

Ponke murder

What could have been done?

You analyze it from every angle . . . from Oxford to Farmington, from a house battered with a sledgehammer to a "tender soul" beaten to death with a claw hammer.

You talk to people who still break down and cry and leave the lights on all night . . . people who are trying to put their lives back together after the gruesome events of Saturday, Jan. 8, 1994, at 33760 Freedom Road in the city of Farmington.

You listen to south Farmington folks who shake their heads knowingly as they discuss the participants in this bloody murder.

The more you think and talk about it, the more one thing becomes abundantly clear: The legal system somehow failed Jackie Ponke, and so did some people close to her.

And now Jackie Ponke is dead.

Jackie Ponke — from all accounts a wonderful woman burdened with a horrible marriage — had the life smashed out of her by a hammer-wielding man in the office of Dr. Alan Bredin, where she worked as a dental assistant, on that Saturday morning.

Her estranged husband, Raymond Ponke, has been charged with first-degree murder in her slaying.

There were warnings that something like this was coming Jackie Ponke's way, but apparently they weren't loud enough, at least not sufficiently loud to prevent the woman's murder.

She had moved out of her Oxford home with her daughter in November, having sued for divorce from Raymond Ponke. Reportedly, he was a violent man who once battered his house with a sledgehammer. A few weeks later, Jackie Ponke filed for a spousal abuse injunction.

She told friends and relatives of threats made against her, some as specific as "cutting her into five pieces with a chain saw." The Oxford police were notified.

At Bredin's office in Farmington, an elaborate

rate escape route was planned for employees in case someone tried to make good on the threats against Jackie Ponke.

After the murder, a brother of Raymond Ponke told Farmington police he had heard similar specific threats made in a conversation with the accused in a Farmington bar. Unfortunately, no one informed the Farmington police of the threats before the act.

Now wait a minute . . . we've described office escape plans, threats involving chain saws, a house hammered violently, a spousal injunction filed, still more threats. It's our thinking that warning gongs and bells should have been going off nonstop in Oxford and Farmington.

We have to ask incredulously:

■ Was the behavior of the accused in Oxford not enough to lead police there to take action? After all, when a man takes a sledgehammer to his house . . .

■ Did the Oxford police communicate the Ponke situation to the cops in Farmington? There's no indication this happened. Properly notified, the Farmington police could have kept an eye on the dental office — and an eye out for whoever wanted to harm Jackie Ponke.

■ Why weren't friends and relatives of both Ponkes banging down the doors of the police stations in Oxford and Farmington, demanding action after the supposed threats had been made?

■ Given the situation, why wasn't the door of the dental office locked on that Saturday when just a few people were in?

After a tragedy like this, a lot of people are saying, "I could have done this . . . I should have done that."

All we can say is: The next time a situation like this looms, please do this or that. It may not make a difference. But then again it may be just the one little thing that deflects someone intent on murder.

School can alter attitudes

They say education is the answer.

So why, at Cranbrook-Kingswood — a nationally renowned private school in Bloomfield Hills that prides itself on its college preparatory program in literature, science and the arts — were four black students subjected to snowballs and racial epithets?

Why? Because racism begins at home and the seeds of prejudice are sown long before children go off to school — Cranbrook-Kingswood or elsewhere.

Cranbrook prides itself on being multicultural and ethnically diverse. Racism isn't tolerated, officials say, and the black co-president of the senior class agrees: "Racism is probably less prevalent here than anywhere."

But Cranbrook is an insular, secluded community, despite including students from 20 countries, other states and many of our suburban communities, and despite the fact that it has an exemplary, longstanding minority scholarship program — Horizons Upward Bound.

And maybe that is where it is making its mistake. Racism can and does occur everywhere — in the suburbs and in the city. Despite its excellent intentions, Cranbrook is no exception.

Why? Because racism begins at home. In a letter sent to parents Jan. 17, a school official talked of disappointment and "a strong desire to want to have everything return to normal."

Cranbrook officials, as well as parents and

students, must ask what normal means to them. We hope it doesn't mean they are willing to tolerate underground hurtful, harmful attitudes for the sake of a false sense of peace.

That's why the announced disciplining of students involved in the incident — a week's suspension, probation and counseling — doesn't go far enough.

These students should also perform community service in a situation where they are able to put aside the myths and stereotypes they learned, yes, at home.

In addition, student leaders should now work with administrators to produce the fundamental, even if slow, changes needed in suburban attitudes.

Multicultural commissions have formed in Farmington, Birmingham, Livonia and Southfield.

Cranbrook — unzip your cocoon. Let your students — perhaps led by their existing African-American Awareness Association — work with those commissions.

It is a privilege to attend a school like Cranbrook that has turned out graduates who have contributed to the leadership of this region, and in some cases the wider world.

Students who attend schools like this have a duty to contribute to the betterment of society. And schools like this have a duty to show them how.

Because education is the answer.

