanted a baby brother," she said. "When I would take him to the doctor, everyone thought I was just a young mother."

The visit went perfectly, said Wolnosky. Even the gray skies and cool weather that prevailed during her entire stay didn't dampen her and Jerry's spirits.

"We went out to eat, went shopping and visited the flea markets. We also rented movies because he only has one good channel and two lousy ones."

Wolnosky was at first reluctant to fill out an application. But her co-workers in the Kay Beard Building in Westland, where she works as a caller in the Senior Alliance "Friendly Reassurance" program,

urged her to do so.

"I knew I wasn't going to get it, but they said, 'Fill it out!,' and I got it."

Wolnosky is now back a work calling homebound seniors and entertaining her co-workers with anecdotes from her trip. Everybody has seen her pictures. She says she had no fear of flying and is grateful to Southwest Airlines for sponsoring the Home for the Holidays program.

"Flying doesn't bother me, but they took my nail file away from me! My daughter-in-law warned me

Please see TRIP, C7