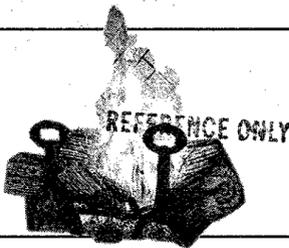


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AT HOME, PAGE B1

FOCUS ON WINE - PAGE B7

THURSDAY
December 22, 2005

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New face Recruiter has task of selling AF's mission

BY BRAD KADRICH
STAFF WRITER

Tech. Sgt. Adam Hessler spent the first 15 years of his U.S. Air Force career walking flight lines, guarding aircraft and standing guard over his country as a member of the Air Force's security forces.

Now, Hessler is looking at it from the other side, responsible for finding new recruits to do the work after taking over new duties as the primary recruiter for the western Wayne County areas.

Hessler, 33, mans the Air Force office at the recruiting center on Ford Road in Westland. It's a different experience for a lifer who has spent 15 years traveling to various bases.

"I'm used to being at a base, so it's interesting not to be in that environment," Hessler said of his new assignment. "This community has accepted me and my family. So far, it's been a great experience all around."

Although being a recruiter isn't something he'd thought much about, being a military man has been on Hessler's mind for a long time. A Lake Orion native, Hessler figured he'd follow his brother's military march (his brother joined the Army) after graduating from Lake Orion High School in 1990.

He'd never been out of Michigan and college, he said, wasn't an option at the time. Having grown up, like many kids, valuing police officers as role models, the military security forces seemed like a natural step.

"A relative gave me a 'cop' jacket when I was a kid, and I wore it all the time," recalled Hessler, who now lives in Canton. "It was one of those



BILL BRESLER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

PLEASE SEE RECRUITER, A5 Tech. Sgt. Adam Hessler spent more than 14 years in the Air Force's security forces before taking on a new role as a recruiter.

Teachers, residents speak out for Legacy

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Teachers publicly defended their schools as the debate over the Livonia Public Schools new Legacy Initiative continued this week in the community.

Cathlene Hedden, a Livonia resident and teacher at Cooper Elementary, spoke out in defense of the school - which has come under negative scrutiny from some community members throughout this process.

Under the Legacy plan, students attending Roosevelt, Cleveland, Grant and Hayes will move to Cooper Upper Elementary for grades five-six, and then go on to Emerson Middle School. For families living north of Schoolcraft, it poses a major change and increased distance to school.

But Monday, Hedden addressed those concerns she's heard from people who have spoken against the

PLEASE SEE LEGACY, A6

Cell call helps police arrest holdup suspect

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

Westland police had a suspect in custody this week after a pizza delivery worker was robbed early Sunday at Hines Park Apartments, on Warren west of Merriman.

The suspect, who lives at the apartment complex, was facing possible criminal charges, although authorities said he has denied any involvement in the holdup.

The suspect admitted calling in an order from his cell phone to Fat Katz Pizza, on Middlebelt north of Joy Road in Livonia, police Lt. James Ridener said.

"He's saying he left the scene before the pizza guy got there," Ridener said. "He said he got tired of waiting and that he decided to spend his money on gas."

However, the suspect matched the description of a robber who allegedly held up the pizza worker about 1:40 a.m. Sunday, according to police.

"The pizza guy knocked on the (apartment) door and nobody answered," Ridener said. "He was walking back to his car when a black male wearing a dark-colored, hooded jacket and a ski mask held a small automatic handgun in his face and stole his money and the pizzas."

Police traced the cell phone call to the suspect, whose apartment was searched after authorities executed a search warrant.

The suspect was arrested about 9 p.m. Monday, some 43 hours after the holdup.

On Tuesday, Ridener said the investigation was continuing.

dcclem@hometownlife.com | (734) 953-2110

Meijer shopping spree brightens kids' Christmas

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

Eight Westland children who might have faced Christmas with no gifts smiled and giggled Monday as they savored a free shopping spree at the Westland Meijer.

The youngsters scoured Meijer's aisles and chose their favorite toys and clothing as they shopped alongside Westland police officers during the company's "Shop With A Hero" program.

"This is wonderful," single mother Kelley Macy, 28, said as her 7-year-old son, P.J., prepared to pick out his Christmas presents.

"This is fun," young P.J. said. "And the cops are cool."

Meijer store director Ron Vanderlaan had \$100 gift certificates for each of the eight children, who were selected for the program by an organization, Westland Goodfellows, that helps hundreds of youngsters each Christmas.

"This is a way for us to give something back to the community," Vanderlaan said.

After the children and their parents arrived Monday, Vanderlaan escorted them to a room where they fueled up with pizza, pop and Christmas cake before starting their shopping spree.

The children picked out toys, video games and clothing as they shopped alongside Police Chief



PLEASE SEE MEIJER, A4 Westland Police Chief Daniel Pfannes helps a girl as she shops for a doll at Meijer.

