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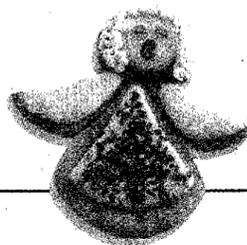
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**New iPod blazes another trail - this time
portable video - AT HOME, PAGE B1**

**Bake up
holiday fun**

TASTE - SECTION B



WESTLAND Observer

**THURSDAY
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TOM HAWLEY | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

The holiday decorations around Westland City Hall have been expanded to include symbols of different religions and ethnicities to represent the city's diversity.

Expanded display recognizes diversity

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

A holiday display in front of Westland City Hall has been expanded from a Christian nativity scene to incorporate the Jewish faith, Muslim religion and the African Kwanzaa holiday.

"We did it to diversify," Mayor Sandra Cicirelli said. "Westland is a nice melting pot of people, and we wanted to recognize other ethnicities and religions."

For years, Westland has had a nativity scene on the front lawn of City Hall facing Ford Road. It stood as the only religious display among some 20,000 holiday lights strewn on trees.

Last year, the city added a large, lighted Jewish menorah. This year, the illuminated decorations also include a dreidel, a moon and star for the Muslim religion, and a fruit-shaped display recognizing Kwanzaa - celebrated Dec. 26 through Jan. 1.

Cicirelli's administration expanded the holiday decorations after receiving phone calls from people who sought a more diverse, inclusive display.

"I think it looks great," said Parks and

Recreation Director Robert Kosowski, whose workers put up the holiday lights and displays. "It really adds to what we already had."

With a large crowd standing in front of City Hall, the lights were turned on Monday evening during Westland's annual tree-lighting ceremony.

The crowd joined in as the St. Matthew Lutheran Church and School Choir performed such Christmas carols as *Silent Night*, *Jingle Bells* and *Here Comes Santa Claus*.

Children's author Nancy Spinelle, a retired Livonia schoolteacher, read one of her stories, *The Mitten Tree*, which tied into Cicirelli's call for those attending the ceremony to bring gifts of mittens and gloves.

The gifts will be given to the Westland Goodfellows to distribute to needy families at Christmastime. Those who missed Monday's tree-lighting ceremony, but who still want to donate, can take mittens and gloves to the mayor's office at City Hall, on Ford Road between Wayne and Newburgh.

Santa Claus made his usual visit to Westland for the event, accepting what Cicirelli described as the key to the city and to the hearts of Westland children.

As the crowd arrived, St. Matthew Church

Brownie Troop No. 568 handed out programs.

"They're so excited to give out the programs. They keep running up to people," troop leader Connie Kovacs said. "They're excited about the holidays. They are the holiday spirit."

Terry Carroll, executive assistant to the mayor, later read winning essays chosen from more than 80 entries in the city's "What Christmas Means To Me" contest.

Essay winners who got to help Cicirelli throw the switch that turned on the holiday lights included Bethany Lilygren, 9, an Edison Elementary School fourth-grader; Ali Marnon, 9, a Wildwood Elementary fifth-grader; and Shelby Stover, 8, a Cooper Elementary second-grader.

Finally, to shake off the chill from the outdoor ceremony, children left City Hall and went next door to the warmth of Fire Station No. 1, where they had hot chocolate and cookies with Santa.

City leaders called Monday's tree-lighting ceremony one of the best yet.

"Every year it just seems like it gets to be a better and better event," Councilman William Wild said.

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Recall talk follows OK of school closing plan

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Whispers of a school board recall and accusations of conflicts of interest circulated the Livonia Public School community this week, in the wake of board approval of a controversial plan to close schools to save money.

By a 6-1 vote Monday, board members approved The Legacy Initiative - a plan that will close seven elementary buildings and reconfigure the district into lower and upper elementary schools, middle and high schools. The district serves northern Westland.

But some parents, like Ann Rae, showed more opposition to the plan and continued to question the board's practices regarding the establishment of the demographics committee - the group that researched and recommended The Legacy Initiative.

Rae, a Livonia parent and educator in neighboring South Redford Schools, said: "According to your board policy BHA Board of Operations: Code of Ethics, as a member of the Livonia Board of Education, 'You will avoid being placed in a position of conflict of interest.'"

Rae said by participating on the committee that created the Legacy proposal, and later voting on it, several trustees did show a conflict of interest.

"The demographics committee is flawed in its representation," Rae continued. "By failing to identify and recruit a broad and varied stakeholder foundation, a true and appropriate representation of needs, expectations and requirements, rather, we are witnessing the product that was driven by the narrow and limited perspective of the current committee."

She wasn't alone in her concerns. Rae and other parents who attended the meeting are looking into the practices of the board, and trying to find out whether members violated the Open Meetings Act, as well as their own policies. Board members have denied that more than three trustees attended any demographics committee meeting. No attendance records were kept.

SILENT MAJORITY?

Prior to the vote, Kim Naccashian, a Tyler parent, called for the five members whose names appeared on the committee's roster to recuse themselves from voting on the proposal because there may be a conflict of interest. They did not do so.

In opposing the plan, Cathy Klockner, a Taylor par-

PLEASE SEE LEGACY, A5

Quick thinking leads police to suspect in robberies

BY LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

Westland police are being lauded for police work that led to the arrest of a man accused of robbing and assaulting a 95-year-old Garden City woman in her home late last month.

Larry Steve John, 36, also is facing charges for the robbery of a second elderly Garden City woman and additional charges in neighboring communities.

"With information shared between departments, we discovered there had been five

home invasions and two attempted home invasions in five days," said Garden City Lt. David White of the Special Investigations Unit. "The suspect had targeted people 85-95 years old who were pretty much helpless."

All of those incidents occurred from Nov. 26-30 in Garden City, Inkster, Dearborn Heights and Warren.

A PATTERN

In each case, the elderly victims reported a man knocking on their door claiming to be a

neighbor who needed help or a motorist having car trouble. The suspect was able to talk some of the victims into letting him into their home, White said, while in some instances he shoved past the residents into the house as they spoke at the door.

"He'd ask for \$5 and after he got that, he'd ask for more money," said White. "If the elderly people refused or showed some resistance, he'd assault them."

The victims also provided consistent descriptions of a dark-skinned man, clean shaven

and speaking with an accent.

Stopped for driving with a suspended license and other traffic violations, John was taken into custody Nov. 30 by Westland police. White credited the information sharing about the suspect and quick response by Westland police officers and Westland Lt. Mark Engstrom of the Metro Street Enforcement Team with leading to identification of John as the home invasion suspect.

In Westland, police Lt. James Ridener had put out information about the incidents, and

Officer Brian Miller had arrested the suspect on an unrelated charge in Westland's south end.

Westland Officers Norman Brooks and Mike Match had discussed the case, and Match remarked that the suspect matched the description of the man being sought in Garden City, and White was called in.

Ultimately, John was picked out during a police lineup at the Wayne County jail by some of his alleged victims. Westland Police Chief Daniel Pfannes



PLEASE SEE ROBBERY, A6 Larry Steve John

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**Coming Sunday
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Meals make Christmas bright for seniors

Volunteers needed to handle deliveries on holiday

BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

Lori Vail is looking for a few good people willing to commit two hours to helping make Christmas Day brighter for homebound senior citizens in southern and western Wayne County.

The holiday meals coordinator for Senior Alliance, Vail needs at least 80 volunteers, and more realistically 90, to help deliver hot meals to some 800 seniors, continuing at a tradition that started in the late 1980s.

"It's really great for the seniors," said Vail. "Many are confined to their homes, have no family around here or live too far away from family or can't afford to get on the bus to go."

The holiday meal is just one program offered by Senior Alliance, the Area Agency on Aging 1-C. It also provides Meals on Wheels, a chore service, family caregiver support and information on medical programs for seniors living in its service area which includes Livonia, Redford, Westland, Garden City, Canton, Plymouth and Plymouth Township.

Volunteers are asked to commit to spending about two hours on Christmas Day delivering the meals, generally around lunchtime. Each volunteer will have 5-10 meals to deliver, depending on their assigned route.

The routes are broken down by zip code and major roads. If a volunteer is going to an apartment complex that has many seniors, he or she may deliver 9-10 meals. Someone with several stops could have less meals to deliver because of the distance.

"We try to keep volunteers in their own community, but we have areas like Taylor, Southgate, Lincoln Park and Allen Park with higher numbers of seniors," Vail said. "Cities like Plymouth and Northville have few seniors."

Senior Alliance volunteers delivered 700 meals on Thanksgiving Day, and Vail is confident the Christmas number will hit 800. The deadline for seniors to sign up was Tuesday, however, Vail said the agency is still accepting names. No senior in need of a meal will be turned away.

'SAY YES'

'A lot of seniors are proud, it's hard to get them to raise their hand and say they want the meal.'

Lori Vail
holiday meals coordinator for Senior Alliance

"A lot of seniors are proud, it's hard to get them to raise their hand and say they want the meal," she said. "If anyone knows a relative who would benefit get them to that point, see if you can get them to raise their hand and say yes."

The meals cost Senior Alliance \$5 each and the non-profit is conducting its annual Bank Day fund-raiser beginning next week. Employees will be in several area banks selling holiday cards for \$5 each.

When a person buys the card, they will be asked to sign it and include a holiday greeting. The card will be delivered with the meal to a senior.

Banks participating in Bank Day on Dec. 16 include the Community Bank of Dearborn on Canton Center in Canton, First Catholic Credit Union in Dearborn Heights, Melvindale and Taylor, Advantage One Credit Union in Southgate, Riverview and Brownstown Township.

National City Bank on Michigan Avenue in Wayne will have Bank Day on Dec. 15 and 19.

The card sale will be 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. each day, and the sale continues through Dec. 20. Banks interested in hosting a Bank Day can call Bill Campbell at Senior Alliance at (734) 727-2050.

And the cards won't be the only thing delivered to seniors. Students at Taft-Galloway Elementary School in Wayne, Kettering Elementary in Westland and Bentley Elementary in Plymouth are making placemats and holiday cards. Taft-Galloway and Kettering are repeating, having done cards and placemats for Thanksgiving.

