



Tragic scene: Police, fire and ambulance crews responded to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Farmington Hills where a man was electrocuted.

Electrocuted *from page A1*

marks on his left hand and head where the electrical current passed through his body.

A family friend said the victim knew how to do electrical work but was uncertain if he was a licensed electrician. His father is an electrician as well as an evangelical minister in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church.

"They're handling it relatively well considering," said Amy Robinson, a family friend and church member. "They have strong support and faith."

"They know that they're going

to see him again."

Members of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church of Novi were working to convert the building into a youth center, Robinson said.

Neil was described as a hard working teen who volunteered regularly for church activities. He was prepared to graduate from night school at Novi High next month, a friend said.

Funeral services will be 11 a.m. today at Oakwood Seventh-day Adventist Church in Taylor with burial at Glen Eden Memorial Cemetery in Livonia.

Durant *from page A1*

Those districts sued the state for not providing sufficient financial aid for state-mandated special education programs.

Maxfield said most other districts apparently are keeping all of the money to help fund educational programs. But in Farmington, both within the community and on the board, serious debate loomed for months about whether to return all or some of the \$9.5 million.

Among board members, those two camps remain, even after the decision. Veteran trustee Jack Inch said he had a "gentleman's agreement" with board colleagues to vote against the recommendations.

"In this particular case, I felt all the funds should go back," Inch said after the meeting.

School board President Linda Enberg, who originally wanted all of the money returned to residents, was satisfied that "a substantial amount" will go back, albeit in reduced bonds and not refund checks. Although actual projections are still being finalized, she estimated that average homeowners and businesses will see annual tax bills slashed by about \$15.

"We are proud to return 61 percent on the second bond issue," said Enberg after the meeting, referring to the lesser of a two-part bond issue (totaling \$93.1 million) approved last September. Board members, in approving

recommendations from the finance committee, also agreed to use the remaining \$1.8 million to do the following:

- Make playgrounds handicapped-accessible, to meet Americans with Disabilities Act safety guidelines; and complete other site and playground improvements, which cannot be adequately addressed in the operating budget.
- Establish an interest-bearing "Equity and Excellence" fund, for specific uses to be determined annually by an oversight committee.
- "It (the committee) allows annual dialogue that says what the best use is for these admittedly very limited funds," said Maxfield, noting that a parent or other community member will be included on the panel.

According to Maxfield, possibilities for the fund include earmarking some to match educational grants, pay tutors for after-school teen-center programs and help needy families with scholarships to tuition programs such as Educare.

Maxfield and Enberg said the general operating budget and fund equity balance are being stretched enough without allocating money for such initiatives.

"I don't think we could ever justify taking money out of the general fund which would apply to everybody, and (then) creating a scholarship fund for some kids," Maxfield said.

Commission stalls on county mental health board plans

As Oakland County inches toward establishing an autonomous authority to oversee delivery of more than \$120 million annually in mental health services, one point is clear.

The transition report unveiled to the public this week needs more work.

No action was taken following three public hearings. And officials - like county commissioner Fran Amos, a Waterford Republican whose district extends into West Bloomfield - said more hearings are likely before Oakland establishes a mental health authority, possibly by the end of 1998.

"We can not accept this report without more direct accountability," said Samuel Davis, executive director of the Southfield-based Children With Emotional Disorders. Davis was one of about 35 people at Tuesday's hearing. His concern was voiced repeatedly during the hearings in one form or another.

"How are we going to get accountability if the responsibility for mental health services is shifted from county commissioners (who are elected) to an authority that is appointed?" asked Carol Vainer, a Bloomfield Hills resident who is also legislative chair for the state chapter of the Alliance for the Mentally Ill.

The 200 page transition report lists 40 steps to be taken to shift supervision of the delivery of mental health services - such as counseling and outpatient care for adults with mental illness or children with severe emotional disabilities - from the county board of commissioners to an independent mental health authority.

The shift, which some say is overdue and inevitable, would give the responsibility of policy decisions as well as day-to-day operations to the authority - whose members would be appointed by the board of commissioners.

The state currently provides 90 percent of the county's \$120 million mental health budget that services about 12,000 Oakland County clients.

"Going to a mental health authority is a big step," said Hope Cummins, a Farmington Hills resident who is president of AIM. "We are opposed to any change that would reduce service or reduce accountability."

The transition report under consideration should be considered as a "work in progress," said county commissioner Amos, who is also chair of the Oakland Community Mental Health Commission.

County Executive L. Brooks Patterson has made no comment on the proposed transition.

Webb *from page A1*

Superintendent Robert Maxfield and his administrative staff, Webb gave them an A-minus.

Some of the areas viewed by Webb as successful include the inclusion of special education students into the educational mainstream and the availability of choice programs, such as Gill Year-Round, block scheduling at Farmington High School and the Highmeadow lottery.

"Everything we do now is centered on individualized student attention," Webb said. "Teacher training is moving into the area of inclusion, trying to keep students in the classroom as much as we can to ensure each student has the ability to attain maximum potential."

According to Webb, that direction and philosophy are among reasons why "when we see excellence and equity (a district mission), we're not just saying it."

But Webb still sees room for

improvement.

"Are we preparing (students) for careers? Are we teaching them an appreciation for the arts? Are they really responsible citizens? Are they developing character?" Webb asked. "Those are very important issues to me."

All of those fold into the bigger, more-controversial issue of student achievement and how to measure it.

Webb said state standardized tests, such as the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, are valuable gauges for local districts.

"They (tests) certainly are a priority," Webb emphasized. "They are a part of the overall student achievement package we need to be working toward. It is a measure that the community has grown to rely on" to identify students' strengths and weaknesses.

The importance of the high

school MEAP, however, fell through the cracks this spring, with just 18 percent of juniors at Farmington, Harrison and North taking it. That's why the school board needs to do even more to inform students and parents why taking the test is not a waste of time or something that could literally label them for life.

"We've got to find a way to communicate that this test is important," Webb said. "Unfortunately, it's important to us but it's not important to them."

Right now, the test is being taken but nobody's doing anything with it."

Although the MEAP controversy has been on the front burner in recent weeks, the battle to get a bond issue passed - which voters did last September - was one of the big issues of Webb's second term. Seeing those projects through to completion will be a top priority for Webb if she is

elected to a third four-year term. And, as far as Webb is concerned, the district is going about that job the right way with its selection of Don Cowan for bond issue project consultant. Cowan is retiring from the district after 36 years to start a consulting business; his longtime employer will be his first client.

Webb even said she approached Maxfield to ask whether any consideration was given to "bringing in somebody from the outside to manage this."

She quickly agreed with Maxfield's reasoning that Cowan would fit the bill - and help keep the tab for projects from getting unnecessarily high.

"We needed someone in a position who knows the buildings, who knows the staff, who will be a conduit" between the district and contractors. "It was a perfect blend for Don Cowan."

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