

THURSDAY

August 15, 2002

75 cents

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Looking good

Dorms  
don't  
need to  
look so  
blah. C1



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# FARMINGTON Observer

Our Towns

## Celebrity honored

Weesam "Sammi" Tournas of Farmington Hills, Marketing Representative for MGM Grand Detroit Casino, has been named one of the casino's outstanding Cast Members (employees).

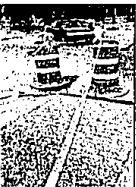
Tournas was recognized as part of MGM Grand Detroit Casino's "Grand Celebrity Award" program, designed to reward

Cast Members for work achievements above and beyond the call of duty.

Tournas has proven himself as a role model for other Cast Members by performing exceptional acts of Grand Class Service, said casino officials. He demonstrates a commitment to excellence, passion for his work, and teamwork qualities, while going the extra mile in his daily role. "Winners of the Grand Celebrity Award are the shining stars of MGM Grand Detroit Casino," said Scott Snow, President and Chief Operating Officer, MGM Grand Detroit Casino. "They exemplify and convey our mission statement, core values and 'Grand Class Service' standards." Tournas is among six Cast Members honored each month and four management staff members honored each quarter as part of the "Grand Celebrity Award" program.

## Stamped

Traffic on Grand River backed up to an even greater degree this week, with the installation of stamped concrete crosswalks that are part of the Farmington Road reconstruction project, scheduled for completion in September. Cars backed up for blocks to the east and west as the road was temporarily narrowed to one lane. According to Craig Bryson of the Road Commission of Oakland County, the crosswalk installa-



tion should take all week. Workers had to first remove the old paving with heavy equipment. The stamped concrete makes the crosswalk appear to be made of brick, Bryson said. Protective covers have been laid over the new material as it is installed. "It takes about a week to cure," Bryson added, estimating this portion of the project might even stretch into next week.

## Hills bank robbery suspect nabbed

BY PAUL R. PACE  
STAFF WRITER

Police have a woman in custody whose possible bold decision to rob two banks in one day may have led to her downfall.

Authorities say a woman who robbed a Farmington Hills bank Wednesday morning matches the description of a suspect who was nabbed hours later, after robbing a bank in Plymouth

Township. The Farmington Hills Standard Federal Bank at 31215 14 Mile was robbed around 10 a.m. by a woman known as the serial bank robber who prefers to wear a bonnet. She is also believed to be responsible for robbing two banks in Livonia recently, said Hills Police Chief William Dwyer.

The Hills Standard Federal was the same bank that was robbed on Aug. 5 by a lone gunman who ordered employees

into a vault and later escaped.

Dwyer said he believes it is simply a coincidence the same bank was robbed twice in 10 days.

The latest incident marks the fourth bank robbery in Farmington Hills in about a month. And it also marks several bank robberies in the metro Detroit area in recent weeks, Dwyer pointed out.

He said he attributes the increase in robberies to the economy, gambling or

narcotics.

The suspect in custody in the Plymouth robbery was caught by police after citizens alerted officers to seeing her after robbing the Comerica Bank on Ann Arbor Road and Sheldon around 1:30 p.m. She was caught a short while later walking in a strip mall east of the bank, police said.

PLEASE SEE SUSPECT, A4



City Planner Charmaine Ketterer shows damage caused by the ash borer.

BILL BRISLER / OBSERVER

## Cities take on Asian beetles

BY PAUL R. PACE  
STAFF WRITER

The cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills have both taken action in the fight to save a signature aspect of their rural ambience.

Saving Farmington Hills' ash trees has turned into a battle cry as city officials

plucked \$45,300 from emergency funds earlier this month to keep an Asian beetle from killing more than 800 ash trees owned and cared for by the city.

And plans are in the works to spread the word to residents about how best to handle the pest that has already killed thousands of trees in neighboring communities.

In Farmington, the beetle has already destroyed a number of trees.

"We're going to be taking out 25 trees this year and a total of 95 over the next two years," said city manager Frank Lauff.

Those will most likely be replaced with

PLEASE SEE BEETLES, A5

## Cities spur veto override

BY LEANNE ROGERS  
STAFF WRITER

With a football game-style chant of "over" and "ride," the message to state legislators from about 2,000 local government officials who rallied at the Capitol Tuesday was clear.

Local officials - elected and appointed - came from across the state to demand that legislators override the veto of \$845 million in statutory state shared revenue funds by Gov. John Engler.

Hours before both houses cast nearly unanimous votes for the first override of a gubernatorial veto in 25 years, officials came from all over Michigan - suburban Detroit, Manistee, Dowagiac, Big Rapids and the Upper Peninsula. "I came here not to fight with Gov. Engler. I came here to fight for Oakland County," said Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson. "What happened was unfair and unnecessary. It's unfair because it's our tax dollars. It's unfair to tell us so late in the year there is no time to plan."

Noting Oakland County would have to layoff 150 employees if the statutory state shared revenue was eliminated, Patterson also mentioned another sore point for many of the local officials and leg-

PLEASE SEE OVERRIDE, A5

## Want to be a little older? Talk to Ralph



BY CHRISTINE BRODA  
STAFF WRITER

For underage drinkers wishing to seem older than they really were, Ralph (not his real name) was a dream come true.

But for parents and authority figures, he was nothing short of a legal nightmare. This is because Ralph used to make and sell fake IDs.

During the eight months he was in business, the 20-year-old Plymouth resident supplied over 1,200 homemade IDs to young men and women in the Plymouth, Canton, Livonia and Ann Arbor areas.

According to Ralph, his market consisted of teenagers who wanted to be 19 so they could go to bars in Canada, as well as young people under 21 who wanted to be able to drink in the United States.

"Anyone can do it, you just need to put your mind to it," Ralph said of the process of making counterfeit IDs. Ralph, who was only 18 when he launched his business in August of 2000, explained that the forging process is relatively simple. He would take a person's

Greg Migliore addresses the question of if underage drinking is a problem. Other Views, Page A9.

real ID and use it to make a duplicate that displayed all the original information except for an altered birth date.

In about a week, the customer would get his old ID back, along with a counterfeit one Ralph said was virtually indistinguishable from the original - even the picture remained the same.

For \$50, a person could get a basic ID with a doctored birth date, while additional features - such as encoding on the magnetic strip or icons that show up under black lights - incurred costs up to \$200.

"Basically it came down to what people wanted," Ralph said, although he noted that most people wanted only the basic age change.

According to Ralph, the special equipment needed to make IDs is easy enough to come by if you know where to look.

PLEASE SEE UNDERAGE DRINKERS, A7

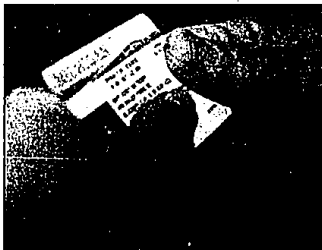


ILLUSTRATION BY KATY BARTOFT / OBSERVER

Falsifying identification was a full-time business for one area man, who stopped when he learned the stiff penalties attached to the practice.

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New year begins  
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