"The seniors really enjoy the extras. It's really nice and it's really great for seniors to get mail other than bills," said Vail.

MEAL MAKERS

Senior Alliance has three "kitchens" preparing the meals - St. Mary Mercy

Hospital in Livonia, Oakwood Hospital in Dearborn and the Park Restaurant in Lincoln Park. The kitchens provided turkey dinners for Thanksgiving and will provide honey-glazed ham, chicken and mostaccioli for Christmas.

"We leave the menu up to them, but ask that they provide at least one-third of the RDA (regular daily allowance)," Vail said.

The Park will cook a vast majority of the meals that will be delivered on Christmas Day because the area it will serve - the Downriver communities - has the heaviest concentration of seniors.

St. Mary Mercy is preparing meals for seniors living in Livonia, Redford, Westland, Plymouth and Plymouth Township, Canton and neighboring communities while Oakwood Hospital is cooking for seniors in Garden City, Dearborn Heights and Dearborn, to name a few.

Volunteers will pick up the meals at the kitchens between 10:30-11 a.m. at the Park Restaurant and Oakwood Hospital and 1-3 p.m. at St. Mary Mercy. There will be coordinators will be at each site to help with check-in and providing the meals.

"We give them about two hours to deliver them," Vail said. "We try to get them enough deliveries, but not too many to run over two hours."

Some volunteers make the deliveries a family affair, bringing along spouses and children. Others bring some small tokens they buy from places like the Dollar Store. Such extras aren't required, but are welcomed by the seniors, Vail said.

"Most people who have done this seem to enjoy it," she said, adding, "I love this program, I love the volunteers. It's a good cause that helps people. It's a win-win for everybody concerned."

People interested in volunteering to deliver meals on Christmas Day can call Lori Vail at Senior Alliance at (734) 727-2017. The deadline for signing up is Dec. 14. Seniors interested in requesting a meal should also call Vail. Senior Alliance is at 3850 Second St., Suite 201, Wayne. For more information about its services, call (734) 722-2830.

smason@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2112



HEATHER ROUSSEAU

Greg Blackwood (front left) was surrounded by family and friends gathered around a tree with a photo of his daughter Amy Blackwood on it, during the Compassionate Friends Candlelight Vigil in Plymouth's Kellogg Park last year. This year's event is scheduled for Dec. 11.

Candlelight vigil honors children lost too soon

Members of the Compassionate Friends know the holidays are tough times for people who've lost loved ones, especially children.

In an effort to help with the grief, The Compassionate Friends, Western Wayne County (Livonia) Chapter, sponsor a candle-lighting ceremony in Kellogg Park in downtown Plymouth Dec. 11 in conjunction with Children's Memorial Day.

"The holidays are especially difficult for parents who have lost children," said committee member Gail Lafferty. "This candle-lighting ceremony honoring them helps their memory live on."

The ceremony will include the dedication of a tree decorated with ornaments with the children's names, a candle-light vigil, a reading of the children's names, poetry and songs.

The local ceremony includes the candle-lighting at 7 p.m. in conjunction with the worldwide

candle-lighting. The idea is that, as candles burn down in one time zone, they're lit in another, creating a 24-hour memorial.

Recognized in communities around the world, International Children's Memorial Day is already officially sanctioned by the U.S. Congress.

"Hundreds of families will gather near a tree specially decorated with the names of children who have died too soon," Lafferty said.

For more information or to register a child, call or e-mail candle-lighting committee members Gail Lafferty, angel4gail@aol.com or (734) 981-4528 or Virginia Herrick, herrick@milleranfield.com or (248) 449-7598. The Compassionate Friends is an international, nonprofit, non-denominational, self-help organization offering friendship, understanding and hope to bereaved families with the loss of their children.

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Fitness center designed for intensive training

BY CAROL MARSHALL
STAFF WRITER

Walk inside Velocity Fitness Center and you're not going to find the average amenities you would find in a health club. There's no juice bar. No sauna. No comfortable lounge with tasteful mood lighting.

Then again, the athletes who come to Velocity aren't looking for your average workout.

"We focus on power and agility, and sports performance," owner Gary Staub said.

The 10,700-square-foot facility, located upstairs in the Arctic Edge building on Michigan Avenue, west of Belleville Road, is designed specifically for the intensive training required by young athletes who want to improve their performance on the field, on the ice or on the track.

Equipped with a 30-yard turf area (not just for football players, but also for exercises which help soccer players, basketball and baseball players), a 50-yard indoor track, and a full complement of free weights, power, speed and agility are the goals of the Velocity trainers.

"Hitting a machine just is not the same movement as you get in real life," Dave Ziemba, performance coach at Velocity Sports Performance said. "We focus on more dynamic movement that requires balance and coordination as well as strength."

Velocity Sports Performance opened last month, and when the doors opened, a trainer who's worked with professional athletes was there on the job.

Debbie Taft, who was the Detroit Tigers' strength and conditioning coach, left his job with the ball club in exchange for working in the community where he lives.

"Working for the Tigers was a good job but it took a lot of time from my family, and I

The 10,700-square-foot facility, located upstairs in the Arctic Edge building on Michigan Avenue, west of Belleville Road, is designed specifically for the intensive training required by young athletes who want to improve their performance on the field, on the ice or on the track.

had to travel so much," Taft said. "When I started looking for something out there, I came across Velocity, and their philosophy is so well meshed with my beliefs that I felt comfortable making the move. We want to work with kids and develop them to be not only better athletes but also better people."

One of the philosophies of the program is a guarantee that a young athlete will be faster upon completion of the program.

"Any athletic activity requires speed," Staub said. All of the coaches at Velocity are certified and have college degrees.

"That's what differentiates us from the rest," Staub said. "We really look for trainers who have trained athletes professionally. We try to hire the best of the best."

In the mornings, ice skaters and semi-professional and professional athletes work out at the center. The evenings are generally slotted for youth and adult classes. Velocity is also hoping to attract firefighters and police officers to specialized classes for them, Staub said.

"We can train a very young athlete in what's really like a specialized gym class, all the



PHOTOS BY BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Trainers Debbie Taft (left) and David Ziemba work with Mike Wagner, Jeff Little and Andy Chmielewski at Velocity Fitness Center.

way through to the professional athlete," Staub said.

Prior to opening Velocity, Staub was in management at Domino's Pizza headquarters in Ann Arbor. As a graduate of Franklin High School and a former football player who later coached at his high school alma mater, he always had a passion for sports.

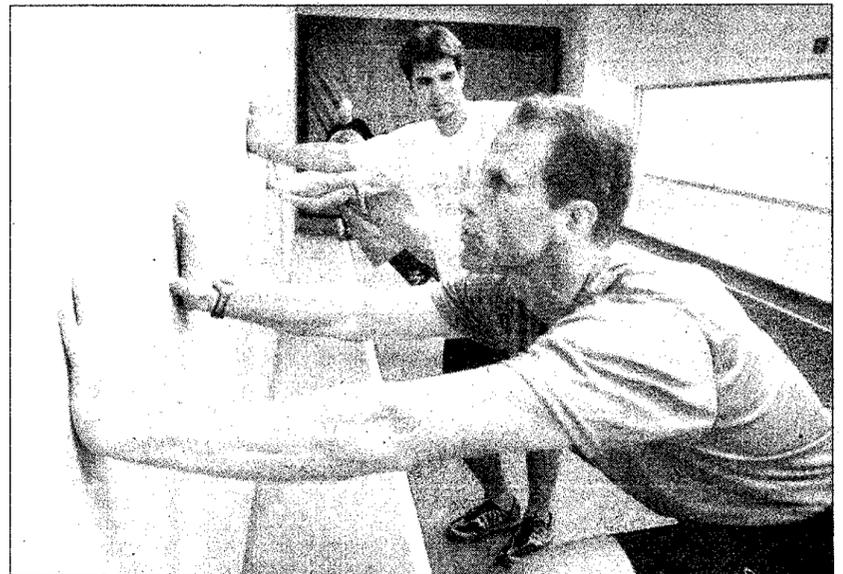
"I was looking for a franchise where I could apply my passion for sports," Staub said.

So about 14 months ago, he found information on Velocity. He considered a few locations, but chose Canton mainly because there was space available within a regional sports complex.

About half of Velocity's clientele is made up of young athletes, age 12-18, though the center will work with children as young as 7 years old.

It's a reality of life that every young athlete must do more and go to extra lengths in order to compete, Taft said, but it's also a reality that in order to avoid sports related injuries, athletes of all ages need special training they often don't get at team practice.

"Are we promoting elitism? Absolutely not," Staub said. "I just think we've become such a closed-door society and kids



Velocity Fitness Center trainer Debbie Taft (right), a former Detroit Tigers' strength and conditioning coach, works with Mike Warner, of Ann Arbor, and other Gabriel Richard High School athletes.

don't get the same kind of activity they used to. We also know so much more about the science of sports and performance and injury prevention."

The education comes at a price, with the average class running \$20-\$30 per client

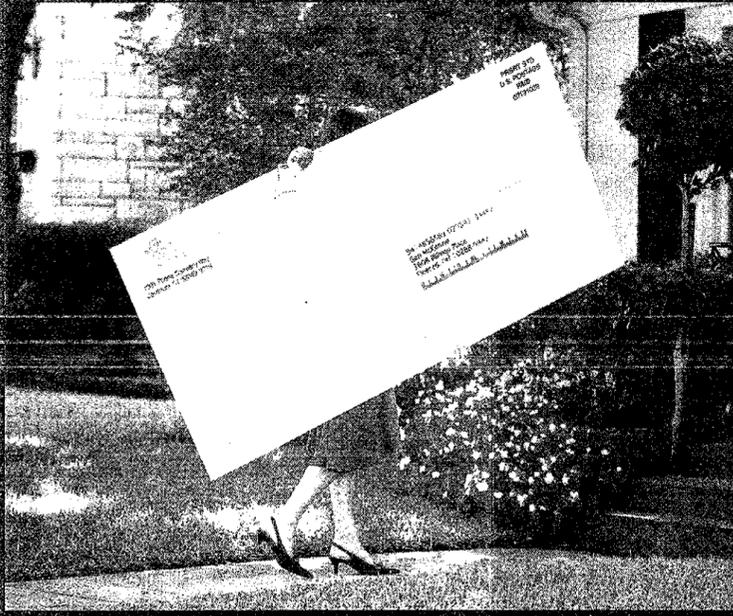
per session. But when Taft considered the immense benefits that come with sports ability, he said it's worth every cent.

