

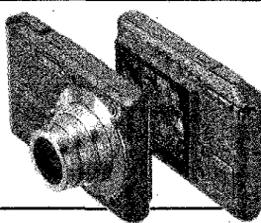
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AT HOME - SECTION B



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TASTE - PAGE B7

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THURSDAY
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'He told me not to tell anybody ...'

Judge determines that informant's testimony is enough to order trial in 11-year-old murder case

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

A former Inkster man will face trial on charges of murdering known drug dealer Billy Ford, whose body was dumped Dec. 14, 1994, along a snow-covered roadside in Westland. Boysie Walker, 46, was ordered to

stand trial after a police informant broke 11 years of silence and testified against him Wednesday in Westland 18th District Court.

Even though defense attorney Susan Rock argued that Walker "did not commit this crime," the defendant will face life in prison if he's convicted in Wayne County Circuit Court for

first-degree murder and felony firearm charges.

Ford, a 33-year-old Inkster man, died of a shotgun blast to his chest. His body was found on the old Wayne County General Hospital property near Michigan Avenue and Merriman Road.

In court Wednesday, Judge C.

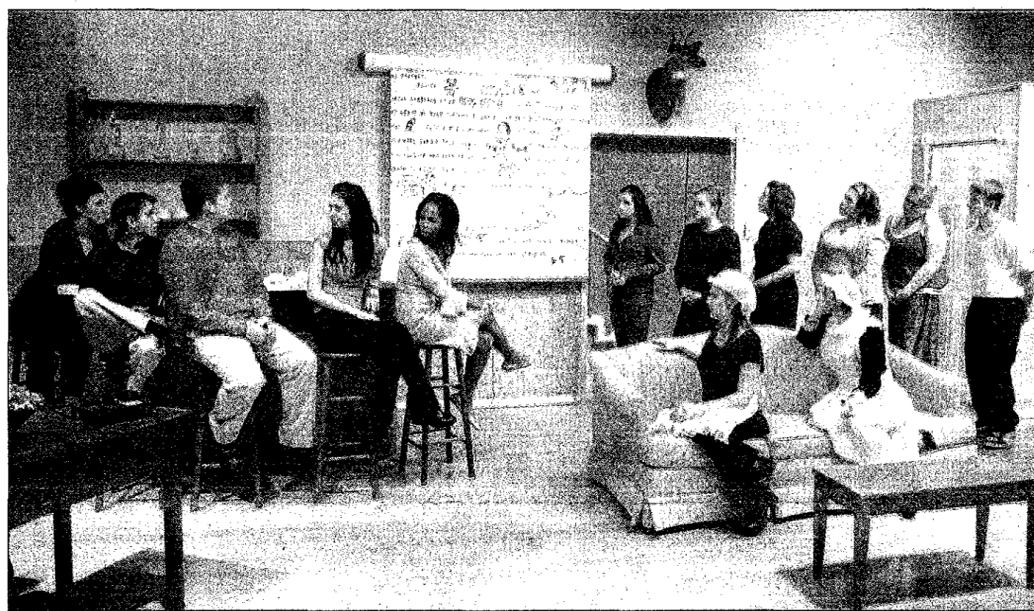
Charles Bokos ordered Walker to stand trial following testimony from Ford's nephew, Darnell O'Neal, who saw the two men on the evening Ford was killed.

O'Neal, now 25, testified that he was walking to his Inkster home from a school basketball game when Ford drove by in a Cadillac and offered to

give him a ride. O'Neal, only 14 then, said Ford first needed to stop by a house on Liberty Court.

Ford went inside and was returning to his car when, according to O'Neal, a hooded man with a shotgun appeared from behind the house. The

PLEASE SEE TESTIMONY, A4



TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Members of the Wayne Memorial Theatrical Guild put the finishing touches on 'Bone Chiller,' a comedic murder mystery being presented tonight through Saturday at the Stockmeyer Auditorium.

Curtain call: Thespians stage 'Bone Chiller!'

BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

A will written in the form of a rebus? Heirs who are being killed because they know too much?

If you like comedy and enjoy a good mystery, you'll find both in the Wayne Memorial Thespian Guild's production of *Bone Chiller!* now through Saturday at the Stockmeyer Auditorium.

"The kids have been working really hard on this," said director Katie Sullivan.

Curtain time for Bone Chiller! will be 7 p.m. tonight, Friday and Saturday at the auditorium on the Wayne Memorial High School campus at Glenwood and Fourth Street in Wayne. Tickets cost \$5 for students and \$7 for adults and are

available at the door.

Written by Monk Ferris, *Bone Chiller!* is the story of 13 people who meet on Friday the 13th for the reading of the will of Josiah Travers. Found dead in his bed and cut into 17 pieces, Travers leaves a puzzle of a will, written using pictures, signs and letter.

The heirs have to figure out what the will says to find out who gets what, as well as figure out who among them is killing off members of the group because they may know too much about what the will says.

The cast and crew have been rehearsing four to five hours a day five days a week for five weeks, moving between Sullivan's classroom in the high school and the auditorium's stage.

Because Stockmeyer is the auditorium for the Wayne-Westland school district, rehearsals, and even the actual performances, had to be worked around other events taking place at the facility, Sullivan said.

"That made a big difference in the blocking and timing and waiting for a specific cue or certain actions to take place," she added.

Sullivan selected the play because she liked the aspect of it being a murder mystery.

"This is a smaller cast than we've worked with in the past and the challenge is that almost every moment in the play almost all of them are on stage," she

PLEASE SEE THESPIANS, A5

Woman confesses to attempt to kill mom

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

A 62-year-old Westland woman is accused of trying to kill her blind, 84-year-old mother by suffocating her with a pillow.

Sadly, police say, Diane Paul may have tried to commit murder because she mistakenly believed she had messed up her mother's benefits from Medicaid and Social Security.

"She blamed herself for it, and she dreaded caring for her mother without the money," police Sgt. David Heater said. "She wanted her mother to be at peace. She didn't want her to suffer."

Paul, arraigned Sunday on attempted murder charges, confessed to police that she had intended to kill her mother last Friday at the ranch home they shared on Glen Street, near Wayne and Avondale, Heater said.

Police believe that Paul gave up after her mother struggled. She told one police officer that "she couldn't bring herself to finish it," Heater said. Paul then left the home and went to her own daughter's house in Westland, and the two of them returned to the Glen residence, Heater said.

In the meantime, the victim had reached for a telephone near her bed and started randomly pressing numbers until an operator came on the line and contacted authorities, according to police.

Other family members indicated to police that Paul was mistaken in believing that she

had somehow put a stop to her mother's benefits.

Paul had cared for her mother for at least 10 years, and by all accounts the two of them hadn't argued before the assault, Heater said.

"The daughter simply walked into the mother's bedroom," he said, recapping Paul's confession. "The mother was laying down, and the daughter placed a pillow over her face with the intent to suffocate her - to kill her."

The victim and daughter openly discussed the incident after it occurred, Heater said, and police ultimately arrested the defendant.

Despite the attack, he said, "the victim was in tears because her daughter was in jail. ... The whole family is traumatized by this."

Paul was arraigned Sunday by video from her jail cell by Magistrate Lawrence Chastang. She was charged with assault with intent to murder, but she was released from custody after someone posted \$1,500, or 10 percent of a \$15,000 bond.

A not-guilty plea was placed on record for her, and she has been ordered to appear Dec. 8 in Westland District Court for a preliminary hearing that will determine whether she should stand trial.

If convicted, Paul could face penalties ranging from probation to life in prison. She has been ordered to stay away from the Glen residence and to have no unsupervised contact with her mother.

