

# Farlington Observer

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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

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## IN THE PAPER TODAY

**Blocked up:** Students at Farmington High find the longer class periods of collegiate-style scheduling seem to be working. /A3

**Not quite gone:** U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg's chief of staff is taking a consulting job, but he'll still be around to plot political strategy for the Congressman. /A3

## COUNTY

**They aim to serve:** The Board of Commissioners is back at work, and most say the county is providing good service to residents and business owners. It is, however, a matter of knowing what's available. /A7

## SPORTS

**Swim victories:** Farmington and North Farmington were winners Thursday in boys swimming. /C1

**Hoop fortunes:** Farmington Harrison tried to get back on the winning track Friday at Northville. /C1

## ARTISTIC EVENTS

**On display:** Check out the exhibits at area art galleries. /B5

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## Death penalty still at issue for Hills man charged in guard's murder

By WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

Although a Federal Grand Jury has handed down an indictment for murder against a Farmington Hills man, there is no trial date and some other issues are unresolved.

The grand jury handed down the five-page indictment on Dec. 17 against Perry Daniel Hollie, 23, of Farmington Hills charging he "did knowingly, intentionally, and unlawfully combine, conspire, confederate, and agree with Committ Rowson III, to commit offenses against the United States, that is, bank robbery and the carrying and using of a firearm during and in relation to a crime of violence."

Hollie is charged with murdering Matthew Girardin with a .32 caliber Beretta pistol that belonged to Rowson's father on the night of Nov. 13. Hollie was working with Girardin in an armored vehicle that was making a run to a Michigan National Bank at the time of the killing.

Rowson was shot and killed by police and FBI agents at a Warren Red Roof Inn on Nov. 20. Agents recovered from Rowson's hotel room much of the \$1.2 million that had been stolen during the armed robbery.

Under state law, Hollie could face life in prison for first-degree murder. But under federal law, he could face the death penalty.

"As far as the death penalty, we're in a wait-and-see stage," said Hollie's attorney, Michael Sharpe. Sharpe has sent a "mitigation letter" to Assistant U.S. Attorney Diane Marion outlining Hollie's work, military and school records along with other positive factors that would mitigate against the death penalty were he convicted.

Hollie has maintained his innocence and passed a polygraph shortly after his arrest.

Once the prosecution has examined any mitigating circumstances, a recommendation is forwarded to U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno for a determination.

Sharpe said the discovery stage of the proceedings, where the defense and prosecution give each other information about their respective cases, has gone slowly.

Federal Judge Barbara Hackett will hear the case.

Hollie remains in the Wayne County Jail without bond.

## Still fainting over 'Birdie'



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LAMBERT

**Flocking:** At top, Jil-lan Ramseyer is one of the flock of girls and boys that faints during a scene where heart-throb Conrad Birdie, played by Aaron D. Bax, is singing. At right, choreale director Tom Schroeder goes through a number with a group of guys.



## Kid appeal helps 'Birdie' fly high at Harrison

By TODD WICKS  
STAFF WRITER

No Harrison High School student can remember back to when the Ed Sullivan show was still on, when a boy "pinning" his girlfriend meant they were going steady, or when Elvis Presley joined the army.

But they'll relive all these classic '60s events—sort of—at "Bye Bye Birdie," the school's annual winter musical, taking place Thursday-Saturday, Jan. 23-25.

"We chose it because it had a lot of kid appeal," said vocal director Tom Schroeder. "This type of show gets a lot of chorus people involved and has a lot of songs. It's a better-known musical, and I thought that would help in terms of people having heard of it before."

Written by Michael Stewart and Charles Strouse, "Bye Bye Birdie" is the story of Conrad Birdie, an Elvis-style pop sensation who joins the army at the peak of his fame. A female member of Conrad's fan club is chosen to receive his "last kiss" on the Ed Sullivan show before leaving.

The play centers on the havoc the kiss creates in the life of Birdie's handlers and the high schoolers from whose

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See BIRDIE, A2

## Renewal fights for voters' attention



By LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

Taxpayers will be hearing an, "Oh, and by the way..." from Farmington Public Schools officials soon.

Talk of a \$110 million bond has stolen attention from the need to get public approval for another ongoing money source for the district—a millage renewal.

A separate ballot question on March 25 will also ask voters to approve a four-year renewal of the current hold-harmless tax rate.

In one ballot question, voters would have to approve 1.7503 mills to maintain the rate of 13.8337 mills for homestead property and 5.9166 mills on non-homestead to continue the 18-mill tax rate on businesses. Together these tax rates generate \$8 million in revenue. (Each mill equals \$1 for every \$1,000 of state equalized property value.)

"They clearly are two separate, distinct issues voters need to focus on," said Trustee Cathy Webb.

Farmington rolled back the homestead 1.0108 mills this year because of Proposal A, which limits the amount of taxes district can collect per pupil. A rollback of .5 mills on homestead property is expected next year.

A financial strategies committee recommends going for the maximum hold-harmless renewal rate allowed by law.

A mill is \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of taxable value on property, which is usually half the

See MILLAGE, A2

## Hills' safety honors help save money

By WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

Winning awards for safety will mean more than a nice plaque this year for Farmington Hills.

By recording far below the average number of claims, Farmington Hills will save \$250,000 in workers compensation insurance premiums.

The city won two loss control awards from the Michigan Municipal League Workers Compensation Fund. The awards recognize the city for having fewer workers compensation losses than other similar communities.

"We've received similar awards in previous years, but this is the first time we've received two awards," said Dana Whinnery, the city's personnel director. "We received the top rating for loss reduction and an award for the greatest improvement in the experience modification factor—the rating factor that adjusts premiums for loss control."

That means Farmington Hills city workers have had fewer claims than most cities of a similar size.

Workers compensation insurance premiums are determined by calculating a modification factor that takes the city's loss experience into consideration. A modification factor of 1.0 is average. Farmington Hills' modification factor was .44.

That means that the premiums are 44 percent of what they would have been if the city had an "average" loss experience.

"We have a record of being below average (in modification factor) for the past 20 years," Whinnery said. "The biggest reason is that the city has had a real good safety awareness program and the employees have gotten accus-

See SAFETY, A2

## Cable committee call

Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi will be looking for a way to involve residents in discussions and decisions about cable TV in the city.

Vagnozzi said he will encourage the formation of a citizens committee that will have input about problems with the city's cable carrier, Time Warner, at the Jan. 25 city goals study session.

"I've gotten several calls about the idea from residents," said the mayor. "It worked with Edison."

Vagnozzi had suggested the same type of committee to meet with Detroit Edison officials after

## FARMINGTON FOCUS

residents complained about power outages and other service problems.

The utility has met several times with the committee and, in some cases, solved service problems.

"We have a way to go (with Edison)," he said. "But we had seven families who were constantly losing power. Edison went in there and fixed the problem."

The committee would be composed of resi-

dents, especially those who have had problems.

## Honored in Farmington

Ten years is a long time, and Farmington recognizes that. At the city's annual recognition dinner, six people were honored for their long-term commitment to serving the community.

City employees Matthew Kean and Norma Stappert.

Downtown Development Authority Board members Robert Heinrich, Jody Soronen and Ronald Oglesby.

Farmington Area Arts Commission member Ellen Wallis.