"When a child is physically active, you create success in the rest of his or her life," Taft

said. Velocity Sports Performance is located at 46615 Michigan Avenue in Canton. For more information call (734) 485-2561.

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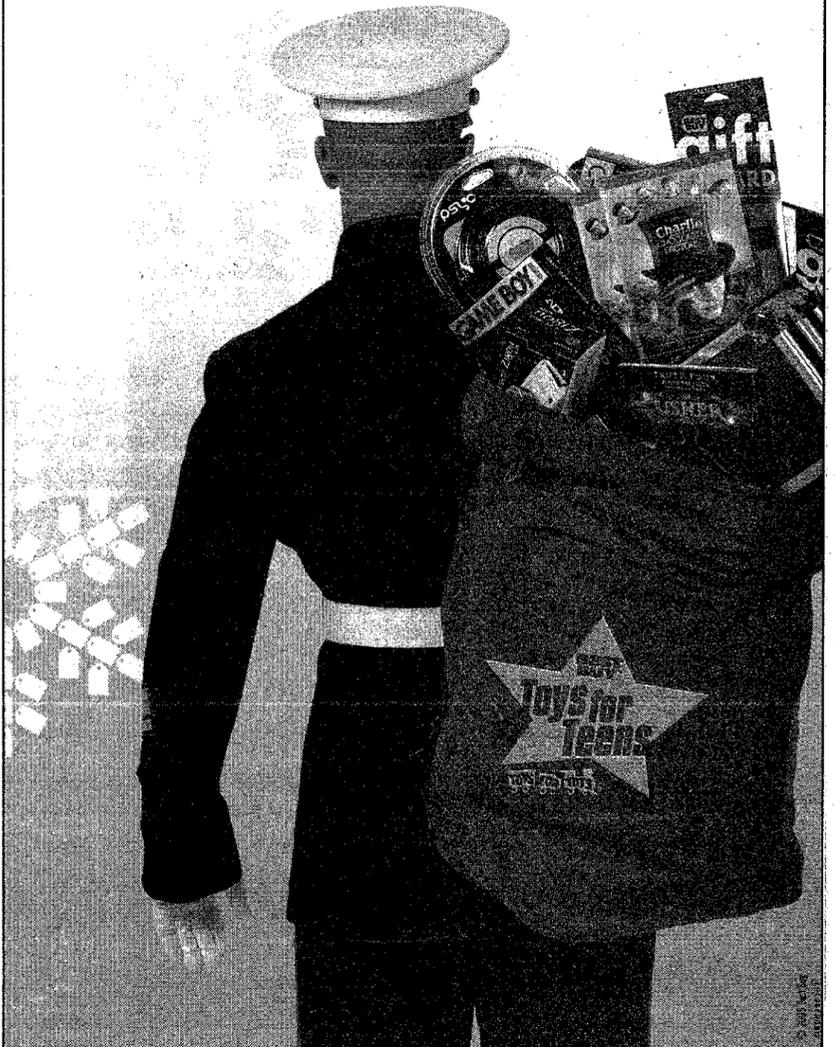
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LEGACY

FROM PAGE A1

ent, told the board: "There is no silent majority. There is a very loud and persistent majority. Have you heard us? Have you been listening to us? You were voted in by us to represent us. Please do so by voting no to this proposal."

Even after these emotional pleas, the proposal passed. Trustee Tom Bailey became the lone voice against the proposal, originally made public by the demographics committee six weeks ago.

For Joanne Morgan, the decision to support the Legacy plan was carefully weighed.

"Livonia Public Schools has always been a leader in educational excellence and student achievement," she said. "We were one of the first districts in the state to have special education. People still move here for our programs."

Morgan referred back to the \$19 million in budget cuts the board has had to make in recent years. She mentioned that 15 Michigan districts are in receivership.

"We need to do something, and we need to do it now," she said. Morgan said that no plan is perfect, but she said she's confident the advantages of the K-4 proposal outweigh any disadvantages.

"The changes will stabilize our schools, demographically and financially," Morgan said.

'JUST DOES NOT WORK'

Bailey was not convinced it was the right plan for the district.

"Whereas, I have previously mentioned, that the proposal is extremely innovative and tries to keep individual school communities together, I now publicly declare that this program just does not work in our community," Bailey said. "Current elementary and middle school square footage, when combined with geographical locations of these schools within our city boundaries, creates a disadvantage to a large percentage of Livonia homeowners."

Bailey referred to the community survey results which showed 65 percent of LPS parents were opposed to the reconfiguring of grades within the district.

"I suppose that if we want our parents to listen to us, we should start by listening to them," he said. His words were met with rousing applause and a standing ovation.

Other trustees, like Rob Freeman and Dan Lessard, urged that change is necessary to ensure quality education in a future where finances remain uncertain.

Cynthia Markarian supported the plan despite how it will impact her own family. The Markarians live just blocks from Adams Elementary, which is slated to close.

Maria Turchan — whose children attend Adams, Riley and Franklin — left the meeting disappointed. She said her family moved to Livonia for the schools, and may well move out because of these changes.

'SUPPORT EACH OTHER'

Elizabeth Scalzo and her son Ryan, a fifth-grader at Roosevelt, attended the meeting to hear the decision for themselves. Though they live a half-mile from Riley Middle School, Ryan will soon attend Cooper Upper Elementary School for sixth grade, then move to Emerson Middle School and Franklin High School. "I don't like it," he said.

"Most people lost an elementary school," added his mother. "We lost a middle and a high school. A lot of people lost a lot of things."

And Anna Hurley, a Taylor parent, was brought to tears following the announcement. She said she was thankful that Bailey stood up for parents like her, and that he remained open to hearing concerns throughout the process.

But the message from all trustees by the end of the night

was one of working together. Board member Lynda Scheel encouraged parents and the community to stay involved "so we can join forces and make public education the best it can be."

Freeman agreed. "We need to support each other," he said. "We need to do what's best for our kids."

Community members who have started sites like www.citizensforlivoniasfuture.com vowed to keep those Web sites, blogs and message boards going, to keep the community informed as the Legacy changes are put into place.

scasola@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2054

The Legacy Initiative goes into action next fall

Livonia Public Schools' Legacy Initiative divides the district into three sections, with the idea that students stay together as students progress from the upper elementary grades through high school.

Slight changes will be made to current high school attendance boundaries to move students from overcrowded Churchill High School into the less-crowded Franklin High.

Students who live between Five Mile and I-96, and Merriman and Middlebelt will be shifted from Churchill to

Franklin.

However, the plan allows current Churchill students, and their incoming freshmen siblings, to remain at the school until graduation.

The district will lose one of its four middle schools in the process, maintaining middle school populations between 930-1,015 students.

Additional changes for grades 5-12 are as follows:

■ In the north end of the district: Students north of Five Mile Road will attend Riley for grades 5-6; Holmes Middle

School for grades 7-8; and Stevenson High School for grades 9-12.

■ The southwestern portion of the district: Students residing south of Five Mile and west of a line that follows Merriman south to the railroad tracks, then west to Farmington, south on a line to Cowan Road will attend Johnson for grades 5-6; Frost Middle School for grades 7-8; and Churchill for grades 9-12.

■ The southeastern portion of the district: Students residing south of Five Mile and east

of that same line will attend Cooper for grades 5-6; Emerson Middle School for grades 7-8; and Franklin for grades 9-12.

Students in four areas shifted from the rest of their current school communities will be allowed to be grandfathered back into their old boundaries for their time in elementary school. In addition, students who live south of Five Mile, but close to Riley School will get preference in schools of choice selection to attend Riley for grades 4-5.

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FROM PAGE A1

commended the Westland officers for their work on the case.

According to White, "Clothing and evidence taken from his (John's) impounded vehicle positively linked the suspect to the break-ins."

White also noted that mail taken from at least one victim was recovered from John's vehicle.

The 95-year-old Garden City woman told police the intruder had stolen \$400 in cash from her after punching her in the face and knocking her down. The second Garden City victim, an 86-year-old, was too frail to resist and wasn't assaulted, but reported \$300 stolen, White said.

In Garden City 21st District Court, John has been arraigned on a charge of first-degree home invasion, assault with intent to do great bodily harm and being a third-degree habitual offender relating to the 95-year-old victim.

John has been charged with larceny in a building in the theft from the 86-year-old. A \$250,000 cash bond was set in each of the two cases. John is jailed in lieu of bond. A preliminary examination is set for Dec. 12 on the Garden City charges.

John was turned over to Dearborn Heights police Monday after being arraigned on home invasion and assault with intent to do great bodily harm in Inkster.

John had listed a non-existent address on Metro Parkway in Troy as his home.

He previously lived in Inkster. There are at least 17 aliases, including Sony Santio, Alen Buggy John, Tony Anthony John, Gino Lee and Nick Pizzo, listed on his criminal record.

John has several relatives living in Garden City, said White, who identified members of the extended family as travelers.

"These crimes are unlike the normal traveler scam in that there was the use of violence," said White. "He (John) admit-

ted to us that he'd been on a five-day crack binge. He'd use the scam to make entry but because of crack addiction, the patience wasn't there to complete the scam."

POLICE CONCERNED

Due to age of the victims and violence that was occurring, White said officers particularly wanted to make an arrest in the case.

"All of the police departments put the maximum effort into this as soon as the senior citizens were getting knocked around," said White. "None of them suffered permanent physical damage, but all of the victims stated they were frightened."

To avoid being victimized in this type of scam, White said residents should call the police for assistance, if someone they don't know shows up at their home asking for help.

Staff writer Darrell Clem contributed to this story.

rogers@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2103

Salvation Army's kettle campaign near \$38,000

BY JULIE BROWN
STAFF WRITER

The Wayne-Westland Salvation Army's Christmas drive is about halfway through, with some \$38,000 raised as of Tuesday.