Hot for Michigan



BILL DRESLER/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Staying put: Despite sub-zero temperatures, Jackie Snyder (left) and Angie Sanchez are hardy enough to venture out for the Plymouth Ice Sculpture Spectacular. These days, the area's snow, cold — and terra firma — seem preferable to California's sunny skies over shaky ground.

LETTERS

A great show

Heartiest congratulations to two exceptionally talented teachers, Sallie Phillips and Karen Greene, from Orchard Lake Middle School, and their equally talented students for their wonderful production of "Coming of Age."

We can only imagine the long hours and hard work that went into this delightful musical. Thanks to all of you for making all of us a little warmer during our "deep freeze."

Pat and Jack Thoresen, Farmington Hills

Watch the spelling

Kudos to Joe Derek for his article on the Rouge River in the Jan. 20 Observer. But, can't anyone spell any more?

Look at the last sentence of the sixth paragraph: "I really needed those car tires, bottles and boards that I'm sure made your garage a cleaner place when you throw them out." It should be "threw them out." If we're really going to spell phonetically, let's try "thru" for all through/threw meanings.

It seems to me a copy editor should have caught this error even if the writer did not, or does no one check for spelling and grammar any more?

Margaret G. Schaeffer, Farmington Hills.

Dolan on her record

To set the record straight:

The Michigan House of Representatives and Senate were in session commencing at 10 a.m. Dec. 23 with final adjournment at noon Dec. 24. I was present for the entire 26 hours. My vote was recorded on all 21 votes taken on Dec. 23.

There were 24 roll-call votes on Dec. 24. I voted on 19, with four being missed while I was in the Senate chambers meeting with Sen. Richard Posthumus.

Constituents had expressed a concern with our charter school proposal and prior to the final vote, I wanted assurance that the Freedom of Information Act would apply to teaching materials offered at the public academies.

While the House was at ease at the call of the speaker, I had discussed my concern with Rep. Bill Bryant and Rep. Richard Agos, who served as co-chairs of the bipartisan House committee discussing the public academies.

After receiving their approval for my amendment addressing this concern, at the suggestion of Speaker Paul Hillegonds, I went to the Senate chambers to cover the issue with Sen.

Posthumus.

During my absence from the House chambers, I did miss Roll Call 1410 on HB 5130 (passed 70-25), 1411 on HB 5010 (passed 100-1), 1412 on HB 6009 (passed 98-2) and 1413 on HB 5118 (passed 99-2).

Since these bills were not close votes, the board that records the votes was open only a very brief period of time, which is why I missed these votes.

I also missed Roll Call 1433 on Senate Joint Resolution S, which was recorded just prior to noon on Dec. 24. It passed 84-15.

After 26 hours of continuous session, I was absent from the chambers with what turned out to be a touch of stomach flu, which remained with me the better part of the Christmas holidays.

I have an excellent record of attendance. I take my commitment to represent this district very seriously and will continue to do my very best to serve you in the Michigan Legislature. Rep. Jan Dolan, Farmington Hills

Improve bottom line

As Clint might say, "Your article, 'OCC gets dough for retraining' made my day!"

Tell me, why in the name of the Almighty, should the State of Confusion — Michigan, that is — shell out \$2.8 million of tax dollars to OCC — or anyone for that matter — to "train" who knows whom for various local major corporations?

At a time when the Lansing crowd — SNAFU CITY II, MI (Washington is SNAFU CITY I) is trying to figure out how to stick it to the taxpayers — without so much as a kiss — it's monumentally appalling to even consider such fiscal nonsense.

I'm sure this \$2.8 million worth of eventual vote-buying and good-old-boy back-scratching will do little more than improve OCC's bottom line and the compensation of the all-of-a-sudden "experts" at OCC. Any beta?

Question: Who will monitor and audit this nonsense? How about Jake Jacobetti or some other financial wizard from the House Fiscal Agency?

William J. Carruth, Clawson

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

So what do you think of winter now?

We asked this question at the Komer Barbers in downtown Farmington.



"I wish it were spring . . . I'm tired of shoveling snow." Christopher Petrides Farmington Hills



"I like it. I just went cross country skiing for about 20 miles." Vernon Bedell Wixom



"It stinks. I don't like winter. I'm going to retire in Florida." Leonard Franke Novi



"If you live in Detroit, you should get used to the cold." Valdie Rozentals Farmington Hills

The Farmington Observer

TOM BACH, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 477-5450

SUSAN ROSEMAN, MANAGING EDITOR, OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, 953-2149

PEG KNOX, ADVERTISING MANAGER, OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, 953-2177

LARRY GORDEN, MANAGER OF CIRCULATION, OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, 953-2239

MARK LEWIS, REGIONAL ADVERTISING AND EDITORIAL MANAGER, OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC NEWSPAPERS, 953-2150

DECK ISHAM, VICE-PRESIDENT, GENERAL MANAGER, OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC NEWSPAPERS, 953-2252

SUBURBAN COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

RICHARD ASHMAN, PRESIDENT