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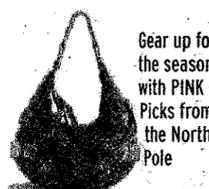
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INDEX	
APARTMENTS	F5
AT HOME	B1
BELIEFS & VALUES	B5
AUTOMOTIVE	G1
CROSSWORD	G2
JOBS	G1
MOVIES	D16
OBITUARIES	B5
REAL ESTATE	F1
SERVICE GUIDE	G3
SPORTS	C1
TASTE	B7

Coming Sunday
in PINK



Keep safety in mind this yuletide season

Christmas trees are among the most common holiday decorations for the coming Yuletide, with 27 million live trees and 9 million artificial trees sold last year. But without proper safety in mind, they can also cause tragedy this holiday season.

"Celebrating the holidays involves a number of potentially hazardous situations if the right safety steps are not taken," said John Drenenberg, manager of Consumer Affairs for Underwriters Laboratories (UL), the not-for-profit safety testing organization.

"Christmas trees, for instance, are significant fuel sources that we bring into our homes every year." According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), Christmas trees were the items first ignited in an estimated average of 310 reported U.S. home structure fires per year in 1999-2002. These fires caused an average of 14 civilian deaths, 40 civilian injuries and \$16.2 million in direct property damage per year. These statistics include both real and artificial trees.

On average, one in every 22 reported home Christmas tree fires resulted in a death. "More than four of every 10 home Christmas tree fires are caused by an electrical problem or malfunction," said Judy Comoletti, assistant vice-president for public education at the NFPA. "One in four Christmas tree fires resulted from a heat source placed too close to the tree. Candles were the heat source in 8 percent of these incidents. Seven percent were started by children playing with fire."

And there are plenty of other tragic accidents occurring during the winter holidays that don't involve Christmas trees:

- Each year, 12,500 people are treated in emergency rooms for injuries related to holiday decorations;
- An estimated average of 2,300 home candle fires were reported each December in 1999-2002; 11 percent of the December candle fires began with decorations.

"These are preventable tragedies," said Comoletti, who

advised that all candles be extinguished whenever you leave the house or go to bed. "The most common causes of candle fires are candles burning too close to combustible materials, such as mattresses or bedding, furniture, curtains or walls, or candles left unattended."

UL also reminds consumers to inspect light strings for cracked sockets and frayed, bare or loose wires. Look for the holographic UL Mark on light strings and electrical decorations. The UL Mark means that UL engineers have tested samples of the product for safety hazards.

If you're decorating outside, also be sure that all decorations and extension cords are rated for outdoor use. Lights intended for indoor-only use have green holographic UL Marks. Light strings intended for indoor and outdoor use have red holographic UL Marks.

"Damaged or misused electric light strings and extension cords, if left unchecked before you put them up, can deliver shocks and potentially cause home fires," Drenenberg said. "If they are damaged or have frayed wires, you should buy new ones. They are relatively cheap and incredibly good insurance for keeping your holiday season safe."

Finally, with 5,800 fall-related injuries during the holidays, ladder safety should be observed. Set ladders on firm, level surfaces and use the proper ladder length - outdoors, the ladder should extend 3 feet over the roofline. You should have someone hand you decorations whenever you are on a ladder, and only one person should be on the ladder at any time.

When the holidays are over, take down your lights. Light strings are not meant to be up more than 90 days. Any longer and the resulting damage could eventually cause a shock or fire hazard.

And remember, even well-watered trees dry out after four weeks, so they should be taken down soon after the holidays.

For more holiday decorating tips go to www.ul.com/holidaysafety.

Schools come together to sing for season

Families from Adams and Roosevelt elementary schools in Livonia have joined together in the spirit of the holiday season.

On Wednesday, Dec. 14, staff members and families from Roosevelt Elementary took a school bus over to Adams Elementary to kick off a new tradition of holiday caroling along Lyndon.

"Several strollers and lots of children joined in the fun as we sang all the way," said Shelly Robinet, a Livonia parent involved in the activity. "As we crossed Middlebelt, traffic was lined up to the lights at Schoolcraft and Five Mile."

Once the long trail of singers reached their destination, back at Roosevelt, they shared cookies and hot chocolate offered by the school's PTA groups.

These two school communities will combine next fall, under the district's Legacy Initiative. Adams is scheduled to close and students in grades K-4 will attend Roosevelt.

"About 120 people spent time enjoying the refreshments and talking about the upcoming changes," said Robinet. "This is the first of many opportunities for these families to meet and begin to share the vision of the demographics team."

"For the past two years, the staff at Adams has rented a wagon and caroled to the



Adams Art Teacher Julie Springer (left to right), First-grade teacher Chris Schulte, and students Lily Robinet and Anna Schirado bundle up for a chilly walk caroling in the neighborhood.

neighborhood. This year, they added their friends at Roosevelt to begin the blending of these two (school) families."

