

Attn: Happy Couples

Reader contributions are being sought for the February special section on weddings and anniversaries. Couples married 25 years or more are invited to send a wedding picture, a recent picture and a write-up on the secret for your marriage's success to special projects editor Ralph Echlinaw, Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Ralph must have your pictures by Tuesday, Jan. 23. Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want your pictures returned. Call (734) 953-2054 for more information or e-mail: ralph@homecomm.net

Rewards posted in 2 bank stickups

By JONI HUBBARD

STAFF WRITER
jhubbard@homecomm.net

The Farmington Hills Police Department and the Detroit Clearinghouse Association have teamed up to offer a \$5,000 reward for information leading to the arrest and indictment of the man who robbed a Farmington Hills bank Dec. 28.

The Clearinghouse, a consortium of about a dozen banking firms in the area that works to capture bank robbers, contributed \$2,000. Hills

Police contributed \$3,000.

The two most recent robberies — both National City Banks — are disturbing because they involved violence.

On Dec. 19, two gunmen assaulted a customer while holding up a branch in Farmington. The two suspects wore ski masks. The Clearinghouse is offering a \$2,000 reward in this case as well.

In the Hills robbery, on Dec. 28, the lone gunman tried to take a female teller with him as he left the bank. He is described as white, blond-haired, about 5-foot-11-inches tall, age 30 to 40 with a two-day growth of beard. He was wearing a tan overcoat and gray tweed hat, sunglasses, red scarf, tennis

shoes and black gloves.

Initially, he made no attempt to cover his face. He carried a burgundy briefcase.

Hills Chief Bill Dwyer said the local money was added to the Association's reward because authorities believe it will assist in the suspect's arrest. The \$3,000 comes from money forfeited in connection with drug crimes.

"It's a good use of those funds," he said. "Most of these bank robberies come from people who have drug or gambling addictions."

According to Jeffrey Rolph, of Standard Federal Bank security and current spokesman for the Clearinghouse,

bank robberies in Michigan peaked in 1998, at 359.

"We have had a relatively quiet year until this fall," he added.

Rolph said it's hard to tell why robbers pick a certain bank.

"We (Association members) talk all the time about this, and there is often no rhyme or reason. The bank you think no one would rob because it is on a traffic-filled, four-lane road is the one that is hit," he said.

The Clearinghouse runs ads in newspapers showing suspects and has had success in capturing bank robbers.

Please see REWARDS, A3

THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY

In the Hills: Farmington Hills City Council members will hold their first meeting of 2001 at 7:30 p.m. Jan. 8 at City Hall, 31555 W. Eleven Mile Road. They'll hear presentations regarding the Franklin Road interchange project and the city's Web site, and hold a public hearing on the vacation of an alley between Colwell and St. Francis Ave. in Section 36, for the Walgreen's development.

IN TODAY'S PAPER

Ice dammed? Don't try to clear your roof yourself. Hire a pro, experienced builder recommends. /E1

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Update: State Rep. Andrew Raczowski discusses important issues with the Farmington City Council in a study session.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREZLER



Discuss: Councilwoman JoAnne McShane, Mayor Bill Hartsock, Clerk Patsy Cantrell, Mayor Pro-tem James Mitchell and Councilwoman Mary Bush of the City of Farmington listen to Andrew Raczowski's report.

In the House State rep, council talk issues

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
tsmith@homecomm.net

It was an attempt to soothe lingering hard feelings between state Rep. Andrew Raczowski and Farmington city officials and get the new year off to a better start.

"I requested that we have this meeting very early this year," Raczowski said, during Wednesday's study session with the city council and administrators, "so that I can get your wish list of what can I do for the city of Farmington."

It was also a try to bridge a communication gap that

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was evident during 2000, particularly claims by council members that the 37th District House representa-

Please see STATE REP, A6

Sears will close its Hills outlet

Two area Sears hardware stores will close as part of a nationwide cost-saving move the retail giant announced last week.

Stores at 7490 Haggerty in West Bloomfield and 27700 Middlebelt in Farmington Hills were included in the company's decision to close more than 80 facilities across the country.

"What we're doing is closing some of our smaller, underperforming stores," said Sears director of public relations Tom Nicholson. "This is not so much a retrenchment as a reinvestment, as we'll be opening new, larger stores in major metropolitan areas this year."

Nicholson said Sears plans to close about 30 of its hardware stores and more than 50 of its National Tire and Battery stores nationwide. He said the stores average 30-40 employees each, and all full- and part-time workers who have been with the company more than one year will be offered severance packages.

Employees are also being encouraged to apply for positions at other Sears stores in their areas.

Please see SEARS, A2



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREZLER
Closing: Sears Hardware, Middlebelt Road and Twelve Mile Road, will hold a clearance sale.

Sled hill still posing problems

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
tsmith@homecomm.net

The Shiawassee Sled Hill is quickly becoming a winter battleground of vandalism and blatant disregard of safety rules.

So far, nobody has been seriously injured. But winter enthusiasts are consistently "trashing" the hill, even moving safety equipment.

Hay bales intended to cushion and block participants from sliding into Farmington Road are being picked up and flung elsewhere on the snow-covered slope that backs up to the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center.

Public safety officers even had to respond to reports of fire being set to some of those hay bales. Meanwhile, soft-plastic fencing also has been damaged and users are seen traveling the wrong way toward unprotected Shiawassee.

"I've never witnessed this level of chaos on the hill," said Kevin Gushman, director of the Farmington Department of Public Services. "It appears as though there's been a lot

more vandalism than we've seen in the past."

He concurred with the characterization made Thursday by Farmington Hills naturalist Joe Derek, that the sled hill is being "trashed."

"We've cleared two large mounds of (broken and displaced) hay bales with a front-end loader," from various points on the sled hill, said Gushman. "Cosmetically, it doesn't look very good."

Tough conditions

Gushman said officials from the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills and Farmington Public Schools would soon meet to discuss the issues, exacerbated by the early dumping of snow this winter.

"We haven't had this magnitude of snow in some time," continued Gushman. "So it's detracted from everybody's ability to pay attention to the hill."

The sled hill — located on the northeast corner of Shiawassee-Farmington roads on school district property — is

Please see SLED HILL, A4

Hills man co-authors book on estates

By DOUG JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

A longtime Farmington Hills resident, Robert Downie, has co-authored a book on estate administration.

What Do We Do Now? A Practical Guide to Estate Administration for Widows, Widowers and Heirs gives you tips, checklists and easily understood guidance on administering someone's estate.

The book has wide margins for note-taking, many Internet resources, and short, sometimes humorous,

references to court cases.

Items alert you to time-sensitive actions (alarm clock) and to things to do to keep peace in the family (a dove in flight).

The whole thing is in layman's terms, utilizes excellent graphics, and includes copies of the numerous forms used in Michigan probate courts. Chapters cover routine matters like Social Security and veterans' benefits and the tougher topics including estate taxes.

Downie's long experience at National Bank of

Please see ESTATE BOOK, A4

Downie and co-author Kass will sign copies of the book 2 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 14, at Borders on Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills.



Robert Downie

