

# Parachute business keeps jumping

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Ten years ago John Sherman and his wife, Diane, purchased a sewing machine in an effort to solve a domestic disagreement. She wanted a couch. He wanted new skydiving equipment.

Out of that compromise purchase emerged a tandem parachute and a thriving business.

Sherman, 40, did what experts once thought was dangerous. He sewed a reserve parachute to the main parachute. A spring pushes the chute beyond the vacuum existing above the skydiver. The reserve chute is also kept closer to the skydiver than in more conventional systems.

The system has acquired a legion of loyal customers who flock to his Farmington Hills shop, The Jump Shack on Grand River near Middlebelt. Skydivers from France, Australia, England and Canada join local sportsmen in purchasing the system.

The French beat the high cost of import duty by combining a U.S. tour with their purchase of the reserve parachute.

The U.S. Air Force skydiving team adopted Sherman's gear for their exhibitions. Pictures of the team falling through the sky reveal to advantage what's become the trademark for his product, a contrasting colored circle on the pack marking where the spring is stored.

SHERMAN'S INNOVATION virtually jumped into the sport. When he introduced his idea to his skydiving team, fellow sportsman Rocky Evans, four-time world skydiving champ, took a liking to it.

Before anyone realized what was happening, Evans had a plane up and was bailing out with the new gear. He didn't have to use the emergency chute he strapped to his chest.

Sherman's invention worked. In Evans' honor, Sherman named a test dummy "Rocky." The 175-pound prototype used for testing parachutes hangs from the ceiling of the Jump Shack.

Behind "Rocky" is a converted wood-working shop where 20 employees turn out 40 parachutes a week. From stock room to the folding procedure, Sher-

man's young employees take care of business after a period of careful training. Two of them are master riggers, experts at the craft of making a safe parachute.

Only four of the employees don't skydive. The two master riggers have been interested in the field for a long time.

Shirley Weber, 21, began at the shop under the federal Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). Now she's the foreman. She grew up folding parachutes for her family who ran a drop site for skydivers who wanted to enjoy dropping in. She was six when she began folding parachutes.

Another Sherman employee, Vicky Christensen, is a master rigger and holds various titles for being able to maneuver quickly in the air.

SHERMAN'S PARTNER, Michael Johnston, is licensed by the Federal Aviation Administration to give the examination for parachute riggers which make them master riggers.

During the weekends, Sherman and Johnston throw a drop cloth over the sewing machines and tables and give classes to skydiving instructors.

Safety is second nature at the shop. "We're dealing with peoples' lives here," said Sherman. "We have to have strenuous quality control."

The shop must abide by FAA regulations. Each chute is checked several times during production. When an individual component is completed, the results are checked for safety. When one task is completed, the workers check for accuracy before moving on to the next step. The final product is subject to inspection before it's put on the shelf.

The chutes, their packaging and harnesses are made from nylon material. Employees account for each lot of the nylon. If one chute malfunctions the faulty material can be traced to other owners.

When customers call for advice, Sherman handles the explanation from his air-conditioned office off the work area. Behind his desk is a testimonial from the Air Force team.

THE CHUTES retail beginning at \$300. A first class rig can cost up to (Continued on page 15A)



Royce Knibb assembles chute releases which allows skydivers to cut away a faulty canopy.

Staff photos  
by  
Randy Borst



Sue Gibser and Harold Fisher carefully begin assembly of a parachute container.



A remodeled wood working shop now houses the Jump Shack in Farmington Hills.

## THE INSIDE \* ANGLE

**CANDIDATES FOR Farmington City Council:** Attention: Petitions are now available at the office of the City Clerk, 23600 Liberty, for the nomination of candidates for three seats on the Farmington City Council. Petitions may be filed from 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays from August 7. Deadline is at 5 p.m. August 17. All candidates who qualify will be placed on the ballot. There isn't a primary election and voters will elect three councilmembers on a non-partisan ballot at the regular odd-year general city election Nov. 6.

- Candidates must conform to the following:
- Must have been a resident of the city of Farmington for three years immediately before the last day for filing petitions.
  - They must be a qualified and registered elector of the city on August 17 and throughout the tenure of office.
  - They may not be in default to the city or any other government unit of the state.
  - They must submit petitions signed by at least 50 persons and not more than 75 who are qualified voters in the city.
  - Candidates must submit an affidavit as to qualifications.

**CONGRATULATIONS AND good luck** to the four Farmington residents who are off to the Special Olympics National Finals in Connecticut. They are: Gail Harowski, Marilyn Hodges, Bill O'Koney and Donna Pergeau. All are residents of Oak Hill Nursing Home. They won a spot in the finals after competing in the Detroit area games earlier this summer. Ms. Harowski will be entered in swimming competition. The three others will vie in field events. Special arrangements for the foursome were made by the Easter Seal Association. A tip of the Angles Toppers to all four Farmington stars: ★ ★ ★ ★.