Robinet said: "It took about an hour to walk the mile, but the memories and friendships will last a lifetime."

She said blending the two schools "is just the beginning of a great friendship."

By Stephanie A. Casola



Parents and students from Adams and Roosevelt elementary schools joined in Christmas caroling recently in Livonia.

Tractor collectors club finds rewards

BY LEANNE ROGERS
STAFF WRITER

Looking at the wish list from one of the families adopted for Christmas by the Tri County Two Cylinder Club, Jody Cannon is struck by the requests.

"There are household items - very humble things that are being asked for - pots, pans, flatware, cleaning products," said Cannon, a Garden City resident. "They ask for coats, hats and mittens. We try to fulfill that and we like to give some toys, too."

This year, the 200-member club of tractor collectors is adopting a total of eight families in counties where they live. The Salvation Army provided most of the referrals for families to be adopted in Washtenaw, Monroe and Lenawee counties.

A mechanic at Crestwood Dodge, Cannon is coordinating

This year, the 200-member club of tractor collectors is adopting a total of eight families in counties where they live. The Salvation Army provided most of the referrals for families to be adopted in Washtenaw, Monroe and Lenawee counties.

the adoption of three Wayne County families referred through the Volunteers of America.

"I like going through the Volunteers - the families are screened and when you get a family you know they are in need," said Cannon. "Unfortunately, if you ask who needs help you get a lot of

hands."

The Adopt a Family program through Volunteers of America gives donors options on how directly involved they wish to be with the adopted family. Cash can be donated but donors also have the option of shopping for the family themselves and whether they would like to deliver the food and gifts personally.

Cannon chooses to shop for the three adopted families and make the deliveries himself.

"One of the things that touches me is that the children will make Christmas cards for me and the club," said Cannon. "They may like to know who is giving to them. I put together a letter about the club for them."

The donors who decide to shop for their adopted family and deliver the gifts find it rewarding, said Volunteers of America President and CEO Alex Brodrick.

"The families that take the time to talk to the mothers and kids develop a bond over the holidays," said Brodrick, noting most of the families on the adoption list are single mothers and children.

Unlike many holiday donation programs, Volunteers of America gets a wish list from the recipients.

"Whether it's a family or a senior, they tell us what they'd

like. We ask the donors to pay special attention to the needs of the children," said Brodrick. "We want them to get clothing, but also a toy that they are asking for rather than a random gift."

When the Adopt a Family program began over a decade ago, there were 100 families adopted.

"The program has grown and grown. The 100 families was one thing - we have 2,800 families asking for help," said Brodrick. "My staff does a tremendous job coordinating the lists."

Volunteers of America has stopped taking requests for adoptions and earlier this week only had 1,800 adoptions in place.

"That's down substantially from last year. Many of those who donated in the past have been affected by layoffs," said Brodrick. "We also have regular donors who gave to help after the natural disasters in New Orleans and the tsunami, so they didn't have the usual amount to give."

Volunteers of America will continue accepting donations and adoptions through Dec. 24. For more information, call (248) 353-4862 or visit their Web site at www.voami.org.

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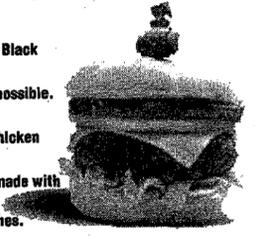
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School district neutral about announced funding increase

BY SUE MASON
STAFF WRITER

Wayne-Westland School Superintendent Greg Baracy doesn't believe in counting on new money until a bill is law.

And that's the position he's taking on a House bill that, if approved by the State Senate and signed into law, would increase aid for middle mathematics and science instruction.

"It's too soon to tell how it will make out in the Senate," said Baracy. "I won't get too excited until it makes it through both houses, until it officially passes."

However, state Rep. Glenn S. Anderson, D-Westland, as of Dec. 8 was announcing increased aid for middle schools in the Wayne-Westland and the Livonia Public Schools and at the Academy of Detroit-Westland.

"We must boost math and science education if our children are to compete for the good-paying high-tech jobs of the 21st century," Anderson said. "This increase gives our

middle schools the tools they need to lay a strong foundation for math and science education."

According to Anderson, the district would receive an additional \$49 per student. The money would be an increase in the 2005-06 foundation grant approved earlier this year.

"When we give today's students the means to succeed in school and do well later on in the high-tech job market, we are also laying the foundation to strengthen Michigan's communities and our economy," Anderson said in a press release.

The legislation is based on House Fiscal Agency estimates that additional state revenue - around \$55 million - would be available by the year's end. Lawmakers approved the package earlier this month on the condition that the money not be appropriated until after the school aid ledger is closed and a revenue estimating conference is held in January.

The House bills would allocate \$35 million for middle

schools - \$49 per student for mathematics and science instruction - and an additional \$18 per student for school districts that receive less than \$7,200 per pupil in state school aid. The remaining \$20 million would be put in the School Aid Stabilization Fund.