This year's goal is \$115,000, said Capt. Matt O'Neil, corps commander with his wife, Mindie. The bell-ringing effort started Nov. 18 and continues through Dec. 24.

"We're not seeing a lot of big donations," he said. "We are doing really good as of now being on target. It always starts picking up through the next few weeks."

Checks payable to the Salvation Army can be mailed to 2300 Venoy, Westland 48186. There's also a great need for volunteer bell ringers to cover some 17 sites in Wayne-Westland.

Volunteers should call (734) 722-3660 and ask for Matt O'Neil or Sandy Kollinger,

Christmas assistant.

"We always need volunteers." Only nine or 10 of the sites are usually covered weekdays, he said, due to lack of volunteers.

People also can go to www.ringbell.org online and follow the instructions to sign up. The Salvation Army requests that volunteers put in a two-hour shift or more.

O'Neil rang the bell with the youth group in late November and will be out again Dec. 17 at Wayne and Warren roads with a group of adult volunteers. He and others find that many are grateful for help received from the Salvation Army.

"Some of the stories you get at the kettle are that the Salvation Army is the greatest organization," said O'Neil, who has heard stories of families being helped during World War II and other times.

"They'll personally say thank you to you. It kind of makes you feel good inside."
In addition to the Red Kettle

campaign, there's a local mail appeal going out this week.

The Salvation Army helps about 5,100 people a year in Wayne, Westland, Inkster, Romulus and New Boston, and helps an additional 460 families at Christmas. Such basic needs as food and utilities are included.

The organization also has Angel Tree and Adopt a Family programs. The Angel Tree is at Westland Center and contains the names of people who need help. Call the Salvation Army's Margaret Gaster at (734) 722-3660 for more information on the programs. The past year has seen great demand for assistance with the Gulf Coast hurricanes and other disasters, but O'Neil is confident that local needs also will be met.

"We've been blessed here at the Salvation Army. We've managed to meet the need that has come in," he said. "We're blessed that we have so much support."

Volunteers needed for tax-aid program

With the help of volunteers, the American Association of Retired Persons' Tax-Aide program provides free tax counseling and preparation services to millions of low- and middle-income taxpayers, with special attention to those age 60 and older.

There is a particular need for counselors in Westland and Canton, AARP Michigan is asking for volunteers to help during the 2006 tax season. Those interested in volunteering should call Karen Kafantaris toll free at the Michigan state office at (866)

227-7448, or e-mail her at kkafantaris@aarp.org.

"You don't have to be a lawyer or accountant to help others through Tax-Aide, just someone who wants to volunteer and who has financial aptitude," said Betty Shaw, AARP Tax-Aide Michigan State Coordinator.

Volunteer tax counselors will assist people in preparing their tax returns and answer questions from Feb. 1 to April 15 at convenient sites in Canton and Westland. A national survey of Tax-Aide volunteers showed that 96 percent were satisfied

with their experience, and most return year after year. Volunteers receive training beginning in January in cooperation with the IRS and the AARP Foundation, which administers the program. In addition, the program assists with electronic filing and online counseling, and also provides tax counseling services to individuals who are unable to leave their homes.

AARP is a nonprofit, non-partisan membership organization dedicated to making life better for people age 50 and over.

Church band takes music to concert level for benefit

BY LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

For the last six months, Mission: Grace has been performing during weekly services held at Garden City Presbyterian Church.

On Saturday, the band will be performing for a bigger audience for the first time at a benefit concert that's open to the public.

"I'm nervous every time I go on stage, but it goes away. This will be our first real concert," said lead guitarist Randy Eiermann. "We hope to make it an annual event in December to benefit a needy family."

Formed about 18 months ago by Eiermann and drummer

Paul Rogers of Canton, Mission: Grace has four musicians and six singers performing music written by group members.

"We do praise music, contemporary music, easy listening, rock, blues, country and hard rock," said Eiermann, who used to play in bar bands before becoming religious. "We play a wide variety. It's music with a message that is Bible-based. It's about life stories."

Performing at the weekly Mustard Seed contemporary worship services, Mission: Grace has been receiving a positive response, Eiermann said.

"We've haven't been to other churches. We've had higher attendance at the Mustard

Seed service," said Eiermann, a Garden City resident.

Also performing at the concert will be Family Tree, a father-and-sons group formed by Mission: Grace member John (JT) Peter.

The church and the Fellowship of Men are hosting the concert which begins at 7 p.m. Saturday. There is no admission charge, but donations will be accepted to the Fellowship of Men to assist a needy family.

"I'd love to see 150 people there, but I'd be satisfied with 100 people," said Eiermann.

Garden City Presbyterian Church is on the west side of Middlebelt just south of Ford. Call (734) 421-7620.

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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 C10.

B
Louise G. Baughman
Baughman, 88, of Green Lake, died Nov. 18.

H
Harold E. Brear
Brear, 90, died Nov. 30.

J
Jack H. Carr
Carr, 98, died Nov. 29.

R
Rene J. Colton
Colton, 43, died Dec. 4.

E
Rev. Dr. Steven M. Eggers
Eggers, 50, died Dec. 2.

S
Sister Mary Coralita Ellerbrock, RSM
Ellerbrock, 90, died December 3.

K

P
Peter Kokenakes
Kokenakes, 85, died Nov. 30.

L
George Remick Libby Jr.
Libby, 90, died Dec. 3.

E
Eileen Frances Little
Little, 89, of Westland, died Dec. 4.

M
Tobin Morbach
Morbach, 50, formerly of West Bloomfield, died Nov. 29.

W
Harriet Haynes Robison Weaver
Weaver, 80, of Harbor Springs, formerly of Detroit and Birmingham, died Nov. 23.

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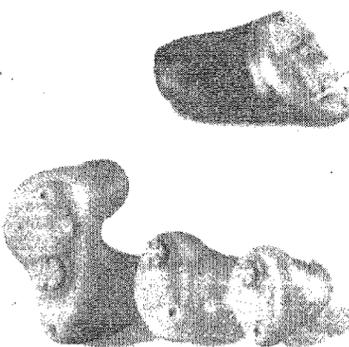
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Israeli consul meets with Detroit media

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
STAFF WRITER

Before addressing a group of Detroit area journalist, Barukh Binah, consul general of Israel for the Midwest, said that for many American Jews news about Israel is "local news."

Binah was being introduced recently to Detroit media by the Jewish Community Council based in Bloomfield Hills at a luncheon at Opus I in downtown Detroit. The news from Israel is that an early election is scheduled for March 28 that might have a big impact on relations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

"Israel has begun the political season," Binah said. "Of course in Israel, the political season is always broiling."

The current coalition government formed by the conservative Likud Party collapsed when Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, former Likud leader, bolted the party to create a more centrist party, Kadima or Forward. Sharon disbanded the Knesset, Israel's parliament, and called for the March election, about eight months before the regularly scheduled election date. The other major party in the country is the center-left Labor Party, under new leader Amir Peretz. Binah said Israel has about 10 active political parties, including two Arab parties.

"It is time to concentrate on social and economic issues," Binah said. He said the problem for Likud will be to present their "social and economic credentials."

On Wednesday former Prime Minister Shimon Perez resigned from the Labor Party to support Sharon's new party.

On the key issue of Palestine, Binah said all the major parties agree on a "two-state" solution, creating a separate Palestine in the Gaza and West Bank areas. He said they all agree on a strong defense of Israel's borders and they all agree on preserving a united Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

The news from Israel is that an early election is scheduled for March 28.

In recent months, Israel has moved Israeli settlers out of Gaza at gunpoint, which drew strong opposition from many Jews throughout the world.

"Disengagement from Gaza was a painful sight for everyone," Binah said. "They (the settlers) felt they were fulfilling the call of the country, which was correct but the call of the country has changed."

Binah the Israeli Army did a good job of handling the evacuation of settlers with "sensitivity."

He said the problem for the future is develop a working relationship with Palestinians.

"We have to counter terror while maintaining dialogue," he said. "Your country has been exposed to terrorism, not because of what America has done but because of what America is."

He said Israel recognizes its special debt to the United States for help in protecting its security.

As counsel general for the Midwest, Binah said he was interested in building better trade relations with Michigan and other states in his region.

In response to a question, Binah touted Israel as a diverse tourist destination. As a center for several world religions, Israel draws pilgrims from throughout the world to religious sites.

But Binah said the country offers everything from the desert culture of the Negev to skiing in the Golan Heights to the Bauhaus architecture and nightlife of Tel Aviv.

"And Israelis are very welcoming people," he said.

He said recent increased security measures make Israel a safe destination for travelers.

hgallagher@hometownlife.com
(734)953-2149

Listings for the Community Calendar should be submitted in writing. They can be mailed to Sue Mason at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, by fax at (734) 591-7279 or by e-mail at smason@oe.hometownlife.com. For more information, call (734) 953-2112.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Breakfast with Santa

Enjoy Breakfast with Santa Saturday, Dec. 17, at the Wayne Community Center, 4635 Howe, Wayne. There will be two sessions - 10-11 a.m. and 11:20 a.m. to 12:20 p.m. Breakfast includes pancakes, sausage and juice. There also will be arts and crafts, face painting and clowns. Cost is \$4 for residents and \$5 for non-residents. Children age 2 and under are free. Pictures with Santa cost \$2. Tickets are on sale at the Wayne Community Center. Call (734) 721-7400 for more information.

Christmas opera

The Children's Ministry of New Hope Baptist Church will perform a free Christmas opera, *FA LA LA MOO!*, at 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 17, at the church, 33630 Michigan Ave., Wayne. The opera is the story of Jesus' birth told from the animals' perspective. For more information, call Children's Ministry Director Allyn Verbal at (734) 728-2180.

Holiday bazaar

Get your holiday gifts at the Wayne County Commission's eighth annual Holiday Bazaar at the Wayne County Building in downtown Detroit on Friday, Dec. 9. Jewelry, unique crafts and clothing will be on display 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the atrium of the building at 600 Randolph. Proceeds from vendor booth rentals to benefit local non-profits.