**INSIDE FOUNDERS:** As the weather becomes hot enough to fry the proverbial egg on the proverbial sidewalk, preparations for the festival continue. Even the fountain in the Downtown Center is beginning its warm up routine for the main event. Last Tuesday, Angles noticed the fountain was trickling away trying to work up to a full-fledged cascade.

Meanwhile, the two Farmington libraries have

been working away to prepare for the festival. A calendar of events is available at each of the libraries, Liberty at State in Farmington and 12 Mile west of Farmington Road in the Hills. Information can be obtained by calling the libraries at 474-7770 or 553-0500. The libraries will be opened from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. on July 26 and from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. July 27.

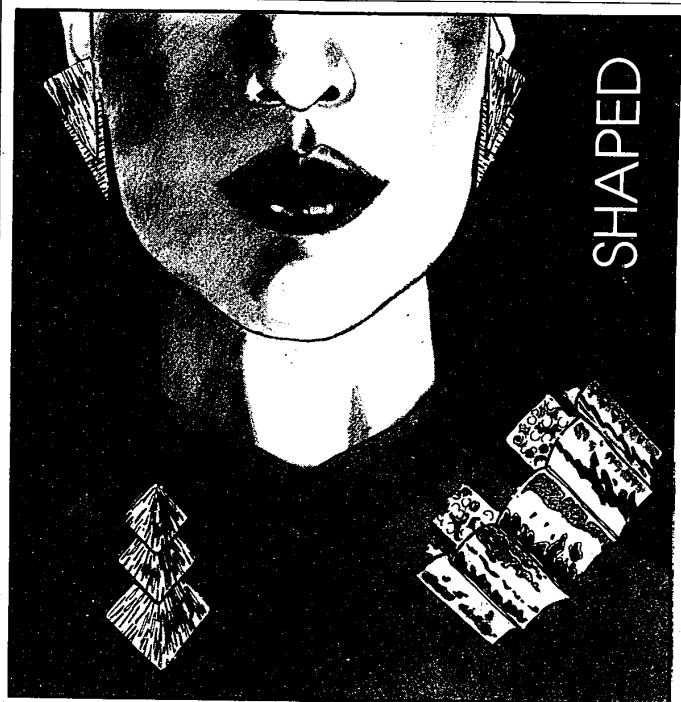
**FAMILY FILM HOUR** at the Farmington library on Liberty and State will be at 3 p.m., July 26 and 3 p.m., July 27. Rest those weary feet and weary children by watching the "Cricket in Times Square," "Bags," "Boiled Egg," "Fun on Mars," and the "Legend of Paul Bunyan on July 26. On July 27 the following will be shown: "Hoover, Blood Highway," "How to Play Baseball," "The Lorax," and "Hank, Cave Peanut." All films are free.

Enjoy an evening with John Glick, Farmington area's resident star potter at 7:30 p.m., July 26 in the Farmington Hills Library auditorium, downstairs at the library on Twelve Mile near Farmington Road.

**THE SHOWMOBILE** goes on as the Clarenceville Summer Theatre Players take on the responsibility for running the show and the acts for the fest. The groups is formed from high school students who are interested in the performing arts. The July 26 schedule: 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Clarenceville Summer Theatre Players; 2-2:30 p.m. Family YMCA Dance Fit; 3-4 p.m. Dorlissa LaMarr Entertainment; 4:30-5:30 p.m. Sherry's School of Dance; 5:30-6:30 p.m. Buster Dance School; 6:30-7:30 p.m. Sweet Adelines of Brighton; 7:30-8:30 p.m. Funkentelechy; 9-10:30 p.m. Spinning Gears Square Dance.

And joining them are: the Oakhill Nursing Home residents, the Scarlett Brigade, the Farmington Trail Blazers 4-H Club and the Clarenceville Summer Theatre Players. Not to mention a host of clowns, balloons and a calliope (toot-toot).

Don't forget the annual fireworks on the Orchard Ridge grounds, Orchard Lake Road near 12 Mile at 10 p.m., July 29. The display is sponsored by the Metro Bank of Farmington and the Farmington Hills Police. There will be a parachute jumping demonstration by the Para-hawks at 8:30 p.m. that day. WDRQ Radio will host a disco beginning at 7:45 p.m. on campus.



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THE  
WOODWARD  
SHOPS  
HUDSON'S

## Bundy gets SMLCC post

Henry Ford Community College president Stuart Bundy, was recently elected president of the Southeastern Michigan League of Community Colleges (SMLCC).

Bundy will preside over the group for the 1979-80 academic year. The SMLCC was set up to improve communication among the presidents of the 10

community colleges in southeastern Michigan.

C. Nelson Grote, president of Schoolcraft College, was elected secretary. The SMLCC is comprised of the presidents of Highland Park, Macomb County, Monroe County, Oakland, St. Clair, Washtenaw, Wayne County and C.S. Mott community colleges in addition to HPOC and Schoolcraft.