Wayne-Westland receives \$7,571 per student in state school aid and wouldn't be eligible for the additional \$18 payment.

The bills are now being considered by the State Senate which could make changes to the bills, forcing a conference committee to come up with the final version.

"I don't know why they're cherry picking when all districts across the state need a boost," Baracy said. "They need to solve the school funding crisis first."

So Baracy will just wait and see what happens with the package.

"It's too early to tell," he said.

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Historic Village has plenty to see

BY CONNIE WAGENSCHUTZ

The Westland Historic Village Park on Wayne Road south of Marquette is waiting to be discovered by you. You probably have noticed it as you passed by, but may not have given serious thought as to what goes on there and how it could involve you.

We invite you to take a break from your usual Saturday routine and stop by between 1 and 4 p.m. for a guided tour by one of the friendly volunteer guides.

The boarded facades of the 1837 Rowe House and c.1870 Octagon houses may not look too inviting at the present, but plans are moving ahead to restore them to their former

beauty. However, there is much to see and enjoy inside the Felton Farmhouse, all decked out in Christmas finery.

As one enters, it's like stepping out of a time machine into a time not soon to be forgotten. You can sense the ambiance of an earlier era when the strains of a hand cranked victrola or a foot-powered pump organ were the main forms of an evening's entertainment.

The Collins House next to the windmill houses the offices of the Historical Commission and Friends of the Westland Historical Museum as well as the archives. The archives, containing photographs and papers that document the events and people who shaped

our community are a rich resource for historical or genealogical buffs.

Also housed in the archives are copies of patient death records from the form Eloise County Hospital.

This is the first of monthly columns that will feature interesting historical facts, upcoming events, answers to questions about Westland's past and that will keep you current with the progress of the Westland Historic Village Park. You are invited to come visit this month and take away a bit of the old-fashioned Christmas spirit.

If you have a question or comment for Connie Wagenschutz, call her at (734) 522-048 or by e-mail at conwag@juno.com.



TOM HOFFMEYER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

General Motors employees and UAW representatives, left to right, Jack Staton, Paul Holdinski, Steve Buddy, John Balogh, Garry Spencer, Jim Dockstader, Ron Kwitkowski, and David Tatman stand in front of the bicycles the plant employees will be donating to Toys for Tots this year.

GM workers donate 50 bikes to Toys for Tots

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

More than 50 shiny new bicycles were parked around a lit Christmas tree inside the General Motors Powertrain Livonia Engine Plant on Middlebelt Road this week.

It was all part of an annual holiday tradition among the skilled trades workers on the afternoon shift at the plant.

Supervisor Ron Kwitkowski and other skilled trades employees asked for donations, and used the money to purchase new bicycles to donate to the Marine Corps' Toys for Tots drive. They even help build the bikes during break time.

Kwitkowski started this tradition when he came to Livonia three years ago. He and his co-workers did the same in a Romulus plant. Now his efforts are recognized throughout the building.

"Every day the skilled tradesman assemble the bicycles during their breaks and between service calls for pro-

duction," said Tim Schweigel, a toolmaker who works an earlier shift. "Buying the bikes is one thing, but assembling them is what takes the time."

The employees chose bicycles because it's such a "big thing" for children to receive during the holidays, Kwitkowski said.

For each bike they buy with donated money, Children's Hospital of Detroit has agreed to donate a bicycle helmet.

In the past, General Motors has paid for a helmet to accompany each bike. Now more donated money goes toward the bikes themselves. "Safety being as important to us as it is, we were not going to give out bicycles without helmets," said David E. Tatman, Livonia plant manager.

Last year the staff bought and put together 70 bikes, a large amount for a small plant, Kwitkowski noted.

Jim Dockstader, UAW Local 22 representative, said the effort has "just gotten bigger every year."

Managers at local toy stores, like the Toys R Us at Seven Mile and Middlebelt, have been assisting Kwitkowski to ensure they get the best deals on quality bicycles.

Employees on the first shift of the day have their own holiday tradition. They too collect money, which is then used to buy toys for Toys for Tots, said Steve Buddy, a team coordinator.

"I'll wear the red nose and hat," he said. When employees come to work, they're always willing to donate to the cause.

"I haven't had anybody say no," he added.

Earlier this week, thousands of dollars worth of toys and bicycles were collected by local Toys for Tots representatives, and a U.S. Marine Corps master sergeant. They will go to children in need within the community.

"This is what Christmas is all about," Tatman said.

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New owners expect growth for Awrey's

BY DAN WEST
STAFF WRITER

Awrey Bakeries plans to expand its product line and may add jobs under new initiatives sought by the Livonia-based company's new ownership team.

This was the report from Alden Knowles, Awrey's new president and CEO, who was hired by the two companies that bought the 95-year-old bakery from the Awrey family this past summer.

"Business is doing well," Knowles said. "We are in the process of developing a new product line that will introduce Awrey's into new markets."