Starfish programs

Starfish Family Services Great Parents, Great Start teachers help prepare children, ages 2-4 years for preschool and school in their own home. Fun, learning activities help children grow and learn and parents learn tips, too. The program is open to families in western Wayne County, if they qualify. Call (734) 595-0411, Ext. 104, for more information. Starfish also has an ongoing, free Pregnancy Support Group, offering pregnant women a chance to talk with other pregnant women, meet with a prenatal nurse, hear baby's heart beat and learn about nutrition, pain management and other topics. Groups to be held in Wayne, Westland and Inkster areas. To register, (734) 595-0411, Ext. 104.

Skating classes

The Wayne Parks and Recreation Department will offer its second win-

ter session of home school physical education and swim program 1-3 p.m. Jan. 9-Feb. 22. Call Nathan at (734) 721-7400 for more information.

ORGANIZATIONS

Vietnam Vets

The Plymouth-Canton Vietnam Veterans of America, Chapter 528, meet at 7:30 p.m. the second Monday of every month at the Plymouth VFW Post 6695, on S. Mill Street, just north of Ann Arbor Road. If you served in the U.S. military between 1964 and 1975, even, if not, "in country" (combat zone) you are still eligible to become a member. Visit the Web site at www.mihometown.com/oe/PlymouthCantonVVA for more information.

Friends of library

The Friends of the William P. Faust Public Library organization meets at 2 p.m. the second Tuesday of each month at the library, 6123 Central City Parkway. Call (734) 326-6123. Meetings last about one hour and are open to the public. The group also holds a book sale during regular library hours at the library.

In Harmony

The Wayne Chapter of the Barbershop Harmony Society meets at 7:30 p.m. Tuesdays at Kirk of Our Savior Presbyterian Church, 36660 Cherry Hill, west of Wayne Road, Westland. Gentlemen interested in the chapter's Renaissance Chorus or who enjoy quartetting can call membership chairman Bob Wolf at (734) 421-1652, or attend a rehearsal.

Civil Air Patrol

Emergency service is just one of the congressionally mandated missions of the Civil Air Patrol, which includes ground and air search-and-rescue operations. The Civil Air Patrol, which is the official U.S. Air Force auxiliary, is made up of civilian volunteers. To learn more about CAP or training as an air crew or ground team member, contact the Willow Run Composite Squadron (MI-260). Call Capt. Dane Hansen, deputy commander/recruiter, at (734) 485-3021 or visit the Web site www.members.home.net/capilberators/.

Habitat help

The Western Wayne affiliate of Habitat for Humanity is seeking volunteers to help with building homes, office duties and fund-raising. No experience necessary. Training will be provided. For information, call (734) 459-7744.

Veteran's Haven

Veteran's Haven operates a car, boat, camper and real estate-donation program. Donations are tax-deductible. For information, call (734) 728-0527. Food is distributed to veterans once a month throughout the month and there is a supplemental food program 9 a.m. to noon Wednesdays. The Veteran Haven's Outreach Center 4924 S. Wayne Road two blocks south of Annapolis in Wayne. Any honorably discharged Veteran that is in need or homeless and wants a better quality of life can call (734) 728-0527.

Pet-A-Pet

The Pet-A-Pet animal visitation program provides pet therapy with the

help of volunteers. Pets should be friendly, well-behaved and must have current vaccinations. There is a \$5 membership fee. Volunteer opportunities are available at Hope Nursing Care Center, 6:30 p.m. the third Tuesday of the month (Marie Johnson, (734) 326-1200), and Marquette House, 10:30 a.m. the second Wednesday of the month (Lorna Johnson, (734) 425-1681). There are also openings at Garden City Hospital, 3 p.m. the fourth Thursday of the month (Stacy Suida, (734) 458-4392).

Zonta Club

The Zonta Club of Northwest Wayne County, a service club to advance the status of women, meets every month on the fourth Monday at the Holiday Inn, Livonia. For more information, call Pat Harris at (734) 420-2920.

Franklin PTSA

The Franklin High School PTSA is seeking members. Membership is open to those who care about the schools and the community. Members need not have a student in the school. Price is \$3 for students; \$5 for adults. Checks should be made payable to Franklin PTSA and sent to 31000 Joy, Livonia MI 48150.

Tutorial program

A tutoring program for students is offered at the Salvation Army Wayne-Westland Corps Community Center, 2300 Venoy in Westland. The program, 3:45-5:15 p.m. Mondays and Tuesdays, is for students 9 and older in Wayne, Westland and Romulus. For information on participating or volunteering, call Tyrone Peterson, (734) 722-3660. Tutors need to have at least a high school education.

M.O.M.S.

M.O.M.S. Club of Canton/ Westland is a nonprofit support group for stay-at-home mothers. There are weekly events, Mom's Night Out, age-oriented play groups and more. For information, call Wendy, (734) 398-6957.

FOR YOUR HEALTH

TOPS

TOPS (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly) meets every Wednesday at St. John's Episcopal Church, 555 S. Wayne Road, Westland. Weigh-in is 6:30-7:15 p.m., with the meeting 7:30-8:30 p.m. For more information, call Rosalie at (734) 728-0299.

Menopause & More

A Menopause & More support group for women meets 7-9 p.m. the first Wednesday of the month in Classroom 2 of the west addition of the Marian Women Center of St. Mary Mercy Hospital, 36475 Five Mile, Livonia. No registration is necessary, and the group is free of charge. For more information, call (734) 655-1100.

Support group

A support group for people with chronic illness meets on Fridays every other week, at the Westside Mental Health Services, 32932 W. Warren, Suite 103, Westland. The support group is a service of Awareness Counseling Services. There is a \$10 for each meeting which will be facilitated by a professional. For more information, call (734) 513-8295 or (313) 562-2800.

AIM

Anxiety or panic attacks? AIM (Agoraphobics in Motion) meets at 7:30 p.m. Thursdays at Faith Lutheran Church, 30000 Five Mile, between Middlebelt and Merriman in Livonia. AIM is a support group for those working on recovery from anxiety disorder or phobias. Call (248) 547-0400.

Grief support

Angela Hospice offers ongoing grief support groups every second and fourth Tuesday of the month. All groups are free of charge and open to the community. Call bereavement coordinator Ruth Favor at Angela Hospice, (734) 464-7810.

Childbirth classes

Garden City Hospital, on Inkster Road at Maplewood, is sponsoring classes for parents of newborns, weekend childbirth instruction, a refresher childbirth education course and a new support group for expectant teens. For information on programs, call (734) 458-4330.

Childbirth Association

Classes for childbirth preparation are offered at several Wayne County locations. Morning and evening classes are available. Registering new classes every month. Newborn care classes and Cesarean birth preparation are also offered. Call (734) 459-7477.

Fibromyalgia

The Garden City area chapter of the Great Lakes Fibromyalgia and CFS Association Support Group meets 1-3 p.m. the first Thursday of each month at Merriman Road Baptist Church on Merriman south of Ford. There are guest speakers and discussion on a variety of topics. There is no membership fee, however a small donation is greatly appreciated. For additional information, call Tina Wing at (734) 338-2226 or Lucy Rowley at (734) 462-1768.

HISTORIC

Pioneer trek

The Nankin Township Pioneer Trek has been designed to introduce travelers to the history of the area. Travelers will visit sites that affected the development of Westland as a community. Those who complete the trek will receive an embroidered patch. To start the trek, first visit the Westland Historical Museum and pick up a patch. The museum is at 857 N. Wayne Road and is open 1-4 p.m. Saturdays, except before a holiday. The trek is sponsored by the Westland Historical Commission and the Friends of the Westland Museum. For information, call (734) 326-1110.

Friends of Eloise

The Friends of Eloise group meets 7 p.m. the third Tuesday of the month in the dining room of the Kay Beard Building, on Michigan between Middlebelt and Merriman. All are welcome. For information, call Jo Johnson, (734) 522-3918.

Friends of Museum

Friends of the Westland Historical Museum meet at 7 p.m. each month except December at the Collins House, located at the museum complex, 857 N. Wayne Road. Call Jim Franklin at (734) 595-8119. Everyone is welcome.

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NAACP meeting

The NAACP Western Wayne County Branch will have its annual *Let's Get Acquainted* meeting at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 15, at the Smith Chapel A.M.E. Church, 3505 Walnut St., in Inkster.

The meeting is open to those who want to become involved in or learn more about the NAACP and the local branch. Refreshments will be served after the meeting.

For more information call (734) 223-1739.

Flu shots

Garden City Hospital will offer flu and pneumonia shots 9-11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.-3:30 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 8, and 3-7 p.m. Friday, Dec. 9.

Vaccinations will be given at the Harrison Health and Education Center, 6701 Harrison, Garden City. The cost is \$15 for flu shots and \$25 for pneumonia shots.

Walk-ins are welcome, but appointments are recommended. For more information or to schedule your appointment, call Garden City Hospital Community Education at (734) 458-4330.

One-stop shopping

How would you like to get all of your holiday shopping done at once while getting free baby-sitting for the kids?

No, it's not too good to be true. It's the Holiday Shopping Night at Taft-Galloway Elementary School, 4035 Gloria, Wayne, on Tuesday, Dec. 13.

The sale will be 6-8 p.m., and admission and baby-sitting is free. In addition to a bake sale and book fair, there will be handcrafted items like blankets, jewelry, scarves and ornaments. Vendors include Creative Memories, Longaberger, Mary

Kay Cosmetics, Dee's Purses, Arbonne, Pampered Chef and Home Interiors.

Cancer fund-raiser

A bowling fund-raiser is planned to help 62-year-old cancer victim Henry Grim experience his dream of going to Disney World.

Grim always dreamed of going to Disney World, but work and other obligations stood in the way. Now, the Belleville resident, who was diagnosed with lung cancer in 2000 and who is currently on hospice care, finally has a chance to realize his dream.

His family is hosting a bowling benefit noon to 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 11, at Westland Bowl, on Wayne Road north of Ford. All proceeds will finance Grim's trip.

Tickets are \$20 and include three games, pizza and shoe rental.

Surplus food

The city of Westland will distribute surplus federal food 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 22, at the Dorsey Community Center, where city residents north of Michigan Avenue should pick up their food.

Residents south of Michigan Avenue always pick up their commodities on the third Monday of each month at St. James United Methodist Church, 30055 Annapolis between Henry Ruff and Middlebelt.