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Web site expands to serve growing audience

The *Observer & Eccentric* has a new look on the World Wide Web.

Visit hometownlife.com for a redesigned, colorful, easy-to-use new Web site. The new hometownlife.com offers many new features, including nearly all local news and photographs contained in print editions of the *O&E*. And the addition of career-builder.com, apartments.com and home-escape.com, a network offering more than 23,000 local real estate listings, will mean market-proven tools for advertisers and

Web users.

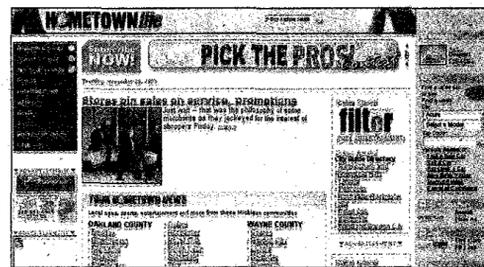
"Our new, revamped Web site gives us a wonderful opportunity to provide readers and advertisers a new information platform on a 24/7 basis," said Peter Neill, general manager of the *O&E*. "It is an extension of what we do in what has become for us the information business. The culture of our business is rapidly changing, as is the sophistication of our online users, readers and advertisers. It is the online user, reader and advertiser who dictates what they want

to see and when they want to see it."

"The changes to our Web site are tremendously beneficial for our readers and advertisers," added Marty Carry, director of advertising at the *O&E*. "And the enhancements to our online classified products are very powerful.

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PLEASE SEE WEB, A5



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Coming Sunday
on the PINK Page



Make your
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School board raises its own questions about Legacy plan

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Livonia Public Schools Board of Education hashed out several hot-button issues surrounding the contentious Legacy Initiative Monday night.

The plan, formed by the district's demographics committee, would close seven schools, combine communities, establish upper elementary buildings for grades five and six, and potentially save the district almost \$2 million a year, if it is passed by the school board.

Trustees spoke directly and publicly with committee members Monday about the impact of adding a transition to an upper elementary school; the benefit of increasing instruction; and the potential one-time costs associated with the plan.

About 20 residents, including LPS parent Salem Samaan, spoke up at the board meeting too, again voicing questions and concerns.

For Samaan, the lack of answers he's received has been frustrating.

"I'd like to believe we're doing something sitting here, looking at you and talking to you," he told the board. "I don't know whether I'm wasting my breath."

Board President Dan Lessard told the crowd the board is not permitted to give answers directly during audience comments. "It is against the law," he said. "We cannot do it. Period."

He said answering one question would lead to another "What about?" "We cannot do this like three or four of us sitting and having a cup of coffee in my kitchen," Lessard said. "It doesn't work."

But board members did pose questions to committee members Monday night which mirrored many concerns raised at the Nov. 21 public hearing.

SCHOOL SIZE

Trustee Cynthia Markarian raised concerns about the capacity of schools under the proposal. "It seems to me it's going to be pretty tight," she said.

Jack Bauman, assistant director of personnel, said staffing levels were carefully examined and based on the current enrollment and future projections. He said the first year or two might be tight - particularly in upper

"I'm concerned about the size of our schools. I've been to a lot of them. I know how crowded they are."



Bailey

trustee Tom Bailey

elementary or middle schools - but enrollment would even out.

And building size, he said, will not impact class sizes - which are regulated by both teacher contracts and a board policy.

Taylor Principal Andrea Oquist said the plan will provide additional flexibility at the lower elementary level, which could minimize kindergarten overflows (where students are moved to another school) or split-grade classes.

But trustee Tom Bailey's concerns were not easily quelled.

"I'm concerned about the size of our schools," he said. "I've been to a lot of them. I know how crowded they are."

He asked whether the committee found another school district of similar size and population that follows the proposed model.

Bauman said they had identified schools in the tri-county area with similar or larger populations. Though he named several schools, none followed the upper elementary concept LPS is considering.

TRANSITIONS

Board members also asked about the additional transition students would make to an upper elementary.

Though not initially a proponent of the plan to establish upper elementary buildings for grades five-six, committee member Ann Owen said she began to support the concept once she saw the potential of "having a pure feeder school."

The direct connection from lower to upper elementary to middle schools would make it easier for teachers and administrators to communicate about students' needs as they progress through grades, said Owen, assistant principal at Holmes Middle School. That connection would smooth transitions, she said.

Trustees criticized for committee roles

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Accusations of a potential conflict of interest, or school board violation of the Open Meetings Act, have surrounded public discussions of Livonia Public School's Legacy Initiative.

Those who oppose aspects of the plan - which would close schools, redraw school community boundaries, and establish upper elementary buildings for grades five and six - have questioned the number of board members who participated in creating the plan.

Four of the seven trustees on the Board of Education were named as members of the district's demographics committee, which formed the Legacy proposal. They were: Dan Lessard, current board president, and trustees Joanne Morgan, Rob Freeman and Tom Bailey.

Another trustee, Kevin Whitehead, is designated a "support resource" person who assisted the committee.

Having four board members attend the same meeting would have constituted a quorum, and required that the meeting be open to the public. According to Jay Young, community relations director, no attendance records were kept for the demographics committee's meetings.

Asked Wednesday about whether four board members attended any one meeting, board President Dan Lessard said: "My recollection is that there were never four of us there at the same meeting."

Supt. Randy Liepa said that he and then-board president Whitehead started the demographics committee. It grew out of their Shared Vision process and followed the same model of finding "stakeholders," or representatives from different interest groups like

parents, staff and students. The challenge was to find a better use of district resources.

"We tried to make it a pretty thorough process," Liepa said.

Michele Hanania, an LPS parent, said she's wondered how individuals who helped craft the plan - presented to the school board Nov. 14 - could consider community feedback and impartially vote on that plan.

"These people are personally invested in one specific plan and therefore cannot look objectively at any other," she said.

Liepa disagreed. "I understand there's a fine line there where (board members) have to put on a different hat."

He said having trustees serve on the demographics committee was no different from times when trustees served on school improvement teams or the district's technology committee.

"As far as the board's involvement on a committee, people make assumptions they've already formed opinions," Liepa said. "There are pros and cons to involvement."

Lessard addressed questions about the board members' involvement Monday night. According to Lessard, Whitehead attended only a few meetings in the beginning. Morgan has said publicly that she attended only one demographics committee meeting.

Bailey attended about half of them, Lessard said, adding that he and Freeman were at nearly all of the committee meetings.

Lessard said Monday that five names signed onto the original list for the committee, but that list did not reflect attendance at the meetings.

"There were two there, by a large margin," he said.

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Oquist said the sense of community fostered by keeping students together as they move from one school to another would also make transitions easier.

ADDING SPECIALS

Trustee Cynthia Markarian asked how the additional programs in grades five and six would compare to the current program.

"In 5/6 model we are committed to adding 25 minutes of instruction time to the instruction day," said Sheila Alles, director of academic services.

By eliminating an afternoon recess for grades five and six, classroom time would increase.

The plan allows for the addition of physical education, technology or instrumental music classes, as well as foreign language - which has never been taught as early as fifth grade in LPS.

Still, Markarian questioned how much students would benefit from a foreign language class offered once a week.

Alles described it as an exploratory course where students are exposed to a "variety of different languages." And Owen said that course is currently taught in seventh

grade. "By moving that down we'd be able to start more of a mastery program at the seventh-grade level," she said.

But trustee Rob Freeman wasn't convinced.

"Can we do something besides foreign language?" he asked, suggesting a math or science elective. "Maybe foreign language was chosen because we have staff that could teach those classes."

Alles assured the board the committee would review the types of specials that may be offered. "We will reconvene and look at what will best meet the needs of students," she said.