He wasn't prepared to offer details, but Knowles added he may go public with the company's plans in late January.

Equity companies based in New York and Chicago partnered to purchase the bankrupt family business for \$25 million in a court-approved deal. The new owners and Knowles officially took control Aug. 15. The new management kept the company's 340 hourly and salaried employees.

"We plan to restore Awrey's to its former position of pre-eminence in the food service indus-

'We plan to restore Awrey's to its former position of pre-eminence in the food service industry. We want Awrey's to be bigger and better.'

Alden Knowles
Awrey's new president and CEO

try," Knowles said. "We want Awrey's to be bigger and better."

Production at company's industrial facility on Farmington Road, north of Plymouth Road, has room for more growth. Knowles said the facility has the potential to produce more goods and jobs without any expansion of bakery's plant and offices.

"We are nowhere near capacity at this time," Knowles said.

The veteran executive of the food services industry said the two equity companies do not have interests with any other bakery or food companies, meaning there are no current plans for Awrey's to consolidate with any other company within the new owners' portfolio.

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MEIJER

FROM PAGE A1

Daniel Pfannes and Officers Joe Bobby and Burke Lange. "The main thing is that these kids get to see police officers in a different light than we're usually seen," Lange said. "It's more like we're their friends."

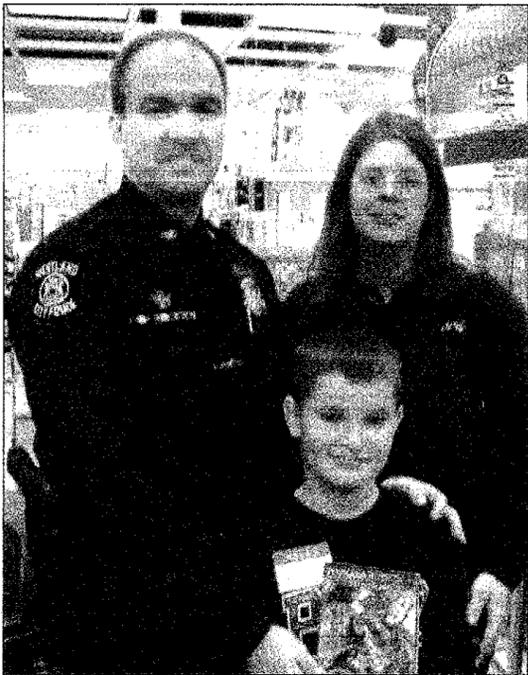
Pfannes commended Meijer for helping the children and for pairing them with police officers for the shopping excursion.

Said Vanderlaan: "The kids get to see who the true heroes are in the community."

Children and their families also left Meijer with food baskets, including a ham, provided by the Westland Police Department.

With the youngsters picking out their own Christmas presents, they didn't have to worry about being forgotten this holiday season.

"This is a very good program," Kelley Macy said, just before son P.J. started looking for gifts. "P.J. is so excited about this. It's really nice that they're doing this."



P.J. Macy, 7, was one of the children who shopped with police Monday during Meijer's 'Shop With A Hero' program. With P.J. is his mother, Kelley Macy, and Westland Police Chief Daniel Pfannes.

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| <p>A
Ray M. Alexander
Alexander, 79, of Clarkston, died Dec. 18.</p> <p>B
Luwana Bond (nee Wheeler)
Bond, 81, died Dec. 14.</p> <p>D
Gordon F. Donaldson
Donaldson, 66, died Dec. 15.</p> <p>Charles E. Drivers
Driver, 76, of Canton, died Dec. 18.</p> <p>H
Jack C. Hutchinson
Hutchinson, 89, of Holland, formerly of Birmingham, died Dec. 15.</p> | <p>K
Stuart Klockow
Klockow, 88, of Canton, died Dec. 19.</p> <p>L
Edward Hodson Lerchen
Lerchen, 85, of Grand Rapids, died Dec. 14.</p> <p>N
Lena M. Nicholson
Nicholson, 96, of Birmingham, formerly of Royal Oak and West Bloomfield, died Dec. 16.</p> <p>P
Susan Peacock
Peacock, of Livonia, died Dec. 13.</p> |
|---|--|

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.

AROUND WESTLAND

Holiday closings

Westland city offices and Westland 18th District Court will be closed several days during the holidays.

They will be closed Friday of this week, Monday, Dec. 26, Friday, Dec. 30, and Monday, Jan. 2.

Also, the court will close at 4:30 p.m. rather than 5:30 p.m. on two consecutive Thursdays, Dec. 22 and Dec. 29.

According to the city's public services department, trash pickup will be one day late for all Westland residents for a two-week period starting Dec. 26.

Regular trash pickup will resume on Monday, Jan. 9.

Beginning Jan. 1, Westland District Court will have new hours: 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays and Fridays, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Wednesdays, and 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Thursdays.

