

Survivor has upbeat message Home from page A1

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Celebrated child-abuse survivor and best-selling author Dave Pelzer told a Farmington Hills audience on Thursday that we all have obstacles to overcome.

Pelzer addressed 250 gathered for the annual Child Abuse and Neglect Council of Oakland County Circle of Friends lunch, at Glen Oaks Country Club.

The victim in a notorious child abuse case, Pelzer was removed from his mother's home at 12 with the help of his teachers and a caring county social worker. He flourished in his new life, as he was decorated for his military service during Desert Storm and was named an Outstanding Young American in the early 1990s.

"I started to realize it wasn't all my fault," he told the social workers and Circle of Friends supporters on hand for the program.

The author once nominated for a Pulitzer Prize said he was nearly killed six times before age 12 by his mother. The most damaging abuse involved her locking him in a bathroom with an open ammonia container. To survive, he wetted towels in the toilet, wrung them out and pressed them to his face to breathe.

Pelzer said the fumes permanently damaged his esophagus, although it wasn't obvious from his speech.

Despite such experiences, Pelzer's speaking style was breezy and full of playful impres-



STAFF PHOTO BY TILL THRELSER

Special guest: Author Dave Pelzer and Jerry Adams, president of the Child Abuse and Neglect Council, speak between courses at the luncheon.

sions of Arnold Schwarzenegger, former President Bush, and "Dr. Evil," from the film "Austin Powers."

Now married with a 15-year-old son, Pelzer tours the country as a motivational speaker.

He said that amid 38,000 child abuse cases in California, he was ranked by authorities "the No. 1 most abused."

But Pelzer uses his own experience as an example to his audience that anyone can rise to overcome extreme setbacks. He said his social worker Mrs. Gold encouraged him, telling him, "I expect the best from you." Pelzer said acknowledging the abuse helped him recover. "The more I got it out, the more of a weight was removed off my shoulders,"

he said.

At the conclusion of a court trial which freed Pelzer from his abusive mother, Mrs. Gold presented him to the judge and said, "If he can overcome all he did, I know there is a place for our little Dave," he recalled.

"He's on the spot," commented Larry Bunker of Sterling Heights after the address. Judy Griffin of Farmington Hills said she attended because she's read all three of Pelzer's books about his life. "What he went through and he survived; he's dedicated his life to helping others help themselves."

"It continued to leak. There was a lot of water damage and a lot of mold growth," Williams said. "In November '98 there was a fire at the house when the hot water heater fell through the floor," Lucella Hempel said. "The fire department said the furnace was in danger of doing the same thing."

The house was boarded up, but vandals repeatedly broke in. Hempel said she was also concerned because the water leak caused the formation of black mold in the home. She had read that this could pose a serious

health risk.

It took repeated visits to city council meetings by Hempel and her neighbors to get some attention. At first, "They listened to the builder but not to us," Hempel recalled. But when the water leak got so bad that there was flooding, and the builder failed to pay for drilling to correct the problem, council eventually directed City Attorney John Donahue to seek a court demolition order.

Atlantic Mortgage Corp. won a restraining order in circuit court to stay the demolition, but the

ruling was overturned in the city's favor in December.

Williams said the court schedule allowed for a 30-day appeal period. When that period passed Friday with no successful appeal, the demolition proceeded Monday.

Now that the house is down, Hempel said, "I'm thankful we have a city that listens to the residents. I'm thankful that this is going to be resolved in a way so that no one is going to live in that house and have a health problem from things that occurred there."

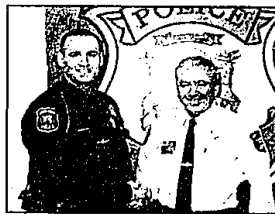
Cadet receives police officer rank

Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer announced that Cadet Hadar Saad earned a promotion to the rank of police officer.

At a recent ceremony, Saad was sworn-in by the city clerk.

Saad, 27, joined the department in December 2000. Since that time he has worked in the uniform patrol division, where he has served the citizens by taking reports, answer phones, and tending to the cellblock while assigned to the command desk. Saad is a 1992 graduate of Dearborn Fordson High School.

He has a bachelor's degree in criminal justice from Grand Valley State. He will receive his



Honor: Cadet Hadar Saad is congratulated on his promotion to officer by Hills Police Chief William Dwyer.

basic training at the Wayne County Regional Center Police Academy. Upon graduation in May, his state certification will

be activated and he will enter the Farmington Hills Police Department's field training officer program.

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