Bailey said that he was concerned about a plan that establishes specials in a time of budget-cutting. "If we're going to make a commitment to our children and their parents that this is what we're going to give them, we have to continue to fund that for 'X' number of years," he said.

Lisa Levesque, director of finance, said while she doesn't know what the future of school funding might be, it isn't the committee's intention to bring back programs only to have them taken away. The committee was formed to find a better use of resources, she said.

START AND FINISH

Trustee Joanne Morgan broached the topic of how early school would start, and how late the day might end under this plan.

Levesque explained that the district would retain the three-tiered model of transportation as it has now so those times would not significantly change. Instead, more buses will be on the road at the same time.

While Levesque originally favored a four-tiered model for its cost savings benefit, "the entire demographics committee said that plan would not work under this time frame for children."

ONE-TIME COSTS

Freeman asked what sort of one-time costs would be associated with the proposal. Levesque detailed the variety of expenses associated with using fewer buildings. Moving and renovation costs were among those listed.

Levesque anticipated Cooper's updates would be the most expensive.

She estimated it would cost \$600,000 to create five classrooms where there are currently three shop classrooms. In addition Rosedale requires fiber network technology upgrades, at a cost of about

\$50,000.

Parking lots will need to be re-worked at schools like Hayes, Grant and Hoover. Much of the renovations she mentioned would be covered by the district's \$5 million Sinking Fund, a separate voter-approved millage only for facilities.

Still, she said the one-time costs would cut into the projected \$1.5 to \$2 million savings for the first year of plan.

Demographics committee members stood firmly behind their recommendation. Oquist said the plan meets the academic and social-emotional needs of all students. Alles said it hinges on quality instructors.

And Bauman noted that it was the only plan that kept school communities intact.

But trustee Lynda Scheel shared her ongoing concerns. They included the leasing and cost of additional buses, actual school sizes, what will happen to the closed schools, and keeping in close communication with residents.

Supt. Randy Liepa said any updates to the plan would come before the board, and public communication would remain open.

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The following vehicles have been deemed abandoned and will be sold at public auction on Tuesday, December 6, 2005 at 9:00 A.M. The auction is to be held at Westland Car Care Towing, 6375 Hix Rd., Westland, MI 48185.

PLEASE NOTE: The bidding will start at the towing and storage charges.

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1996 FORD ESCORT	2 DR	3FASP11JXTR147860
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1992 SATURN	4 DR	1G8ZJ5474NZ257975
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1987 ACURA INTEGRA	2 DR	JH4DA3340HS031312
1993 NISSAN ALTIMA	4 DR	1N4BU31FXPC228703

Publiah: December 1, 2005

CITY OF GARDEN CITY
December 12, 2005 -
BOARD OF REVIEW

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN TO all property owners of the City of Garden City that the Board of Review will meet in session on Tuesday, December 13, 2005 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. to correct mutual mistakes of fact or clerical errors. PA74 of 1995 authorizes the July Board of Review to hear appeals for poverty exemptions, but not for poverty exemptions denied by the March Board of Review. This applies to current year only.

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Publiah: November 24, 27 & December 1, 2005

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Sticks 'blow out' police chases

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

Criminals who think they can outrun Westland police during high-speed chases may find their egos - and their tires - quickly deflated. Local police have a powerful new tool to flatten the tires of criminals fleeing in getaway vehicles.

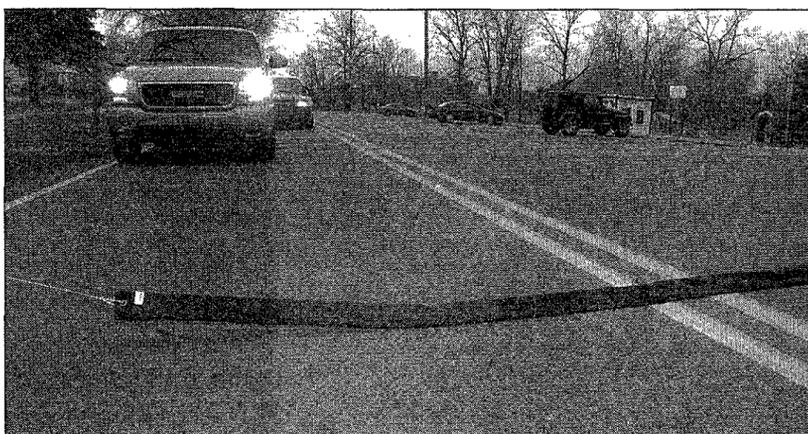
Called a Stop Stick, it's a tool that officers stretch across the road, and it shoots dart-like quills into tires to deflate them.

"It's like a porcupine shooting a quill at you," Police Chief Daniel Pfannes said. "It doesn't cause a blowout. Instead, it causes a controlled deflation."

Unless they choose to ride on rims, most criminals will find they have to pull over within 20-30 seconds of driving over a Stop Stick.

"We just throw it across the roadway, and we can stop the bad guy where we want to stop him," said police Sgt. Rob Collier, who's in charge of the Westland traffic bureau.

Stop Sticks aren't very effective for rush-hour traffic,



PHOTOS BY TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Called a Stop Stick, this new tool releases teflon-coated quills that flatten a vehicle's tires, helping police to end chases and capture suspects.

but they can otherwise avert a high-speed chase when a criminal is fleeing from police.

Many chases occur at night, when lighter traffic would make it easier to use a Stop Stick, Pfannes said. Officers can stretch the tool across the road when they know a sus-

pect is approaching.

At times, officers also may divert traffic to ensure that a fleeing suspect - not an innocent motorist - will drive over the Stop Stick.

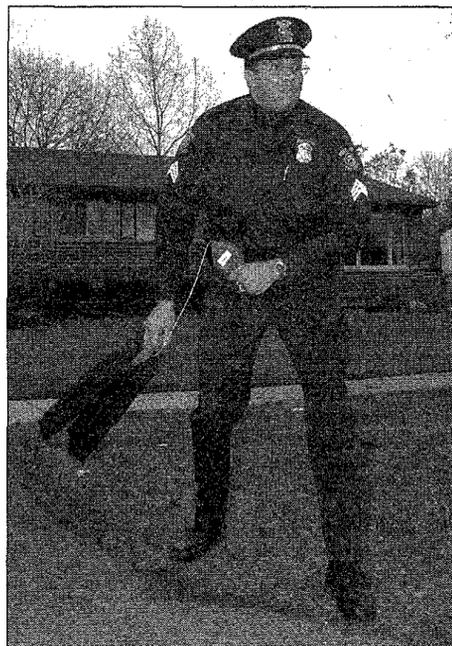
The tool shoots a hollow, Teflon-coated steel quill into tires, Collier said, and the design is intended to gradual-

ly release air. The quills are less than 3 inches long.

"It doesn't cause the driver to lose control of the car," Pfannes said.

Still, officers will try to use Stop Sticks in areas where pedestrians aren't around.

The tool not only can prevent property damage, police



Police Sgt. Rob Collier, head of the traffic bureau, prepares to throw a Stop Stick across the road during a demonstration of the new tool.

officials said, but it also could avert traffic-related injuries and deaths that can result from high-speed chases.

Stop Sticks are made by Stop Tech, Ltd., a company based in Harrison, Ohio, near Cincinnati. They cost about \$530 each, Collier said, and the Westland Police

Department bought five using federal Community Development Block Grant dollars.

Police haven't yet used the new tools, but Pfannes said the Stop Sticks will definitely enhance efforts by officers to halt criminals:

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AROUND WESTLAND

Membership meeting

The Westland Youth Athletic Association will hold its annual general membership meeting at 7 p.m. this evening. The meeting will be held at the WYAA Lange Compound at 6050 Farmington Road, Westland.

