

All locked up



Local 'jailbirds': Two familiar faces have made the "Most Wanted" list for the American Cancer Society's Great American Lock Up March 7-10. The "jailbirds" — Mike Van Beek and Richard Bennett (center), general manager and chef of D. Dennison's Seafood Tavern — have been charged with "serving farm raised steroid-injected smelt." They have to raise at least \$2,500 for ACS. A tax-deductible \$25 donation can put someone "behind bars" for the benefit. Call (800) 543-JAIL.

Program to feature author

Sylvia S. Hacker, author of "What Every Teenager Really Wants to Know About Sex: With the Startling New Information Parents Should Read," will be featured in a program from 7:30-9:30 p.m. Friday, March 24. Hacker, a frequent radio and television guest, author and expert on human sexuality, will share information with sixth through 12th-graders and their parents. After a one-hour presentation, Hacker will meet with the young people while parents enjoy refreshments, followed by refreshments for parents. Questions.

For information and registration, call the church office at (810) 626-3620. No charge.

Harrison grad involved in Ticketmaster suit

By CHRISTINA FUGGO
STAFF WRITER

Ceiling Ticketmaster's "monopolistic practices" and service charges unfair, a group of Oakland County residents sued Ticketmaster in U.S. District Court in Detroit.

"We want to recover damages on behalf of all those individuals who have been harmed by the monopolistic practices of Ticketmaster by arbitrarily setting service charges and handling fees on their concerts, plays and all other entertainment activities, sporting events, etc.," said attorney Vince Colella, of Provizer, Lichtenstein and Phillips, the Southfield firm that is handling the suit.

Executives at the local Ticketmaster office in Bingham Farms were unavailable for comment.

Complainant Ebon Petty, a 29-year-old Birmingham resident who graduated from Farmington Harrison High School, said he realizes that he and the 12 others on the suit are asking for a lot. But he believes that service will be improved, just like when the phone companies were split up.

"I realize it's a pretty tall order to fill to break up something like this. . . . We'll get improved service and better rates, and I think that's good."

Charges at issue

They are asking that Ticketmaster work with groups who seek lower service charges.

Ticketmaster refused to lower service charges for a proessed 1994 summer tour by Seattle supergroup Pearl Jam and threatened to "aggressively enforce" its exclusive dealing agreements with promoters who booked Pearl Jam.

Since there is no way to effectively sell tickets for their shows, Pearl Jam canceled the tour.

"(We also want to) stop them from any kind of future violations of anti-trust, which is what they're doing in Michigan," Colella said.

"It's not fair. What if you live in Charlotte, Mich., and you want to go see the Rolling Stones? You're not going to drive down and spend all that time (trying to get tickets). I know it's a good service, and I'm not doubting that the service is effective, but the

fact of the matter is they've created a monopoly, and there's nothing right now that's going to put a ceiling on the charges," the attorney said.

Charges 'unpredictable'

Service charges for tickets are unpredictable ranging from \$4 to \$15, depending on the performer, Colella said. According to the complaint, the Los Angeles-based Ticketmaster makes about \$200 million from service fees and \$1.3 billion from sales.

The ticket service sells tickets for multitude of venues that vary in size including The Palace of Auburn Hills, Joe Louis Arena, Fox Theatre, State Theatre, St. Clair Music Theatre, and Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor.

Complainant Jay Rotenberg of West Bloomfield says he's tired of what he called "exorbitant service charges." Rotenberg said he attended about 20 concerts a year.

Petty tries to make it to every big show in town and says because of that he's paying Ticketmaster "a fortune."

"I have four tickets for R.E.M., and I paid \$13 for those four tickets just in service charges alone. I have Black Crowes tickets, (and) that's costing me another \$14-\$15. I'm fed up with it. They're abusing their power."

Last year when Barbra Streisand played The Palace of Auburn Hills, he paid \$54 in service fees for four tickets. Petty said he was aware of the controversy long before Pearl Jam went public.

No competition

Ticketmaster has no competition in most of the 42 states in which it operates a computerized network of ticket sales outlets.

The complaint, filed last Thursday, charges Ticketmaster with forcing this monopoly by buying out its competitors, including Michigan's CTC outlet, and then closing them down.

That, along with a "minimization of the service charges," is what Rotenberg hopes the class-action suit will change.

Attorney Colella said that the Detroit case and 15 suits filed throughout the country will be

consolidated into one case to be heard in St. Louis. More complaints are expected to join the Michigan suit, Colella added.

The Ticketmaster controversy began in early 1994 when Pearl Jam reported that they wanted to charge \$18 per ticket with a \$1.80 service charge to keep the price less than \$20.

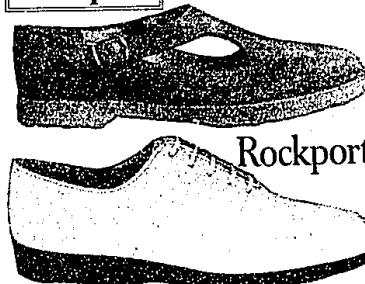
Ticketmaster refused to allow arena owners and promoters, with whom they have exclusive con-

tracts, to charge the lower fee.

Pearl Jam also wanted the service charges stated clearly on the face of the ticket, and refused to permit paid advertising on the backs of tickets. According to Pearl Jam and documents filed with the Department of Justice, Ticketmaster and concert promoters refused to deal with Pearl Jam.

Pearl Jam was forced to cancel its proposed tour.

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