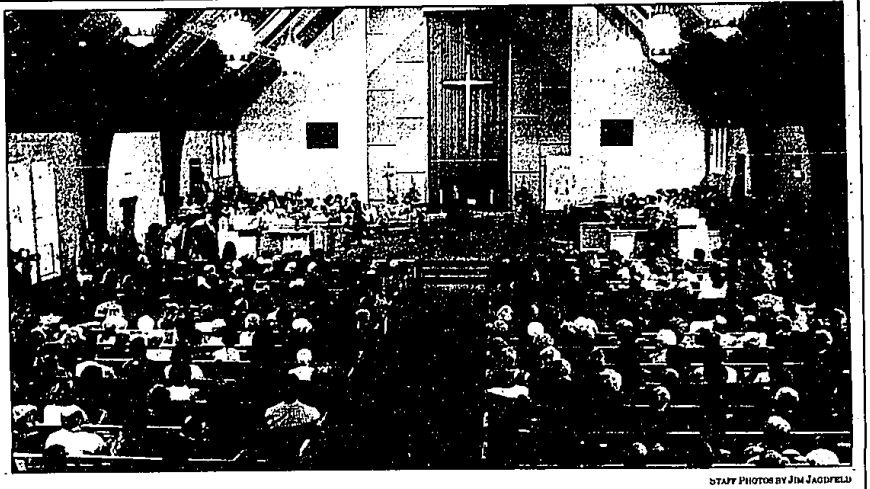
Makes pitch: *Dr. Jack Kevorkian speaks at St. Paul Presbyterian Sunday morning to make a pitch to legalize physician-assisted suicide.*



STAFF PHOTOS BY JIM JAGDFELD

Packed house: *The pews of St. Paul Presbyterian was filled for its Sunday morning forum session to hear arguments why physician-assisted suicide should be legalized in Michigan.*

Local cleric helps Kevorkian's right to die drive

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER

As a clergyman, Rev. Thomas Eggebeen has walked through both the valley of the living and the near-dead.

"The suffering person grabs you by the collar and says, 'Please help me die'," Eggebeen said.

Call it fate or coincidence then, that the petition drive to attach the "Mercy Amendment" to the Michigan ban on physician-assisted suicide was launched Sunday at Eggebeen's St. Paul Presbyterian Church in Livonia.

The church regularly holds a forum session Sunday mornings between scheduled church services to give congregation members an opportunity to explore and discuss current issues and the church's interactive role.

The stage for Dr. Jack Kevorkian's first scheduled public speech in three years was set there when Farmington Hills resident Janet Good, president of Hemlock of Michigan, who was originally scheduled as Sunday's speaker, relinquished her spot after learning Kevorkian was available.

"You're trying to raise me up to the level of hero," Kevorkian began. "There's no hero in this anymore. We are all in this together."

Kevorkian was recently freed from an electronic tether imposed by Oakland Circuit Court.

Applause followed his repeated assertions that all people have a right to not suffer. He referred to Lansing legislators as "tyrants" and the "mentally infirm."

A person's right not to suffer when he is dying is as important as the right of freedom of speech and assembly when a person is healthy, Kevorkian said. He referenced President Franklin Roosevelt's "four freedoms" speech equating freedom from fear as being directly related to freedom from fear of suffering.

"The legislature has said, 'You must suffer'," Kevorkian said.

Geoffrey Feiger, Kevorkian's attorney, preceded Kevokian's speech. "This transcends religion," Feiger said. "It's a metter of choice, a constitutional right to be left alone. I know damn well that the government does not own my life."

Feiger stressed that the amendment is aimed at mentally competent adults, not minors.

Life and death decisions are made every day, Feiger added. "Who gets a heart transpant? And, who doesn't? Who gets kidney dialysis? And who doesn't."

Joycelyn Koenig, of Redford, said that her grandfather committed suicide when he learned that he, like his two sisters before him, had cancer of the stomach. Because her mother-in-law had no living relatives, Koenig felt frustrated when she didn't have a legal say in her fate. Her mother-in-law died in a nursing home. "I could have saved the taxpayers a lot of money," Koenig said.

Added Koenig's son, Fabian Lanzy of Redford: "I'd like to see the voters decide."

Phil Farhat, 13, of Livonia, joined his family in their support of Kevorkian. "People should have the right to die if they are suffering and have nothing to live for."

Good first contacted Eggebeen when she read his rebuttal of Archbishishop Adam Maida's February 1993 letter to a daily newspaper in which Maida called every moment of life precious. "Even terminal suffering has value and meaning," Maida wrote. "In a strange sort of way, as the saying goes, suffering is good for the soul."

Eggebeen's letter responded, in part: "The power of medicine to interrupt the process of dying is a gift from the hand of God, but even Jesus brought Lazarus back from the grave only once."

Hemlock members wearing "I Back Jack" buttons, energetically passed out petition forms in the church basement during the reception hour following Kevorkian's speech. Eggebeen is a Hemlock member, supporting the option of voluntary euthanasia for the terminally ill.