For more information, contact the WYAA at (734) 421-0640 or electronically at wyaa@wyaa.org.

A new job

SmithGroup, the eighth largest architecture and engineering firm in the U.S., has promoted Marie Sayer of



Sayer

Westland to accounting manager. In her new role at SmithGroup, Sayer, a former project accountant, will be responsible for managing all billing and accounts payable, financial statements and other management reports for SmithGroup, in addition to assisting project managers with project financials. Sayer is a graduate of Madonna University in Livonia, with a bachelor of sci-

ence degree in accounting.

Christmas play

Come experience the magic of Charles Dickens as Inspire Theatre presents a Christmas musical where stingy, mean-spirited Ebenezer Scrooge encounters his past, his present and then his future.

Feel the sadness, the regret and then the ultimate joy as Scrooge travels the journey that eventually transforms his lonely life into that of a brand-new man who learns the true meaning of Christmas.

Performances are at 7:30 p.m. Dec. 8, 9 and 10, and 3

p.m. Dec. 11, at Dearborn Evangelical Covenant Church, 18575 Outer Drive, between Ford and Cherry Hill, Dearborn.

Tickets are \$10 with a portion of each ticket going to local charities. For information or tickets, call Len Fisher at (734) 751-7057.

Retiree reunion

A Christmas party for former employees and retirees of Wayne County General Hospital will be held 5-9 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 6, at the Golden Corral buffet restaurant on Warren Road east of

Newburgh. A private room has been reserved. For more information, call Patricia Ibbotson at (313) 561-0177.

Christmas concert

The Westland Community Foundation will sponsor a holiday reception featuring the Glenn Singers from John Glenn High School 6-8 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 7, in the school's media center. The school is on Marquette west of Wayne Road.

Refreshments and hors d'oeuvres will be served. Those attending are asked to bring an unwrapped toy that will be

given to The Salvation Army for children in need at Christmastime.

Please call (734) 595-7727 for a reservation.

Las Vegas Party

St. Bernardine Men's Club is sponsoring a Pinochle/Euchre Card Party on Fridays, Dec. 2 and 16, Jan. 6, 13 and 27 and Feb. 3, 17 and 24, at the church, southwest corner Ann Arbor Trail and Merriman in Westland. Participants don't need a partner to play. Snacks and soft drinks are included in the \$5 charge. Games start at 7:30 p.m.

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TESTIMONY

FROM PAGE A1

suspect ordered O'Neal out of the Cadillac and got inside with Ford.

"It looked like the defendant - Boysie Walker," O'Neal testified.

O'Neal fled on foot and later heard that his uncle had been found dead. O'Neal said he ran into Walker, who admitted knowing what happened to Ford.

"He told me not to tell anybody or something would happen to me," O'Neal testified.

He recently implicated Walker in Ford's death by writing to Westland police from a prison cell where he is serving time on drug charges. He said his decision didn't involve any promises of leniency.

Under questioning Wednesday from Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Lawrence Talon, O'Neal said he wrote the letter because he believed that Walker - a neighbor of his - was involved in Ford's murder.

"I felt he had something to do with it," O'Neal testified.

O'Neal initially refused to testify and said the contents of his letter should suffice.

"It ain't worth me testifying," he said. "I'm worried about the well-being of my family. My testifying - it ain't worth nothing happening to them."

Rock, the defense attorney, called for the hearing to end and suggested that O'Neal be allowed to consult an attorney to avoid incriminating himself.

However, Bokos continued the hearing after being assured by the prosecution that O'Neal was not at risk of being charged in Ford's death.

Walker was arrested in October in Battle Creek, where he had since moved. In court, he wore a black sweater and gray pants, and the only words he spoke came when he whispered to his attorney.

Rock argued Wednesday that charges against Walker should be dismissed, saying the testimony didn't link him to Ford's murder.

But, Bokos said the circumstances surrounding Ford's death amounted to a reasonable suspicion that Walker may have been involved. Bokos said Walker's guilt or innocence should be decided in the higher circuit court.

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Catherine's repeats Toys for Tots event

Everyone is thinking Christmas, but at the Catherine's clothing store in Westland, the staff is thinking about Toys for Tots.

The plus size women's clothing store at 34764 Warren at Wayne Road is offering a day of fashion, food and fun Saturday to benefit the U.S. Marine Corps Reserves program.

The event runs 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and includes a fashion show and drawings for a variety of prizes. For every new unwrapped toy brought to the store, people will receive a ticket for the hourly drawings.

The prizes include Catherine's gift cards and gift certificates for Applebee's, Red Robin, Golden Corral, Papa Romano's, Famous Dave's BBQ, Marco's Fine Wine and Deli, Outback Steak House of Livonia, Baker's Square of Westland and Livonia, Flower King in Livonia, passes to Laser Tag of Westland, and arrangement from Flower Cents in Redford and movies tickets from Emagine Theater in Canton.

This is the second time this year the store has held the event.

It first came in October.

"We were really surprised we did so well considering the times," said employee Linda Rankin about the first event. "We have some wonderful people who came, and the toys were great."

There also will be a bake sale and raffle with the money raised going to purchase toys for older children ages 10-12.

"We're trying to get it going for the older kids who tend to get left out," said Rankin. "People see Toys for Tots and end up buying for tots."

Representatives of the U.S. Marine Corps also will be on hand to talk with customers about the program and help with parcels.

The Toys for Tots program got its start in 1947 in Los Angeles, Calif., when a group of Marine Corps reservists collected and distributed 5,000 toys to needy children. Now the official activity of the Marine Corps Reserves, Toys for Tots distributed 15 million toys to 6.5 million needy children in 2003.

Catherine's is in the Westland Crossings shopping center at Warren and Wayne Road in Westland. For more information, call (734) 422-2527.

Talk to your children

Expert says parents shouldn't try to shelter children from images of war and suffering

BY KURT KUBAN
STAFF WRITER

Tana Bridge says the images are almost impossible to escape. Nary does a day go by when we aren't bombarded by scenes of war and human suffering. And when our television and newspapers aren't bringing the war into our living rooms, there have been plenty of destructive natural disasters for them to report, like Hurricane Katrina or the tsunami that devastated parts of the Pacific.

Bridge, a Canton resident, says these images have a far greater impact on us than we sometimes know or care to admit. This is particularly the case with children, she says, who can be traumatized by the images they see.

If anyone is qualified to make such evaluations, it is Bridge, who is an assistant professor at Eastern Michigan University, where she teaches in the school of social work. She has been teaching at EMU for 13 years, and is an expert in trauma and loss, particularly how they impact children and families.

Bridge, 41, says no matter how much we want to insulate our children from distressing world events, the encroachment of the media into our daily lives makes it almost impossible. Children are going to see the images anyway, whether we want them to or not. Bridge says the best thing a parent can do is to talk to their children.

"We need to give our children normal outlets of communication. We need to talk to them about their feelings. Without that, we leave it up



BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Canton resident Tana Bridge, an assistant professor at Eastern Michigan University, says parents should talk to their children about traumatic events.

to our kids' own capacity to make sense of an issue," she said. "Kids do have the ability to make sense about issues if it is explained to them. One of the biggest mistakes we make is to try withhold information from them."

In addition to her teaching, Bridge does trauma response training around the country. For instance, she says she helped Plymouth Christian Academy -- where her son goes to school -- develop a trauma response plan. She said most schools in Michigan now have such plans in place, largely to deal with local tragedies.