Holiday hours

As a courtesy to Wayne County property taxpayers, the Office of the Wayne County Treasurer will be open for business 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesday-Thursday, Dec. 27-29, for walk-in tax payments. Online tax payments can be made via the Treasurer's Web site at www.treasurer.waynecounty.com

The office will be closed Dec. 23, 26 and 30 and Jan. 2. It will reopen on Jan. 3.

The Wayne County Treasurer's office is at 400 Monroe in downtown Detroit.

Training program

Train To End Stroke, a marathon training program offered by the American Stroke

Association, will hold an information session at 2 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 7, at the W.P. Faust Public Library, 6123 Central City Parkway.

This program is designed for people who want to get in shape, travel and raise money for a good cause. Choose to walk or run a full or half marathon in San Diego or Kona, Hawaii. All fitness levels are welcome. Additional information sessions are scheduled in January.

For more information call (248) 827-4214 or visit the Web site at strokeassociation.org.

Legion meets

American Legion Westland Post 251 meets at 7 p.m. the first Tuesday of every month at the Westland V.F.W. Post 3323 at Wayne Road and Avondale just north of Palmer Road.

Membership is open to all veterans, providing they meet the eligibility dates. For information call 734-326-2607.

The Post 251 also will be presenting their Blue Star Banner to families who have a member currently serving in the Armed Forces.

The banner will be presented at the Westland City Council meeting at 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 6. Families in the Westland and Canton areas who have members currently serving in the Armed Forces to contact the post at (734) 326-2607 for more information.

Las Vegas Party

St. Bernardine Men's Club is sponsoring a Pinochle/Euchre Card Party on Fridays, 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.

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.

New Year's Eve

Tickets are now on sale for the Ushers Club's annual New Year's Eve dinner dance at St. Simon and Jude Church, 32500 Palmer, Westland. Tickets cost \$20 each and include reserved seating, party favors, snacks, mixers, beer, a three-meat buffet with side items, dancing to the music of The Goldtones and pizza shortly after midnight.

Tickets are limited and none will be sold after Dec. 27. To order them, call Sharlene or Curt Frizzell at (734) 425-6819.

Car donation

People with a car to donate can give it to Veterans Haven. The organization is accepting cars, running or not running, that are given to veterans to provide them with transportation to work, school of medical needs. To date, the agency has given away more than 250 vehicles and three fully furnished mobile homes to needy veterans. To donate, call Veterans Haven at (734) 728-0527 or go to vetshaveninfo.org on the Internet.

Notice of Public Sale of Personal Property

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Section 4 of the Self Service Storage Facility Act, State of Michigan, the undersigned will sell at public auction by competitive bidding. Sales are for cash only. Removal within 24 hours. For sale and storage units, which rent and fees are past due.

On the premises where said property has been stored and which are located at Public Storage, 3650 Enterprise Dr., Allen Park, Michigan 48101, (313) 441-3117, on December 28, 2005 at 10:30 a.m. Personal property described below in the matter of:

- B001 - Valerie Edgerton - boxes, bags, chest of drawers, sofa, microwave, rug
- B002 - William Stone - stereo, camper
- B072 - Michael Kowalski - household items
- B151 - Yolanda Bright - air conditioner, entertainment center, freezer, stove, refrigerator
- B186 - Tommeia Baldwin - headboard, mattress, China cabinet, dresser
- B199 - Susan Rohr - boxes, dresser, microwave, power tools, snack table
- B217 - Kwana Felton - household items
- B227 - Kelly White - sofa, love seat, microwave
- B265 - Steven Weaver - bags, boxes, speakers, stereo
- B289 - Carol Boissonault - sofa, love seat
- B335 - Kasla Grauman - bags, bike, boxes, totes, suit case
- B374 - Marshawn Robinson - bags, boxes, lamp, end tables
- C003 - Candy Gabbard - TV, mattress, bike, boxes, totes, toys
- C007 - Lela Dow - air conditioner, bags, boxes, computer, desk, exercise equipment
- C039 - Charles Toth - boxes
- D029 - Amanda Thornsberry - bags, bed frame, bike, stool, table, totes, TV
- D041 - Nathan Williams - household items
- E050 - Scott Stevens - bags, boxes, power tools, speakers
- F047 - Brian Thiel - household items

Publish: December 18 and 22, 2005

Notice of Public Sale of Personal Property

Notice is hereby given that pursuant to Section 4 of the Self Service Storage Facility Act, State of Michigan, the undersigned will sell at public auction by competitive bidding. Sales are for cash only. Removal within 24 hours. For sale and storage units, which rent and fees are past due.

