

# Students try on disabilities to understand others



Lynn Gross, a certified occupational therapy assistant, watches as Brad Barth maneuvers a wheelchair to try to pick up a cookie jar from a counter top. The purpose of the exercise was to show

Eagle students how everyday objects, such as waste baskets and objects left on the floor, can pose obstacles to people who use wheelchairs.

**A**RM BRACES held one student's arms rigid, making it tough to put on a shirt. Another could use only his head against a switch to draw on a computer screen. His hands didn't work.

"For kids who have never ever drawn a picture before, this (the computer) can be very exciting," said Kathy Nicholas, helping a fifth grader learn the special computer program.

It was all part of Changing Places, an annual event at Eagle Elementary School, in which general education students learn about the problems encountered by special education students attending the Farmington Hills school.

Stations involving speech, physical therapy and other specialists guide general education students through a variety of activities designed to help them understand classmates who have disabilities.

"It's really nice how the other children accept them," observed Jo Esper, a paraprofessional who has worked with special education students in the Farmington district for the past 10 years. "They love it. Each one is anxious to try the next thing."

Occupational therapist Laura Barker said after each exercise, she could sense students' frustration at being "handicapped."

"We're trying to increase sensitivity to what it's like to be handicapped," she explained.

Part of her program taught general education students what it was like to have muscle weakness in one side of the body. Students learned to tie a shoe with the use of one hand.

The Changing Places program also helps general education students deal with special education peers — students mainstreamed into regular classroom settings.



Joan Crawford (adult) shows Eagle students Tracy Weiss (center) and Brenda Bittkofer how a computer speaks back words that have been typed into it by a person with a speech handicap.

# Drowning death suspect not insane, report says

By Darroll Clem  
staff writer

Anthony Bonelli was not insane when he allegedly drowned his girlfriend, and he is competent to stand trial, according to a state report.

But a defense attorney disputes the findings in the long-awaited state Forensic Center report and has called for another psychiatric evaluation of Bonelli.

"We obviously feel that he (Bonelli) was not criminally responsible for his actions," attorney Howard Wittenberg said. "Our whole defense is 'not guilty' by reason of insanity."

Bonelli is accused in the drowning death of 17-year-old Kristina Marie Fracchia, whose jolly clothed body was found face down March 17 in Orchard Lake by Oakland County Drain Commission workers.

A pretrial hearing scheduled for this week was postponed until next Wednesday after attorneys received the state forensic report, which was requested six months ago under a court order.

State experts wrote in their report

that they didn't believe Bonelli met the statutory criteria for being insane, Wittenberg said.

"THEY DIDN'T feel that he rose to that level," Wittenberg said. "They feel that he's mentally ill, but they feel that he understood his conduct and, therefore, didn't meet the statutory criteria for being insane. That is basically what we're taking issue with."

Assistant prosecutor Fred Miller said Monday that he is "disappointed that there's going to be a further delay in this case."

"I felt that his (Bonelli's) actions were rather calculated from the beginning," Miller said. But he added that defense attorneys "have that right" to seek a second psychiatric opinion.

Wittenberg said the defense is contending that Bonelli was "definitely having mental problems at the time of the offense" and that "he still is."

Bonelli has had a history of mental illness, Wittenberg said, adding that Bonelli's "whole adolescence was just a very terrible experience."

THE DEFENSE is in the process of seeking a psychiatrist to conduct the second examination of Bonelli, who was a 17-year-old student at the Farmington Training Center for emotionally impaired students when he was arrested and charged with open murder. He remains in the county jail.

The defense is expected to choose a psychiatrist prior to Wednesday's pretrial hearing before Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Alice Gilbert, Wittenberg said. The judge may decide at the pretrial hearing to set a timetable for having the second psychiatric evaluation completed.

Wittenberg said he expects to ask Gilbert to grant the defense 60 days for the process.

Wittenberg noted that Gilbert "wants to get this thing moving." But he added that defense attorneys consider the psychiatric tests "a serious matter" that should not be rushed. That is why they have not pushed the issue of a speedy trial.

Wittenberg said he expects the trial will be delayed until early spring.

# Hills couple's backyard named a designated haven for wildlife

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has been near. Blood will mar their wooden deck. And he knows when abandoned baby rabbits near death belong to a first-time mother rabbit — a novice to the responsibilities of parenting in the wild.

"I understand there's nature. There's a balance. And that's the way it is," Derek said. "It's a very uneducated thing to interfere."

Judy Derek has groomed her knowledge of nature from her husband, who has nurtured his love for wildlife by reading and experimenting. "It's the life cycle. I like watching nature like this," she said.

THEIR LIVES are filled with a lot of noticing, watching calmly and standing still for something to move. On the tarp covering their above-ground pool, the Dereks one day discovered that ducks found it a perfect place to act out their courtship and mating.

They also discovered that an area of their acreage near the creek,

**'I thought something had to be done to bring back wildlife habitat. We're here to share a planet. Somebody's got to do something.'**

— Joe Derek

served as a "wintering area" for garden snakes. "On a warm spring day, you'll see little periscopes popping up," Derek said, referring to the snakes awakening from their seasonal homes.

Along the way, Derek also discovered that opossum and skunks continuously share the dens of hibernating woodchucks. And with a clearer creek, Derek has found bullfrogs and small-mouth bass.

The Dereks also discovered that sometimes they have to manage the habitat. "When you take care of a

natural area, you have to play Mother Nature," Derek said. For example, the fox squirrels have had to be relocated, as have some of the raccoons, to make way for fox, red and gray squirrels.

Looking forward to spring, Derek already has plans. Praying mantis eggs will be attached to a tree branch when it's warmer, ready for hatching. Vines will be planted on a downed tree as a means of attracting humming birds and butterflies — one of Derek's true loves.

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