Seniors in Taylor Towers should call their building manager for information about their day of distribution.

Food distributed in December will include beef stew, apple juice and instant potatoes. For more information call the Dorsey Center's surplus food hotline at (734) 595-0366.

The program is administered

by the Wayne County Office of Senior Services.

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.

Doggy gift

Ever visited relatives during holidays only to experience Fido jumping on you for attention or Fluffy stealing food from your plate?

This year, the Michigan Humane Society is asking people to consider giving a gift certificate for high-quality dog training classes at the Michigan Humane Society Pet Education Center.

Classes are offered year-round at a variety of skill levels in Westland, Oak Park and

Rochester Hills.

Gift certificates are available in \$10 increments and can be purchased by calling the Pet Education Center at (248) 650-1059, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The Pet Education Center offers a variety of dog training classes based on effective and humane techniques. They are designed to "bring out the good in your dog" by teaching house manners that help ensure a joyful and lasting relationship between a dog and his family. Dogs learn many different commands and skills, including how to behave politely with family and strangers, walk nicely on a leash, come when called, sit and stay.

Daytime, evening and weekend classes are available and run one hour per week for seven weeks. A 20 percent discount off the \$150 class fee is available for dogs adopted from any shelter, placement group or animal control agency. The class schedule can be found online at www.michiganhumane.org or www.goodindog.org.

Shelters across the United States cite behavior problems as a major reason companion animals are surrendered to shelters, regardless of their pedigree or whether they were obtained from a breeder, pet store, animal shelter or elsewhere. The Michigan Humane Society established the Pet Education Center in 1997 to help socialize and train companion animals so they would be more likely to

stay permanently in their adoptive homes.

Christmas dinner

Gethsemane Missionary Baptist Church is inviting the community to a complimentary Christmas dinner 3-7 p.m. Christmas Eve, Dec. 24, at the church 29066 Eton St., Westland.

Reservations can be made by calling (734) 721-2557 by Dec. 14. Transportation also is available upon request.

Singers needed

Do you like singing Christmas and religious music? Kirk of Our Savior on Cherry Hill west of Wayne Road, Westland, is looking for singers for its adult (ages 13 and up) traditional choir for the Christmas season and beyond. All Christian faiths and all voice ranges are welcome. Rehearsals are at 7 p.m. Thursdays. For more information, call Tim at (734) 718-8733 or the church at (734) 728-1088.

Senior dinner dance

The Wayne Ford Civic League is hosting a senior dinner dance noon Sunday, Dec. 18, at the hall, 1645 N. Wayne Road. There will be a full buffet dinner, beer, wine, coffee and pop and dancing to the music from Solitaire.

Participants must be 60 years or older to attend. Tickets are \$8 for league members and \$10 for non-members. Memberships are on sale year round and are only \$5 for seniors. Tickets are

available at the door. Call (734) 728-5010 for more information.

Share the warmth

Westland Shopping Center and Cotton Incorporated, the marketing and research company representing upland cotton, are sponsoring the Share the Warmth program to help those affected by this year's hurricanes.

Shoppers can present receipts from cotton merchandise purchases totaling \$150 or more to the Westland Shopping Center Customer Information Center between now and Dec. 23, and a new cotton blanket will be donated to the Salvation Army on the participating shopper's behalf. The cotton blankets will be distributed to those affected by the hurricanes.

For more information, call the center's Customer Information Center at (734) 421-0291.

Holiday party

Westland senior citizens are invited to the Holiday Extravaganza, a Christmas party, at the Westland senior Friendship Center, Thursday, Dec. 15. Doors will open at 11:00 a.m., with the "fabulous feast" will be served at noon. There will be a chance to have pictures taken with Santa and Mrs. Claus, dancing to the music of the Tommie James Trio and gifts galore. Tickets cost \$8 for members and \$10 for guests. They're available at the Friendship center, 1119 N. Newburgh, Westland.

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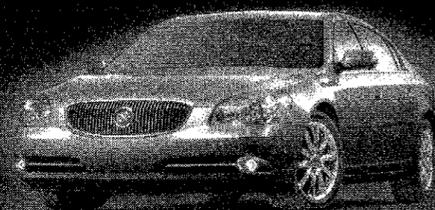
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OUR VIEWS

Aftermath: Time to work together

Now that the decision is made, it's time to move on. The Livonia Public Schools Board of Education's 6-1 vote Monday to approve the Legacy Initiative may have left a bad taste in the mouth of many — perhaps even most — people in the district. There were many missteps of judgment in how this proposal was put together and there are flaws and questions in the details revealed so far about the plan. There is real hurt across this community and we hope school officials learned some lessons here.

All that being said, it's time for our community to get past the other options they may have preferred and start the process of joining with their teachers and principals in making this massive overhaul work for the children of the district. This board isn't going back or reconsidering this issue. It's settled.

For all the concerns raised in the past six weeks, it's worth noting that even opponents often took the time to thank the Demographics Committee members for putting in countless, thankless hours of work. And the administration and board did put an emphasis on giving the community a chance to respond. It's also worth noting the extra effort by a handful of administrators who sat down Friday night to answer questions by a group of 10 parents — and then putting it all on cable television.

Before the decision was finalized Monday, parents joined together to research, share information and try their best to lobby the school board. They did a great job. But no matter what your position, people must know that committee members, school administrators and board members were trying to do what they thought is right. We do not support the talk of a recall now; residents who want to take this issue to the ballot box will only have to wait until the school board election in May.

For those who will remain part of this district, now is the time to put the anger behind us and use that energy to find ways to make this transition work. Yes, we expect parents to keep a discerning eye on how this whole change will take place. But we should all begin with a positive attitude.

We've heard how our kids take cues from their parents. Now that this decision has been made, its success and the success of our children will depend to a large extent on the support of parents across the district.

State must back up plans with funding

The young girl packing groceries picked up the newspaper being purchased by the shopper. "Great," she said. "Just what I need — more science classes."

The high school student was referring to a story about new graduation requirements that were recently proposed by the state superintendent of education. And, yes, they are great news.

While that student wasn't enthused about the prospect, more science classes — and English and math, among others — are just what today's young men and women need. It's no longer enough just to try to keep kids in school. We have to give them a reason to stay there, one that replaces what, in some cases, has amounted to little more than baby-sitting.

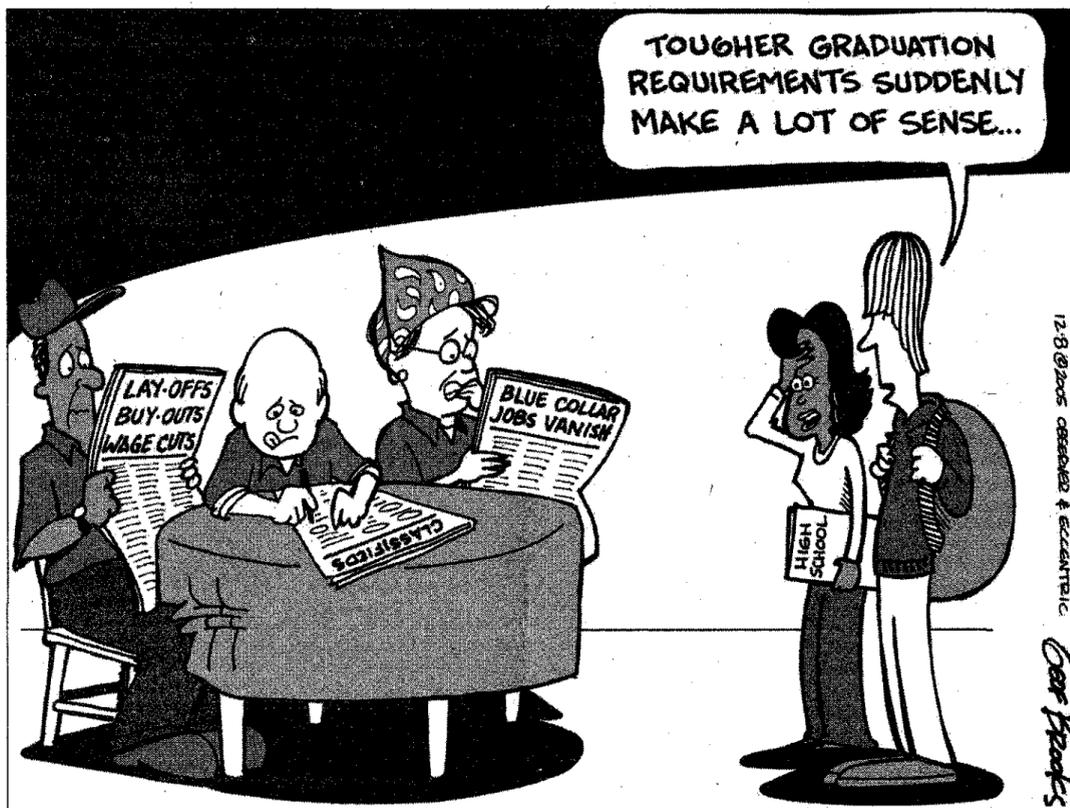
Students need the knowledge and skills to become productive adults, a goal that can only benefit the state's economy, as well.

The proposed requirements include 3½ years in English; three years in social studies; two in science and math; one semester in health; one year in physical education; and two years in a combination of foreign language, fine arts and career and technical education.

While many local districts come close to these standards already, the proposals, which will be discussed by the state board of education Dec. 13, set the bar higher for all districts. As such, they deserve a favorable review by the school board and approval in some fashion by the state Legislature to amend the school code.

Some parents, however, are expressing concern for those students who won't be on a college path. Students will always have a need for life skills classes, but as one high school automechanics teacher said recently, even learning those skills requires more high-tech savvy. For instance, he said, there are no more shop manuals. The information is now all online.

The state can change the core curriculum all it wants, but if parents don't embrace the changes and if funds aren't available to implement them, it's doubtful that their children will succeed in their educational careers.



LETTERS

Another flu shot fiasco

We're wondering where is the outrage by the public regarding the shortage of flu shots again. For the last three years, including 2005, unlike any other years, we along with countless other citizens had difficulties getting our annual flu shot. What is the problem?