On the premises where said property has been stored and which are located at Public Storage, 20080 Allen Road, Trenton, Michigan 48183 (734) 479-5790, on December 28, 2005 at 9:30 a.m. Personal property described below in the matter of:

- 023 - Steven Quails - automobile
- 1025 - Nicole Hellema - bags, mattresses, headboard, stereo, totes
- 1134 - Jim Ferguson - bags, boxes, pictures, TV, furniture
- 157 - Al Sobolewski - sofa, love seat, shelving, patio furniture, area rug
- 304 - Susan Burkhart - boxes, shelf, totes, microwave
- 404 - Jennie Dominguez - mattress, boxes, monitor, tool box, power scooter
- 507 - Brian Psykala - bags, bike, boxes, lamp, pictures
- 513 - Roy Poore - boxes, bags, books
- 529 - Cecelia Alford - boxes, dresser, chest of drawers, lamp, pots and pans
- 615 - Thomas Roethlisberger - boxes, totes
- 642 - Lisa Alexander - boxes, bakers rack, mini stereo, kids toys, entertainment center
- 709 - Steven Young - boxes, lawn equipment
- 710 - Raymond Nutter - bed frame, mattress, books, computer, tool box, totes

Publish: December 18 and 22, 2005

CITY OF GARDEN CITY

The City will be in Section 4, Ford Road to Cherryhill, Inkster to Middlebelt to clean the Sanitary Main sewer lines.

You may experience gurgling noise in pipes and faint odor. To avoid any problems here are some tips:

- Keep the toilet lids down when not in use.
- Keep taps filled with water
- Cover Floor drains with a disposable rag.

In order to avoid any additional inconvenience please keep this in mind as you scheduling your activities.

Publish: December 22 & 26, 2005

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INFORMATION CENTRAL

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the house, not a creature was stirring not even a mouse; the stockings were hung by the chimney with care in hopes that Saint Nicholas soon would be there ...

Everyone knows these famous lines of Christmas poetry. Did you know that the American image of Santa Claus comes largely from this popular poem, written in 1848?

At the William P. Faust Public Library of Westland, you can find many poetry books for adults and children in the non-fiction section of 811.54, including *A Visit From St. Nicholas* by Clement C. Moore as mentioned above.

For adults, you may like to read some Helen Steiner Rice: "Is it just a day at the end of the year, a holiday filled with merry good cheer, a season for presents - taking and giving, a time to indulge in the pleasures of living ..."

There are some well-known poets who have written books especially on Christmas, for example, Langston Hughes' *Carol of the Brown King* or Robert Frost's *Christmas Trees*.

For children there are so many holiday poetry books, many of them about Christmas. Grade school aged children are sure to love Jack Prelutsky's *It's Christmas*.

"Up! Up! Up! I jump and down the stairs I fly. Look! Look! A brand new

sled that I can't wait to try. Zip! Zip! Bundle up, I'm toasty warm inside. Quick! Quick! Out the door, then down the hill I'll glide. No! No! It isn't fair, it simply isn't right. Snow! Snow! I see no snow, it melted overnight."

This book is recommended by School Library Journal magazine. "The poems cover subjects of interest to children - making a Christmas list, performing in the school assembly, cutting a Christmas tree. Children enjoy Prelutsky's poetry."

Other titles to try are *Long Was the Winter Road They Traveled* by J. Patrick Lewis, or *Who Was Born This Special Day?* by Eve Bunting.

Why not read a few Christmas poems when celebrating this season? Stop in the library soon and check the non-fiction area 811.

Internet 201: 2 p.m. Dec. 22.

An "inside look" at Internet search engines.

Matinee Movie: 2 p.m. Dec. 28.

Come and watch *Herbie: Fully Loaded* in the library's community rooms. The movie will run approximately 90 minutes. All ages welcome, those under age 6 with adult.

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



2nd Amendments to rock troops

U.S. Rep. Thaddeus McCotter, who is a member of the all-congressional band, the Second Amendments, will perform for U.S. troops over the holidays during a trip to the Middle East and Europe.

The bipartisan country-rock band features McCotter, R-Livonia, on lead guitar, Reps. Ken Hulshof, a Republican from Missouri, on drums; Collin Peterson, a Democrat from Minnesota, on guitar and

lead vocals; Dave Weldon, a Republican from Florida, on bass; and Jon Porter, a Republican from Nevada, on keyboards.

The five-city tour is part of an official congressional fact-finding trip between Christmas and New Year's Eve that will take the band to Iraq, Afghanistan, Kuwait, Pakistan and Ramstein Air Base in Germany. The group will conduct official business during

the day and entertain the troops at night.

"We hope we can boost morale a little bit and join the troops over the holidays and remind them that we fully support their efforts and appreciate their sacrifice," McCotter said. The band played before large audiences this past summer at We Fest in Detroit Lakes, Minn., and the 20th annual Farm Aid benefit concert in Chicago.

CLUBS IN ACTION

Listings for Clubs in Action 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.homecomm.net. For more information, call (734) 953-2112.