"After the school shootings in Columbine, there was this huge anxiety in America. It raised community awareness. People began to realize how these larger incidents could affect our children," she said. "But you can also have a lot of local incidences. You might

have a school where a student died unexpectedly, or a car crash where some teens are killed. Schools need to have plans in place to deal with something of that nature."

Bridge says trauma impacts people in different ways. Some can digest it and move on. For others, nightmares will develop and a sense of fear can overtake them. For that reason, Bridge says parents need to pay attention to their children. Look for signs of abnormal behavior, and always keep lines of communication open. She says a good way to get kids to open up is to ask them what kinds of things they are afraid of or worried about.

"A 9 year old, 10 year old, or 12 year old has much more capacity to understand things than we sometimes give them credit for," she said.

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Is there a big test on your horizon? Do you need help in passing the college entrance exams or preparing for a job qualifications/licensing test? If so, the William P. Faust Public Library of Westland may be able to help you in your quest to do your best.

The library has a wide variety of materials to help you prepare for those school examinations like the SAT, ACT, GRE and GED and examinations for various careers, such as real estate, civil service, and postal worker. Since these items are always in demand and have proven to be a high risk for not being returned, there is a \$20 deposit per item required when the item is checked out and can be paid by cash or check. If the item is returned or renewed on time, the deposit will be returned.

For those patrons who have access to the Internet at home the LearningExpressLibrary.com site might be the answer for you. This site is provided to all Michigan libraries as part of the Michigan eLibrary program.

Any Michigan resident is able to access this site by first signing up as a new user at their home library. After that, the patron is able to access the site from any computer that has the Internet. To make things easy for our patrons, LearningExpress can be accessed from the Westland library's Web site (www.westland.lib.mi.us) under Research Databases.

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Please remember to check out the library's test book collection and to sign up for Learning Express Library the next time you have a big test.

The William P. Faust Public Library of Westland is open 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday-Wednesday, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday and noon-5 p.m. Sunday.

Notice: As of Dec. 1 the library is no longer offering two free black-and-white pages at its public Internet workstations. All black-and-white printing will cost 5 cents per page.

Highlighted Activities
Teen Advisory Board: 7 p.m. Dec. 7.
Gifts for Giving: 1 and 2 p.m.
 Make some great gifts with materials provided for free. Register at the reference desk for either session.

The William P. Faust Public Library is at 6123 Central City Parkway, Westland. For more information, call (734) 326-6123.

FOR THE RECORD

B
Mary Ann Bricker
 Bricker, 55, formerly of Bloomfield Township, died Nov. 27.

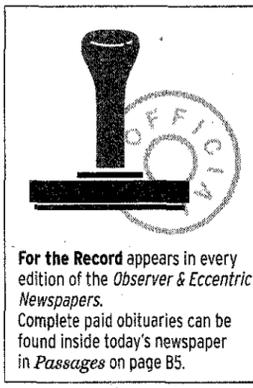
D
Nicholas R. Diana
 Diana, 24, died Nov. 25.

L
Dorothy L. Lent
 Lent, 91, of Plymouth, died Nov. 25.

M
Nancy H. Morrison
 Morrison, of Birmingham, died Nov. 26.

O
Joseph L. O'Connor
 O'Connor, 82, of Ann Arbor, died Nov. 23.

V
Mary Ann Opalinski
 Opalinski, 83, died Nov. 21.



For the Record appears in every edition of the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*. Complete paid obituaries can be found inside today's newspaper in *Passages* on page B5.

Brent C. Verrot
 Verrot, 46, died Nov. 19.

WEB

FROM PAGE A1
 careerbuilder.com. Our online real estate offering has also improved and is one of the best in the state. The bottom line for our classified readers and advertisers is we will continue to be your best source for local classifieds and now we can provide you with worldwide reach online with several categories."

EXTEND YOUR REACH

Putting your ad online expands your reach and keeps you connected to customers, Carry added.

"The *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers* is now owned by the Gannett Co., a leader in print, broadcast and Web-based information.

"Our enhanced Web site is just one of the benefits of joining with the Gannett Company," said Richard Aginian, publisher of the *O&E*. "In addition to maintaining the most complete and comprehensive site of local news for the community, our readers, advertisers and just plain surfers can now easily link via our Web site to the resources of cars.com, careerbuilder.com and Homescape."

Find a job, place an ad, sell a car, read about what's happening in your hometown or search for a story you forgot to clip and save — it's all a computer click away. You can subscribe to the print edition or e-mail a vacation pause online, too.

We have redesigned the Web site with our readers in mind.

Find your hometown news by utilizing the navigation bar at the left-hand side of the screen — it's fast and easy. And the local community links are on the home page. We have several photos online that have appeared in the paper and we will be publishing several more photos that were not seen in the paper. In addition, prep sports from throughout western Wayne and Oakland counties is presented on a special sports home page. Access local city guides, area obituaries and our popular Pick the Pros contest from the hometownlife.com site.

MORE TO COME

And more improvements are in the works, including updates on local news and information on a daily basis, along with photo galleries for special community and sports events. "In the coming months, we have a lot of plans for our new site. We will continue to enhance our online classified ads, our new Real Estate section, bring you more entertainment events with a Filter online calendar, bring the Pink fashion pages online and provide new and exciting forums for news and information," said Michael Mizner, director of information technology at the *O&E*.

We're excited about updating, improving and adding features to our site and we welcome your comments. Go to www.hometownlife.com and click on "Contact Us" to tell us what you think and what you'd like to see in 2006.

THESPIANS

FROM PAGE A1
 said. "It also was a challenge to make sure the cast was available to the audience and the stage was large enough for the cast."

Sullivan also likes that it has a smaller cast and found it has a plus-side for her group of thespians.

"I think it's brought them closer together and created friendships that might not have happened otherwise," she said.

Assistant director Evan Williams agrees.

"Even though some of us were meeting for the first time, it still seemed like we were all old friends doing a show together," he wrote in his note in the program. "I can't imagine doing this play with anybody else."

Williams as well as fellow

assistant director Andy Rodriguez are pulling double duty. They also are members of the cast that also includes Tricia Terrien, Briana Dewyer, Nathan Polen, Kristina Monty, Melissa Wincher, Ashley Sullivan, Alicia LaRoque, Alex Worthy, Sarah Strum, Megan Lundberg, Alyssa Lucas and Tim Rundell.

The technical directors are Justin Monit and Andy Rowland, with Lindsay Groh and Ripley Sambro as assistant stage managers.

She also has been working with Tim Sullivan, Bill Mayfield and Mark Wright on publicity.

Also helping are Charde Baggett and Alyssa Lucas, props; Tyler Honeycutt and Jessica Matheson, sound; Heather Greenshields and Jacque Matheson, lights, and Christina Curtis, backstage. smason@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2112

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OUR VIEWS

Junior Miss work deserves hurrah

It is a tribute to the tenacity of organizers that the annual installment of the Wayne-Westland Junior Miss program took place without a hitch.

Sure, there was concern early on when it appeared America's Junior Miss was folding and other local programs in Michigan were following suit. But the Wayne-Westland program hung in there and, when new sponsors rescued the failing national program, the only viable local program in the state was Wayne-Westland's.

Junior Miss isn't a beauty pageant, it is a scholarship program. While the young women are judged on talent and fitness routines, poise and an interview with the judges, scholastics also has a big part in the scoring.

This year, 28 young women competed for the honor to represent the area at the state competition. Kim Rutkowski of John Glenn High School and Kelly Doerr of Wayne Memorial High School will go to Alpena in March as the Wayne-Westland and Wayne Junior Misses, respectively.