After last year's fiasco, we were told that in 2005, there will be no problem in getting a flu shot. Define "no problem." This year was worse than the previous two years. The first year, we called around and after several weeks found the vaccine at a local hospital, that also had difficulties obtaining the serum.

Last year, after numerous calls, the Wayne County Health Department was able to obtain the vaccine and they were taking people by appointment. This year after calling since October, we finally found a local hospital that posted dates in our local paper and finally, we got our flu shots the third week in November.

Locally, there were some senior centers and/or supermarkets that had vaccines. We waited to allow higher risk people to get their shots, never thinking that this year would be worse than the last two. And of course, they, too, ran out quickly.

Prior to that, every early October, we simply called our doctor, went to the office and got our flu shots. That's the way life used to be. What happened?

This year, early October, we placed our routine call and our doctor's office told us that even though they, along with everyone else, placed their orders for the vaccine, they would not get their order until November. After continued calls through mid-November, our doctor's office did finally get their vaccine. It was gone in two days. That was it.

Something is drastically wrong. If we can't any longer get our flu shots, what will happen in case of a pandemic? Everyone should call their legislators and express their outrage at a routine health care program that went "amok." We already placed all of our calls to all of our legislators. Unless constituents speak up, this problem may just fall into the mix of loss of pensions, loss of jobs, loss of medical insurance and loss of medical care.

This no longer is the country we once knew.

James and Mary Murphy
Westland

'Tis the season to be jolly!

I recently read an interesting article regarding charities that are supposed to be helping veterans, but only pennies of every dollar donated actually going to help these ex-service men and women.

My name is Vince Berna, I am the founder/president of an organization located in the city of Wayne that has been around for the last 11 years and has helped thousands of vets during hard times. I'm not writing this letter in any attempts to knock or chastise any other organizations and make us look good, but merely to state the facts of the matter. I'm not making this stuff up, check it

out for yourself.

Out of every dollar's worth of goods donated to us, surplus items and/or actual money, 90 percent goes directly to help veterans in need. I say this with much pride.

Our commitment and dedication over the last decade have proven to be fruitful for veterans that have served and we have not forgotten. We have given away more than 1 million pounds of food, 260 vehicles, three fully furnished mobile homes that made homeless vets homeowners and tons of miscellaneous clothing, medical equipment, furniture and other items.

In addition, we thank city of Westland officials, Wayne Metro Community Action Agency and the U.S. Department of HUD for recognizing Veterans Haven and the good work we do for veterans. We also operate two facilities, one in Wayne and the other in Westland, with a supportive/transitional housing program to help the homeless get back on their feet. This has been accomplished to date with federal grants in the amount of \$570,000.

It's very upsetting to read about other veteran organizations that claim to be helping veterans when, in reality, they are lining their pockets with cash from the blood, sweat and tears shed by fellow vets. Through their actions/exploitation, they have dishonored the word veteran and have shown no integrity.

I am not naive, nor do I live in a fantasy world, I have witnessed many times "vets getting over on other vets" for their own financial gain; this is very disheartening, to say the least. I know by federal law, the IRS tax code, these organizations that have been granted a 501(c)(3) charitable status are required to give at least "the largest share of the pie" to the people they claim to be helping to maintain their charitable status. This is not happening and there are no laws within the our state that prohibits this type of "racketeering/profitteering" from the despair of less fortunate individuals.

I've been saying this for 10 years to anyone that will listen and wanted to be educated regarding the realm of "charitable giving," including other car donation programs. Perhaps, it's time for our state Legislature to take the appropriate steps to correct this situation in Michigan.

I would strongly suggest that if someone cares enough to want to help others, take the time to check out the charity of your choosing before making a donation. You can check us out with the state of Michigan Attorney General's Charitable Trust Division, Guidestar.com, vetshaveninfo.org, or call (734) 728-0527.

We have had another great satisfying year of "Vets Helping Vets." From all of us at Veterans Haven Inc., thanks for your support and have a safe and happy holiday season.

Vince Berna
president, Veterans Haven Inc.

Say 'enough' to McCotter

At a "coffee chat" last year with Rep. Thaddeus McCotter, I remarked to him that I would like a representative whose

knees wouldn't buckle when Tom DeLay came into view. Well, on Nov. 18 my wobbly-kneed buddy buckled under yet again. That day, in the wee hours of the morning after several hours of House Republican leaders pleading, cajoling and arm-twisting their Republican caucus, they finally got the last vote they needed to pass legislation they called the deficit reduction bill by a 217-215 vote.

McCotter's arms remained unbruised, however, as he voted for this in the first round. In short, what this bill does is cut \$50 billion from popular programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, student loans and food stamps for the poor. To show that they are not completely heartless, these Republicans inserted a provision that the children of anyone cut off food stamps would get free school lunches. It should be noted that not a single Democrat supported this despicable bill.

What makes this legislation especially breathtaking in its audacity is the fact that Congress is poised to give another \$70 billion in tax cuts to the rich after Thanksgiving, thus having the effect of adding another \$20 billion to the deficit. To quote *Washington Post* columnist E.J. Dionne, "But the Republican leadership does not want to revisit tax cuts. It wants to keep control over the budget within the Republican Party, which is dominated by the right wing..." (*Washington Post*, Nov. 22, 2005).

To those who have supported McCotter and figure on continuing to do so, I would just like to ask if this is what Jesus Christ taught — to take from the poor and give to the rich. If you examine McCotter's voting record, you will find that he has supported other bills such as the bankruptcy bill and the Medicare drug prescription bills, which are huge financial windfalls for large corporations. Do you people not see that the middle class is being eroded in this country and that this Republican-led Congress is doing it to you? Do you people have to lose your jobs, health care and pensions before you say "enough?" Wake up and call McCotter at (734) 632-0314 and tell him to stop the insanity. Then let's let him hear from all of us next November.

Kenneth Hymes
Redford Township

SHARE YOUR OPINIONS

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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QUOTABLE

"Officer Percin has proven himself to be a valuable asset to the Westland Police Department. He serves as living proof that one man can have a positive effect on the safety and quality of life for the citizens of the city of Westland."

— Police Chief Daniel Pfannes, talking about the department's Officer of the Year, Kenneth Percin

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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.

Cutting taxes won't solve all that ails Michigan's economy

Amid the harsh squabbling and political posturing pouring forth from Lansing's capitol dome, one persistent theme has been sounding loud and clear: cut business taxes.

They've been talking ad nauseam about the subject since Gov. Jennifer Granholm proposed a couple of years ago a far-reaching overhaul of the Single Business Tax (SBT), the state's main levy on businesses. It raises about \$2 billion a year for the state.

Talk reached a crescendo last month when it looked as though the governor and Republican legislative leaders had agreed on a tax-cut-and-jobs-growth package.

That fell apart in a spasm of partisan finger pointing. Granholm now has her "21st Century Jobs Fund" under way, funded by something like another \$2 billion in tobacco settlement money.

Legislative Republicans are now in a year-end frenzy pushing a new interim tax plan. It would give manufacturers a credit to the SBT equal to 15 percent of the property taxes they pay on plant and equipment. That would cost the state treasury around \$500 million.

Naturally, nobody is talking about how they would plug this particular hole in an already precarious state budget.

When it comes to the long haul, however, the change can't hurt much and might even help a little. After all, with General Motors planning to close a bunch of plants and Delphi in bankruptcy, a little marginal tax relief from the state might make a difference to some business trying to decide whether or not to close plants in Michigan.

But tinkering around the edges of the state's tax structure isn't going to do much to help us overcome the worst economic crisis since, well, the Great Depression.

The restructuring now sweeping through the auto industry and the very, very high-stakes negotiations now going on between General Motors, Delphi Corp. and the United Auto Workers union are going to proceed largely unaffected by anything our political masters in Lansing might do or say. That's how top business experts see it.

For example, consider the cuts in the SBT. The Big Three automakers and their Tier One suppliers — like Delphi — pay the bulk of the it. But what nobody seems to remember is that over the past five years, SBT taxes have been cut by a total of \$1.5 billion.

The auto industry's share of this big tax break doesn't seem to have done much to stave off what's now taking place. Delphi is in bankruptcy; GM and the Ford Motor Co. are losing billions.

The saddest part of what's going on in Lansing: The lemming-like kowtowing to the new dogma that any solution to our economic ills must include tax cuts. A hard look at the evidence shows just how silly this shibboleth really is.

Here's some data from a soon-to-be released report compiled by Michigan Future, Inc., a highly regarded economic think tank. By the way, it uses the same tools as does the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce — taxes per capita, taxes per employed resident and taxes as a percentage of personal income:

■ Michigan is not a high-tax state. In fact, Michigan today is slightly below the national average. That's a switch from 1993, when the state embarked on its tax cutting program. Back then, Michigan's tax burden ranked a bit above the national average.

■ Has cutting taxes since 1993 improved Michigan's economic performance? Nope. Our per-capita personal income has dropped by 2.3 percent, while employment declined by 7.6 percent.

■ Are other high-performance states suffering because they are high-tax states? Again, no. Growth in per-capita personal income for high-tax states (except for California and Colorado) has outstripped that for low-tax states.

■ Conversely, the five states with the lowest per-capita tax burden — Tennessee, Alabama, South Dakota, Oregon and South Carolina — are all below the national average in per-capita personal income growth since 1993.

Data recently released by the U.S. Census show the states with the highest median household income are Connecticut, New Jersey, Maryland, Massachusetts and New Hampshire.

What is common to all these states is the country's best-educated populations, good universities, knowledge-based economies and easy access to amenities like recreation and culture.

Insightful readers will realize at once that cutting taxes bleeds money from exactly these essential components for a successful economy in a globalized 21st century. Or put another way: We could save money in the short run if we didn't insist on clean drinking water.

Anyone want to try that? Lou Glazer, president of Michigan Future, puts it succinctly: "When you actually look at the data comparing tax levels to a state's relative prosperity, there is no evidence that low taxes lead to high economic performance. Indeed, it may well be that the opposite is true."

Here's the first thing we all need to do: Stop. Squint. Think. Substituting economic idiocy driven by knee-jerk ideology for a hard look at the facts is no way to get us out of the jam we're in.