Several family members of the 20 persons Kevorkian assisted were also present, including members of the Donald O'Keefe family of Redford.

Carol Poenisch, daughter of Merian Frederick, who took her life in Kevorkian's Royal Oak apartment last October, said her mother was single-mindedly focused on suicide as soon as she learned she had ALS or Lou Gehrig's disease. But, Frederick also grappled with who would assume care of a mentally retarded daughter who lived at home. Poenisch now does.

"Even my sister asked Dr. Kevorkian, 'How come animals have the right to die, but people don't?, "

Makes sergeant: *Sgt. Tim Connor, with the Farmington Hills Police Department since 1980, stands at the department's front desk.*

STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIRUX

Hills police promote 2; new officer joins ranks

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Hills Police Department came out in force Friday — and the uniform of the day included a smile — as two of their finest were promoted and a new officer added.

Chuck Nebus, 38, and a 19-year plus veteran of the Hills force became the first officer in seven years to be promoted to lieutenant. Tim Connor, 36, was promoted to sergeant.

Evan Warsecke, 25, became an officer after more than three years as a cadet in the department.

"These are well-earned promotions," said a beaming Chief Bill Dwyer.

The men had worked hard and earned their promotions through competitive exams and extensive training, Dwyer said.

Nebus joined the department in April of 1974 as a cadet. He was hired as an officer in October 1976. He has served in the patrol division, undercover surveillance unit, detective section and juvenile section.

In 1985, Nebus was promoted to sergeant, was named as detective section supervisor and was named the department's police officer of the year. He has attended the Northwestern University Staff and Command School, has a master's degree from Eastern Michigan University in public administration and graduated from the FBI National Academy in Quantico, Va., in December 1992.

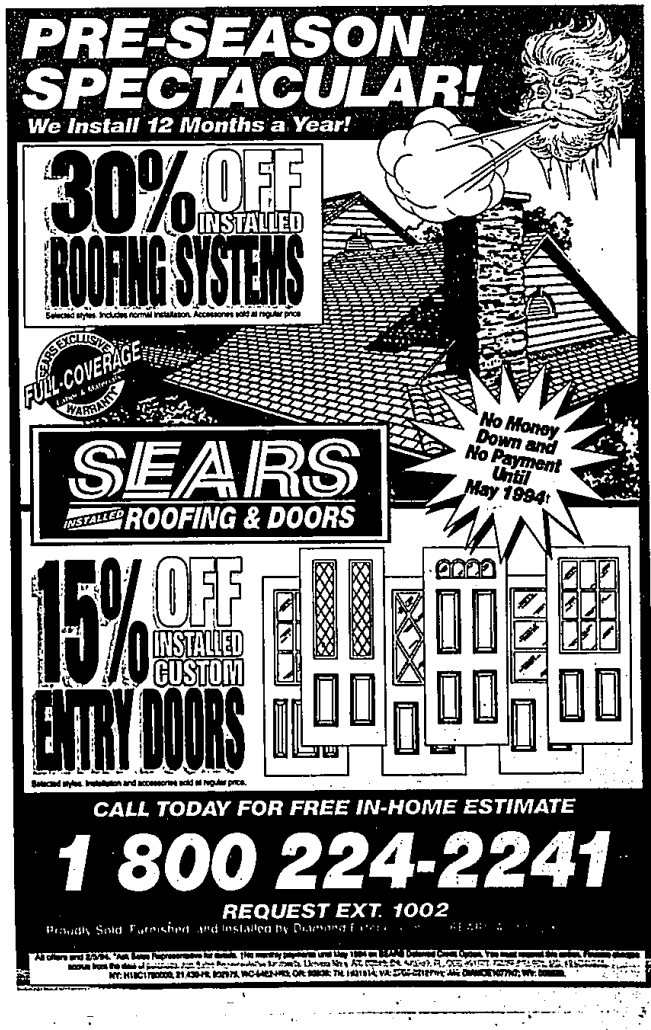
Lt. Chuck Nebus

Connor, who joined the department in 1980 after four years as a police officer in Garden City, served in the patrol division and traffic sections. In 1987 he was designated as the department's training officer. During his assignment, Connor helped the department gain statewide recognition with such innovative projects as "Police Journal," a cable TV show, and the THINK program, to educate children about drugs.

In 1984, Connor received a citation for rescuing a woman from a burning building and was also named police officer of the year. He has a bachelor's degree from Madonna University and is a certified firearms instructor.

"Tim is going to make an outstanding supervisor," Dwyer said.

Warsecke joined the department in November 1990. He has had several assignments with the department and will enter the Oakland County Police Academy in February.

"We're certainly proud of you," said Mayor Larry Lichtman. "We're are continually receiving compliments on the professionalism of our police department."

It is a credit to the department that serious crime has decreased while the city's population has increased, Lichtman said.