The fact that so many young women competed is a tribute to Wayne-Westland Junior Miss board of directors and the many volunteers who spent many Sunday evenings preparing the young women for the program, who worked the fund-raisers and raised more than \$21,000 in scholarship money given out to the contestants.

The Wayne-Westland Junior Miss program also deserves praise for what it has accomplished. Many clubs and organizations have gone by the way because of declining membership, but Junior Miss has continued to grow with each passing year.

We congratulate Rutkowski and Doerr on their accomplishments and wish them well in their quest for the state title and a chance to become America's Junior Miss.

We also extend a thank you to the Wayne-Westland Junior Miss Inc. for providing a program that offers such wonderful scholarship opportunities for young women in our community. Considering the commitment and determination of the organizers, the program can only get better.

We need to confront our racial problems

We live in the most racially segregated metropolitan area in the United States. In 2001, the U.S. Census confirmed what we already knew. Though many middle-class African-Americans have moved into the suburbs, the suburbs remain predominantly white and Detroit remains predominantly black.

The city of Detroit is also poor and aging. Despite some high-profile developments such as Fox Center and Compuware, Detroit seems resistant to the renaissance that has been the city's theme for a generation. Instead, population has declined steeply, unemployment has remained stubbornly high, more people live in poverty in Detroit than in any other large city in America, school children continue to underperform suburban children by a wide gap and the tension between city and suburbs seems as taut and dangerous as it has ever been.

In the wake of several racially charged incidents and statements, many area leaders have called for a "racial summit." While we endorse the idea of a meeting on race issues among the leaders of the metro area, we believe that is only one of many steps that need to be taken in what will be a slow process of coming to terms with our racial and economic differences.

Meetings among area leaders are important, but programs that bring people from all walks of life and all age groups together will do more to break down the barriers that have built up over generations.

A start has already been made in some of our suburban school districts, where programs bring Detroit students to suburban campuses and suburban students to Detroit campuses. Each year, Focus:HOPE sponsors a journalism program that introduces suburban high school students to the job training and social service organization. Students are able to put the realities of economic hardship and racial discrimination into the context of real human beings with needs, desires and a strong ambition to make their lives better.

While these are commendable efforts, we also need programs that bring adults together. In recent months, we've seen that race has been underlying concerns about development, mass transit, school boundaries and even management of the water and sewer system.

We are living with the consequences of our history. We need to understand that history, learn from it and break down the walls that have separated us for too long.



LETTERS

Change in democratic process

There is a change of how our government operates, and it is not by democratic process. Since the inception of Newt Gingrich's "contract with America," Republicans are struggling to make our government a one-party system, particularly in the judicial branch by placing right-wing extremists in power.

The last two nominees to the Supreme Court show this very well. Harriet Miers is an unskilled, unqualified worshiper of George W. Bush, willing to do anything to support her king, and Alito is a right-wing extremist even so defined by the necons during his first Senate hearing.

The Republican Party has been driving extremist judges onto the federal benches. The result does not represent America, but extreme right-wing ideology and changes to the judiciary that favors right-wing members, with inconsistent decisions, lack of principle formed decisions and is corrupted by money. There are many examples of their behavior.

Antonio Scalia, Supreme Court justice, accepts a free vacation and spends personal time with Mr. Cheney. Nothing wrong with that. But a case comes before him involving Mr. Cheney and he refused to remove himself from the case. Any judge with integrity will follow the judicial guidelines to remove himself from any case with personal involvement.

Tom DeLay, corrupt Speaker of the House, requests to move a trial because a democratically elected judge has not been appointed by his party. Mr. DeLay is implying that the entire judiciary must be Republican. His fear is without a Republican judge, he may have to be responsible for his crimes. If Tom DeLay were innocent, he could prove it in front of any judge, not just a corrupt Republican judge.

The Republican Party here in Michigan did not want one of its Michigan Supreme Court judges appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States because its super right-wing majority of 5-2 may have a moderate judge appointed by a Democratic governor. It seems if the majority of Michiganders are Democratic, then the Michigan Supreme Court should have a majority Democratic members, not right-wing extremists.

The biggest indictment of the Republican injustice in the courts and corrupt agenda is the deafening silence from Republican Party and party supporters with the revelation of illegal behavior and cover-up in the White House and in the Legislature. No Republican is standing up and saying, "this is not right and we have to put a stop to this behavior," hence, corrupt illegal and immoral behavior is accepted by the Republican Party. This may be the new first tenet of the Republican Party.

Allan Biber
Westland

Temporary solution

The tentative agreement between GM and the UAW is yet another temporary solution to the real problem. General Motors will only save \$1 billion annually.

They lost more than that this quarter.

Now DaimlerChrysler is seeking a cut? Is \$1 billion really going to make a difference? It sure won't fix the problem and the effects will be felt everywhere as others follow GM's lead. The only losers will be the workers and the existing retirees who are the most vulnerable. Who will now have to bear the burden once again.

Instead of using this opportunity to rally for national health care, the United Auto Workers' leadership champions concessions. GM will be temporarily relieved by \$1 billion annually? I don't think so.

What will be revealed is the pork barrel of bargaining under the special clauses of plant closures. I wonder if these plants will be known prior to a membership ratification of this new deal. I wonder if they'll tell the workers at the plants that will be shut down before they vote. It will be highly unlikely that a plant would vote yes knowing their jobs would be lost if they did. This new deal isn't as much about health care costs as it is about plant closures.

We know from the Delphi bankruptcy that filing for North American operations are a promised success, right? After investing all of North America's profits overseas for the last two decades, Delphi has little to invest in the American infrastructure.

In a matter of time, we will watch GM follow the Delphi experiment. Without GMAC and with careful handling of profits overseas, GM needs Delphi to succeed with its dramatic union busting or, as they call it, "reconstruction" of the company.

If Delphi can get away with this and dump pensions and benefits, then GM will, too. It is a pattern that is being set by Delphi. A grand testing experiment to shrug off the weight of an organized labor force. Millions are going to be affected by this long-term strategy. Some are going to lose everything and some are going to gain everything.

If history shows us anything, it is that we can find our fate from the steel and airline industry. Even the players are the same. Robert "Steve" Miller is now leading Delphi along with all his same bankruptcy cronies. Key figures in both the airline and steel industry melt down. They're bringing down the ship and the main goal of their strategy is to remove the word "united" next to auto workers.

Terri Maga
Plymouth

Another hole in aid act

The school aid act has been passed and signed by the governor and the districts are very appreciative of the first increase in student foundation allowance in three years. The additional support is certainly welcome for public schools battered by relentless cost increases, flat state funding and even prorated reductions in promised funds.

But at the same time, schools are alarmed at the continued erosion of school funding.

The special August Revenue Consensus determined that the state would have almost \$400 million in new dollars earmarked for public schools

flowing into the School Aid Fund for 2005-06. Those are tax dollars mandated and earmarked for public schools by voters when they adopted Proposal A in 1994.

But wait a minute — the school aid act just past and signed for 2005-06 does not allocate \$400 million in additional support for schools. What's going on?

Quite simply, the Legislature and the governor have punched another hole in the school funding pot this year and drained off more than \$100 million for other purposes. Almost \$400 million in one end, more than \$100 million out the other end and the result is another year when districts can't make ends meet.

What's happening is simple, the dedicated money earmarked by the voters in 1994 comes in, but the general fund money that's also always been used to fund schools under Proposal A is cut again. It's been reduced by \$500 million since 1994-95.

And to make a bad situation worse, a pattern of shifting programs from funding by the general fund to funding out of the School Aid Fund continues. The School Aid Fund is now being required to fund Durant lawsuit settlement payments, Renaissance Zone payments and payments in lieu of taxes on state property, all of which used to be funded out of the general fund.