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

Ornaments ignore diversity

A recent trip to Bronner's Christmas Wonderland revealed something ugly about this country — manufacturers largely ignore people of color when it comes to Christmas Ornaments.

I went to Bronner's with my fiancée, Robin, to buy decorations for what will be our first Christmas tree. We needed just about everything for a tree but tops on the list was an ornament to honor Ndeye, 6, a little girl half a world away in Senegal, Africa. Robin and I sponsor Ndeye through the Christian Children's Fund. We've heard from her through a letter but don't know much about the life she lives in Senegal. That fact doesn't remove her from our thoughts and we wanted an ornament for Ndeye.

It seemed like a simple request.



Larry Ruehlen

For those of you who haven't been to Bronner's, it's in Frankenmuth and claims to be the biggest Christmas decor store in the world. Company literature boasts 50,000 items for sale including decorations and gifts from 70 nations.

Our search began at the west entrance. First in our basket was fake icicles at \$6.99 a dozen. Second was a tree skirt and third was a small nativity scene. The ornament we were after had yet to appear. To be fair to Bronner's, the majority of its decorations don't depict people at all. Reindeer, snowflakes, jingle bells and lights of all kinds are for sale as well as ornaments of every shape and color. The biggest problem was that whenever an ornament had a person on it, that person was invariably as white as all the fake snow decorating the more 90,000 square feet of retail space at Bronner's. After an hour we were half way through the store and couldn't find a dark face on a single ornament.

We then saw a black couple walking around Bronner's with an empty shopping basket. I didn't know what they were shopping for and didn't ask but the dearth of ornaments with people of color had my mind racing. Just what does a parent tell a child who asks where the black Santa ornaments are?

And what about the angels that top Christmas trees all around the land. If a minority child doesn't see black, Hispanic or Asian angels standing alongside the white cherubs, does the child think only whites go to heaven? That notion is silly to adults, but what do young children think?

I'm not politically correct and don't claim to have close friends of every ethnicity, yet I was still bothered.

Questions lingered. Isn't this America where everyone is supposed to be equal? Don't companies spend

millions of dollars marketing Hip Hop culture to white youth? If it's hip for white kids to act black, why can't a black family buy an ornament with someone on it that looks familiar? I'm not talking about ornaments with African themes either, I'm talking about depictions of everyday life including people of color. Think of it as Andy Warhol with a twist of Romare Beardon.

Our last hope was Bronner's section of Christmas decorations from around the world. After nearly two hours of looking, we fittingly found an ornament to honor Ndeye in the section labeled Africa. According to the U.S. Census, this country has 39 million blacks and another 39 million Hispanics, yet the only ornament we could find representing a person of color came from Africa — I was stunned.

We talked about the ornament search on the hour drive home, and I began to feel despair for our country. We have come so far in so many ways but in a very basic quality-of-life issue like offering representative Christmas decorations, we are making a pathetic effort.

With that initial thought in mind I dropped an e-mail to Bronner's Merchandising Director Anne Koehler.

"Our buying team does try very hard to have all ethnic back grounds represented," she said. "We often request our vendors to come up with more and better product. We did find more in 2005. We carried a line of black children in various activities (playing sports, ballerinas, and the like). We also had a new Hispanic line of trims. We also found sources in Africa for some new ornaments and nativity scenes made there. We do have a nice selection of ethnic angels (treetops & trims) and also Santas. We really are trying! But to answer your question specifically, no, the product is not readily available..."

Koehler said that perhaps the store had sold out of some of the ethnic items it once offered but that it would try to do better next year.

To put things in perspective, people of color represent nearly 32 percent of the U.S. population. That's a whole bunch of customers the ornament industry is shamefully ignoring and diminishing.

I asked a black co-worker about the situation to see if I was angry over nothing. She smiled and said most black people don't get upset about such things because they were raised shopping in stores that only carried ornaments with whites on them. And no, black children don't believe Santa and all the angels in heaven are white, she said.

You'd never know that shopping for Christmas ornaments.

Larry Ruehlen is the editor of the *West Bloomfield Eccentric*. He can be reached by phone at (248) 901-2556 or by e-mail at lruehlen@hometownlife.com.

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Tom Hawley named journalist of year

Photographer Tom Hawley was named the *Observer & Eccentric's* Journalist of the Year for 2005.

Hawley's selection was announced Dec. 1 at the O&E's annual Journalist of the Year breakfast at the Townsend Hotel in Birmingham. Detroit Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick was the guest speaker.

Hawley has worked at the *Observer & Eccentric* for 10 years. He previously worked at the *Monroe Evening News* and Monroe County Community College. His primary coverage area has been for the *Westland* and *Garden City Observers*, but he has covered assignments throughout the *Observer & Eccentric* circulation area.

He was nominated by Sue Mason, editor of the *Westland* and *Garden City Observers*; Dave Varga, editor of the *Livonia* and *Redford Observers*; Dan O'Meara, sports editor of the *Farmington Observer*; and Tim Smith, sports editor of the *Redford* and *Garden City Observers*.

"He has a keen eye and a creative mind and makes a sow's ear of an assignment look like a silk purse," Mason wrote in her nominating letter.

Dave Varga wrote, "Tom's true value as a journalist must include his ability to organize, plan and find the significance of things going on in our communities."

"I'm honored to receive this



BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Photographer Tom Hawley thanks *Observer & Eccentric* editorial staff after receiving the O&E's Journalist of the Year Award. Behind him are his nominators, Sue Mason, *Westland* and *Garden City Observer* editor; Dave Varga, *Livonia* and *Redford Observer* editor; Tim Smith, *Redford* and *Garden City* sports editor; and Dan O'Meara, *Farmington* sports editor.

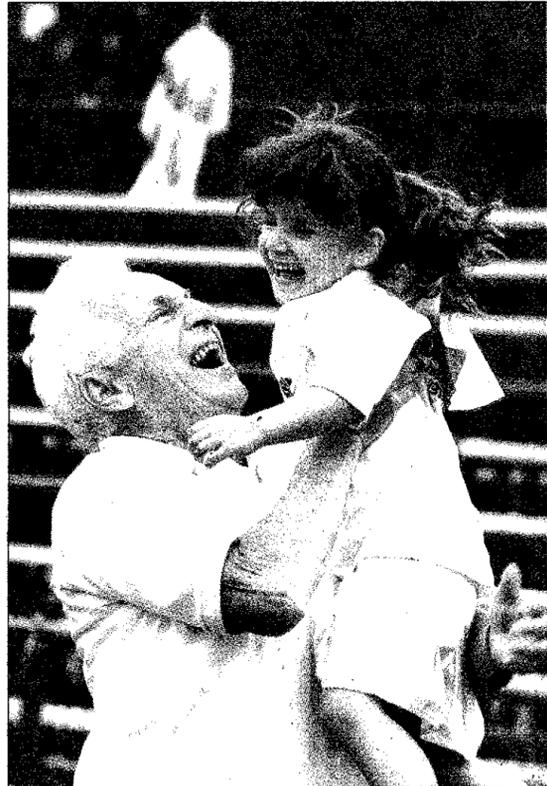
award," Hawley said. "But the rewards I get from our community are just as important to me, the comments in the letters I receive."

When he received his award, he said he was especially moved by a letter he received

from Bill Rothley of Livonia for a photo essay on Rothley's grandchildren participating in a Junior Olympics.

Varga cites this response in his nominating letter: "He found this great story on his own while shooting the event,

then shared it with the editor so the complete story could be presented with the wonderful photo package. A letter from the grandpa said, 'I have attempted to write before, but my eyes filled with tears - I am sure you understand.'"



Tom Hawley shot this photo of Bill Rothley of Livonia and his granddaughter, Melissa Rothley, 4, of Livonia after she won her first race in the 35 meter race at the Redford Township Junior Olympics. Hawley said the response he received from the family when this and other photos of the event ran were the kind of everyday rewards of being a photojournalist.

Hawley said he appreciates the importance community newspapers have in the lives of our readers.

Hawley has been the recipient

of numerous awards from the annual Michigan Press Association and Suburban Newspapers of America editorial excellence contests.

Gleaners holiday drive to fight hunger, raise issue awareness

Gleaners Community Food Bank kicks off It's Time To Give campaign this week to raise money and awareness to help feed hungry families this holiday season.

The message is being delivered via print and broadcast mediums now through the end of the tax year, to encourage area residents to put Gleaners on the gift giving list.

"During this time of giving, we want to encourage everyone to reflect on the meaning of giving and what a difference it makes in the lives of struggling families who consume more than 2 million meals each month in the six county area,"

says Gleaners president Agostinho Fernandes, Jr.

Gleaners is making it easy and timely to give. Donation envelopes are being inserted into community newspapers throughout the region (including today's editions of the *Observer & Eccentric Newspapers*) to make it simple for potential donors to respond to the need for more resources to feed hungry families. The message It's Time to Give can also be heard on radio and television ads and public service announcements that reminding everyone that the spirit and act of giving is alive and well and needed more than

ever.

For the company that has everything, Gleaners Community Food Bank also accepts donations from companies that want to forgo a Christmas Party but still celebrate the spirit of giving.

Additionally, Gleaners Community Food Bank is taking orders for holiday cards available for \$10 dollars for 10 cards. Charity Card selections can be made on the Web site at www.gcfb.org - Gleaners store. The proceeds go to help the food bank. Each dollar donat-

ed can provide up to 16 meals.

Since 1977, Gleaners Community Food Bank has been serving the hungry of our region. In 1984, the Food Bank of Oakland County began serving the hungry in Oakland County. July, 2005 brought the merger of these two food banks joining together as Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan.

Gleaners secures, stores, and distributes donated food from farmers, grocery stores, supermarkets, food distributors and food processors to local non-

profit agencies and charities that directly feed the poor and hungry.

Who are the hungry? People of all ages, races and socioeconomic levels have needed Gleaners' assistance. Fifty-nine percent of the hungry are children and seniors.

For more information or programs and services or to donate on line visit the Web site at www.gcfb.org. Gleaners Community Food Bank of Southeastern Michigan is located at 2131 Beaufait, Detroit, MI 48207.

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