The result is less money to support the student foundation allowance.

It's an outdated switch-the-money tactic that reminds us of the bad old days, since fixed, when the lottery revenue, which was supposed to enhance school funding, was used to replace general fund money for schools that was transferred elsewhere with a result of no net increase for education.

We're concerned. It can't continue. Public education is the strongest weapon Michigan has in the competition to survive and thrive in today's economy. Our public schools need to have their funding stabilized, assured and protected.

Ray Telman
executive director
Middle Cities Education Association

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

QUOTABLE

"I was really shocked and surprised when they called my name. I was really excited that they chose me."

— John Glenn High School senior Kim Rutkowski, about her selection as the 2006 Wayne-Westland Junior Miss

It's time for state's leaders to pass tougher school standards

At a time of economic crisis, it's simply astonishing that Michigan's political system is so out of touch and broken.

It's out of touch because those who are supposed to represent us in Lansing are single-mindedly preoccupied with tactical eye-gouging, prior to next year's statewide elections. Meanwhile, most people in Michigan are worried about their next year's paycheck ... and if there will be one at all.

Our system is broken because most folks in Lansing are behaving as though sanctimonious posturing and "gotcha" press releases are the way to fix Michigan's economy for the decade ahead.

Can it be fixed? We'll find that out over the next few months as Lansing considers a far-seeing and sensible set of proposals for a new school curriculum from state Supt. of Instruction Mike Flanagan.

He wants all schools to require four years of math, including Algebra I and II; four years of science, including chemistry; and three years of social science, including a semester of economics.

What a happy shock! Somebody actually has the guts to propose something tough, far-reaching and relevant to our problems!

His proposal is way overdue common sense. Up to now, Michigan has led (or trailed, depending on how you look at it) the nation. The only thing we've required has been civics. We've got this problem in Michigan that we think that "work-ready" means "high school dropout work-ready." "This is a recipe for disaster," Flanagan told me last week. "Today, only one-third of our school districts require Algebra I, only 10 percent Algebra II. Yet that's exactly the skill level that is required today to work in a modern auto plant."

Much of Flanagan's thinking builds on last year's Cherry Commission report. The commission (of which I was a member) found that fewer than a quarter of Michigan's high school graduates take the courses necessary to prepare them for college and that half of those who enroll in college drop out.

That means that less than 20 percent of today's high school freshmen will ever graduate from college. And that, in turn, is a prescription to make Michigan into an economic Mississippi, which long was the weakest state in terms of income and educational attainment. The cute term, of course, is "Mississippi."

So I asked Flanagan what chance his radical proposal has in the quagmire of Lansing. "Pretty good," he replied, sounding hopeful. "Most of the big players seem to be onboard. My biggest concern is a kind of whispering campaign going on that all our kids really are not up to taking

demanding courses. This is simply demeaning to our kids.

"The Japanese expect all their kids to take tough courses, and I don't think our kids are dumber than the Japanese."

Word is that the state Board of Education will approve the proposal in a couple of weeks, which puts the issue squarely in the well-fed lap of the Legislature (one of the nation's highest paid) and the various interest groups.

That's where the going gets tough. There are so many things that can go wrong before next March, which is when curriculum reform has to be adopted to take effect in the fall.

First, there is the education establishment — never a force for far-reaching change — that is already hedging its bets.

The Michigan Association of School Boards is opposed to any move that would require districts to do anything. "We support guidelines; we oppose mandates," says a MASA spokesperson. The Michigan Association of School Administrators, while generally supportive, is worried about issues of local control. A spokesman for The Michigan Association of Public School Academies (i.e. charter schools) says his members are already doing what Flanagan wants.

Forget the educators. You can bet things will get much worse once the proposal gets to the Legislature. Take Rep. Brian Palmer, R-Romeo, chair of the House Education Committee, as an example. He's worried about loss of local control — a mysteriously persistent doctrine that ignores the fact that Proposal A put money (and control) for the schools in the hands of the state in 1994.

"All the districts are concerned about loss of local control. We can't let that happen," Palmer says. Opposition from parts of the education establishment will also play to the legislative knee-jerk reflex to do nothing.

"We should not have anybody in the education establishment disagree with what we're doing here," intones Palmer. Yes, the establishment has done a great job ensuring quality in districts like Detroit.

It's crunch time, folks. The political system can step up and actually do something serious and constructive about saving our state's economy, long term, by adopting the tough curriculum Flanagan is proposing. Or the system can do what it's done so often in the past: fudge, dodge, delay and finger-point.

We'll see. But if you have a stake in this state's future, or kids in the public schools, you might not want to be too passive about it.

Phil Power is a longtime observer of politics, economics and education issues in Michigan and a member of the Cherry Commission on Education. He would be pleased to hear from readers at ppower@hcnnet.com.

Principal's simple gift of book makes math homework doable

There are those nights I rush into a meeting just moments before the gavel hits the table. If there's time, I explain that I was finishing my fourth-grade and/or fifth-grade homework.

Decades — yes, I admit, it's decades — after learning to multiply, do long and short division and work with fractions, I'm learning math all over again. And what I've discovered is today's kids aren't learning math the way I did.

When I was a kid, we started with addition in first grade and finished up with trigonometry and/or calculus in 12th grade. In

between, there was subtraction, division, multiplication, fractions, decimals, ratios, algebra I and II and geometry.

I think I work with words because I hated math. I did OK in elementary school, but in ninth grade I ran into an algebra teacher who was more interested in teaching us how to do calculus. It left me dazed and confused and nothing about algebra seemed to click.

It took a full semester before I started understanding geometry, and after a year with another algebra teacher who only wanted to explain things once, I swore off math for good. No trig, no calculus my senior year, 11 years of math was enough for me.

So here I am, the woman who works with words helping my kids with their math homework. Should be a piece of cake, right? Wrong. The Everyday Math my kids are learning has the multiplication and division, but there's also geometry and algebra. Welcome to Chicago math, so called because it is the University of Chicago School Mathematics Project.

Instead of having one way of doing a math problem, there's several. As one teacher explained it, it offers four ways to do a problem, a sort of mathematical alternative to one way fits all. Thankfully, the teachers send home Homelinks (a.k.a. homework) answer sheets, so we can tell if we did it right whichever way we're doing it.

Last year, my son's fourth-grade math teacher let me keep a student reference book to help. This year, I'm winging it with my daughter and dog-eared the pages of a math resource book as I help my son with his fifth-grade work.

The book has gotten me through medium, mode, range and mean. About the only thing it couldn't help me with was doing an array, so I called my mentor — I'm talking a fifth-

grader with all A's in math. In less than a minute he'd explained what an array was and how to do it. Thanks, David. You da man.

I must have been whining when I got this book, *Math on Call*, from a middle school principal, Patsy Marchel. She handed it to me, telling me that it would take me from first grade through college. It must have been around the time I was stumped by a math problem that looked to me like the number was being squared, but my answer didn't match up with the Homelinks sheet.

I learned later that even though the problem had that miniaturized two dangling in the air to the right of the number, we weren't doing squares, it was just another way of writing a multiplication problem. Hey, it's from Chicago math, what can I say?

I first met Patsy when she was named principal of Douglas Elementary in Garden City. She stayed at Douglas for three years, then returned to the junior high, successfully leading the staff and students into the middle school concept.

Yeah, that stuff looks good on a resume, but where do you list something like the simple act of giving a parent the tools to help their kids learn? It's a gesture I will always remember. I do every time I pick up the book, every time my husband calls at work to ask where it is.

It has its own special place on the ledge by the kitchen table where learning takes place in our house. Panic sets in when it's not in its spot. My son automatically grabs it when I sit down: "Here, Mom, here's your book."

It'll be my book until algebra II; after that, my kids are on their own. Hopefully, they'll decide to go to the same college, so they can share it, or we may have to draw straws to see who gets it. And, since it's my book, I guess I'll have to decide who inherits it.

Patsy has moved on to a middle school principalship in northern Michigan. She left before I discovered what she had given me or had time to properly thank her. I'm not sure where or how she discovered this book, but for me, it's as good as finding a buried treasure.

As you grow, people come and go in your life. Patsy has come and gone, but she'll be with me every time I open that book. Thanks, Patsy. I'll never forget what you did for me ... and my kids.

And just maybe, with this book, I'll try trig and calc when they get to them.

Sue Mason is editor of the *Westland and Garden City Observers*. If you have a comment, send her an e-mail at smason@hometownlife.com. For parents who also are mathematically challenged, *Math on Call* is published by the Houghton Mifflin Co.



Phil Power



Sue Mason

BRIGHT, EAGER, AND STILL A POOR STUDENT

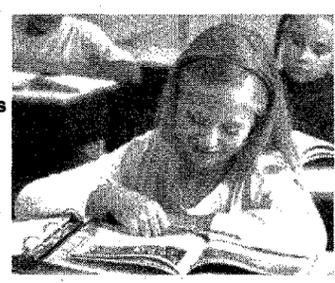


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- Poor handwriting

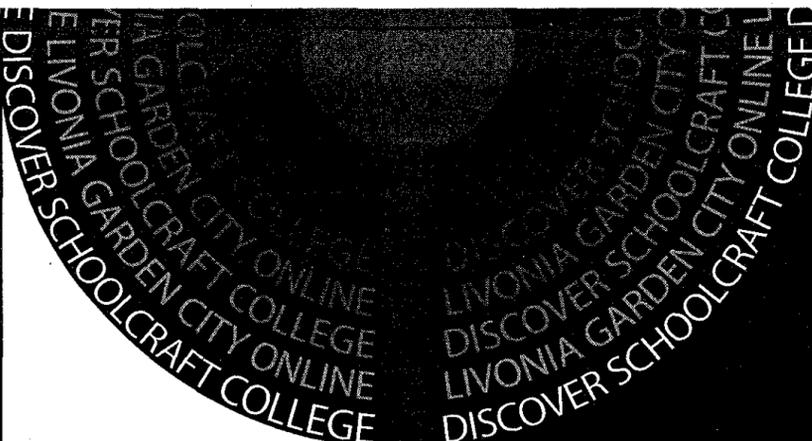


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School districts support group health care legislation

BY ALEX LUNDBERG
STAFF WRITER

A group of Michigan school districts from all over the state are banding behind legislation that will allow them to purchase health care and other benefits as a group in the hopes of avoiding the recent fate of General Motors.

The Affordable Benefits Coalition is backing a package of bills heading through the Michigan legislature that would allow school districts to form into purchasing pools to find health plans to best meet their needs and reform how retirement benefits are administered.

Bill Nowling is a public relations specialist with the Rossman Group, a firm hired by ABC to push its agenda. He said access to accurate health

care use information will give districts good tools to comparison shop.

"This is key, it's information the districts can't get from insurers now," Nowling said. "The pools would have accurate data about what kinds of health care services had been used, how many times and how much those procedures cost."

The teacher's union, the Michigan Education Association, isn't happy about the ABC. Director of Communications Margaret Trimer-Hartley said, without changes, the union couldn't support the effort.

"The language that defines 'carrier' excludes the Michigan Education Special Services Association, which is 55 percent of the market," she said. "They should be allowed."

She added there's no provision to pre-fund any of the benefits in the ABC plan, creating a crisis if anyone asks for their benefits early. There's also a significant risk of insurers picking and choosing who they'll cover and who they'll choose to ignore.

"By releasing the claims data, providers can cherry-pick the youngest, healthiest districts and ignore the others," Trimer-Hartley said. "That's going to undermine attempts to insure everyone."

She said the nation as a whole would do well to start addressing those things that are driving the cost of health care: the millions of uninsured, unaddressed problems with Medicare and Medicaid and the health habits of the country.

SCHOOLS BACK PLAN

Oakland Schools Director of Government and Community Services Brian Whiston said Oakland has been behind the coalition from its inception and added that Michigan schools can't wait much longer for relief.

"Health care and retirement costs are skyrocketing," Whiston said. "We got a \$175 per pupil per year increase in the foundation grant this year. Currently, we've got \$17 billion in unfunded costs. We would have to get a \$200 per year per student increase in the foundation grant to cover the costs of those increases alone. We've got to either close buildings, eliminate programs and increase class sizes or come up with some alternatives."

Without new ideas, like

the ABC, he said school districts are going to have to increase taxes or eliminate jobs — both unacceptable alternatives.

The Tri-County Alliance for Public Education, an association of all public school superintendents in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, is backing the ABC initiative. Executive Director Kathleen Booher said public schools are facing the same grim realities recently visited on the auto industry.

"Public schools cannot afford the current costs of benefits and health care," she said. "They don't want to reduce benefits but they have to provide them at a more affordable cost."

She said state funding of public education does not meet

the needs of districts and a number of them are facing bankruptcy. Most people aren't aware of this.

"Local communities would be surprised to hear who is going to come up short in the next few years," Booher said. "There are districts that are two years from great difficulty. People perceive their districts are in good condition but the state has not provided sufficient funding for three years straight."

The coalition includes the Michigan Association of School Boards, the Detroit and Michigan Chambers of Commerce, the Oakland Schools, Wayne Regional Educational Service Agency and sister educational service organizations in Ottawa, Muskegon, Kalamazoo and Kent.

Contest winners play at Schoolcraft

Plymouth piano teacher Brenda Krachenberg knows that her 6-year-old pupil, Ivy, can't deal too well with octaves or reach the pedals yet.

Nevertheless, she has entered Ivy into the Ann Arbor Bach Association competition. Ivy will play two Bach minuets from the Anna Magdalena Notebook on Dec. 3, and reach the advanced age of 7 on Dec. 4.

The public can listen to winners of the Bach competition at 7 and 8 p.m. Friday, Dec. 9, in the Presentation Room of the VisiTech Center at Schoolcraft College. The recitals are free and will spotlight the 35 winners.

Ivy, a Canton resident, is a second grader who has been studying piano since the first grade. She has drive and talent, said her teacher Krachenberg, and has been preparing her pieces since the summer, beginning to polish them by September.

"To her, this is not a competition," said Krachenberg. "It is a performance opportunity. She will go and play. I think she will do just fine, and she is ready to play. The pieces were very challenging for her, but she was eager to try and is very ambitious."

Donald Morelock, professor of music at Schoolcraft and director of the Ann Arbor Bach Association, said this is one of the strongest competitions in Michigan for pianists ages 5 through 18. This year there are 135 entries, which represents a 300 percent growth in 15 years. The majority of performers live in southeastern Michigan, and judges represent college and university music departments from Michigan and Ohio.

"The competition is good for teachers, parents and students so that they can hear other pianists play," said Morelock. "It is part of Schoolcraft's identity to work with the community, colleges and universities to foster high quality performance. I encourage the entire community to come and hear these students play."

The Bach competition is one of four music competitions sponsored by Schoolcraft College, which involves almost 400 musicians. The others include Sonata Festival, Saturday, Feb. 4; Sonata Festival, Saturday, Feb. 11; and the Schoolcraft Piano Honors Auditions, Friday and Saturday, March 31 and April 1.

For more information, call the Schoolcraft Music Office at (734) 462-4403.

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