Mustang Owners Club

The Mustang Owners Club of Southeastern Michigan meets the second Tuesday of the month at Angelo Brothers Restaurant, 33550 Ford, Westland. The meeting starts at 7:30 p.m., with dinner and socializing before the meeting. For more information, call the MOCSEM hotline at (313) 438-4174. The club was established in 1975.

Silver Strings Dulcimer

Musicians and listeners are welcome to stop by and visit a traditional music jam 7-9 p.m. the first and third Thursday of the month at Good Hope Lutheran Church, 28680 Cherry Hill, Garden City. Acoustic instruments include hammered and mountain dulcimer, guitar, banjo, fiddle, harmonica, concertina, autoharp, recorder, penny-whistle, ukulele and upright bass. Call (734) 482-2902 or check out the Web site at <http://geocities.com/ssdsociety>.

Westland Rotary

The Westland Rotary Club meets 12:15 p.m. Thursdays at Joy Manor, 28999 Joy, east of Middlebelt in Westland.

RECRUITER

FROM PAGE A1

role models when I was growing up. I just started looking at all my options, and it was a way to do some things I wanted to do."

He's had three different tours at bases in North Dakota, spent some time at the Pentagon and was sent overseas to Korea. After 14-plus years in security forces, a trip to the Noncommissioned Officers Academy at Tyndall Air Force Base, Fla., changed the direction of his career.

"They talked a lot about giving back to the Air Force," Hessler said. "I really love my job, and the Air Force, and I wanted to give back to it."

During a second tour at Minot AFB, N.D., Hessler decided to apply to retrain as a recruiter. After being accepted, he moved his family - wife Michelle, 12-year-old daughter Brianna and 7-year-old son Cameron - to Canton.

Once he gets his feet wet, his superiors believe Hessler will be a good fit. His biggest challenge, according to his boss, could be answering questions about the Iraq war. The Air Force doesn't have a huge presence other than flight crews, though, so it shouldn't be much of an impediment.

"Answering the Iraq question will be his biggest challenge,"

said Tech Sgt. Donna Williams, recruiting flight chief for the metro Detroit area, stationed in Livonia. "That question comes up a lot in school visits, even though we don't have a huge presence over there. But (Hessler) will do fine. He's very sharp, very intelligent."

School visits are something Hessler is getting used to, because he spends a lot of time there. He's responsible for recruiting in Plymouth-Canton, Wayne-Westland, Romulus and Van Buren schools, and it's something he enjoys doing.

Much of that time he spends dispelling the myth everyone in the Air Force flies a plane. In truth, Hessler said, only about 4 percent of Air Force members fly.

"Everyone thinks the Air Force just flies," Hessler said. "When they find out 96 percent of us do other things, they're enthusiastic, because they think the only way to get in is to be able to fly."

Hessler signed on for a three-year tour as a recruiter, and he's not sure what he'll do when that time is up.

"I love this, but I love the security forces, too, and I miss that," Hessler said. "My original plan was to do this for three years, then go back to my original job. But I love this, so who knows?"

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LEGACY

FROM PAGE A1

diversity in the Westland portion of Livonia Public Schools.

For the past 10 years Hedden has taught either first or second grade at Coolidge. She teaches a diverse group of students - from Hispanic to Arabic, African American to Caucasian.

The young children work together and accept one another, she said.

"I am passionate about the welfare of my students," Hedden said. She added that teachers are dedicated and competent and the location is safe.

"There seems to be a group that is fearful, negative, and outwardly contemptuous of Cooper," she said. Hedden reminded the board and public that "children learn by example" and those negative sentiments may be passed on by some parents.

OTHERS CONCERNED

She wasn't the only one concerned with the divisive atmosphere that has engulfed the school district.

Carolyn Norris-Deyell, president of the Livonia Education Association, noted Monday that teachers "all had the opportunity to give input" on the Legacy plan. She said she was concerned about some public comments made recent-

ly that asserted teachers had been silenced or left out of the demographics process. She said that was not the case.

Russ Keberly, a Livonia teacher, made the same point.

"I have tuned in and/or attended every meeting, and I am a member of our teacher's union," he wrote in a letter to the *Observer*. "In all these situations we were never given scripted language as to how we should address the Legacy Initiative.

"In fact, our opinions and positions have been encouraged."

Teachers have not been the only group under fire through the Legacy process.

Elaine Koons, a member of the demographics committee, said she felt the need to share all of her ties to the community publicly. Once the Legacy plan was initially revealed, members of the community questioned who sat on the committee and what their connections were to Livonia Public Schools.

"I care so much about the community and the people in it," said Koons. She defined herself as a 20-year resident, a retired LPS administrator, a former member of the planning commission, a consultant with Wayne County and a volunteer puppeteer for Kids on the Block.

Koons commended the school board for showing "class and grace under pressure." She thanked trustees for asking "insightful" questions and staying "up-to-date" throughout

the process of deliberating on the Legacy plan.

REMAIN ANONYMOUS

Supporters of the Legacy plan in the community, who asked to remain anonymous, said they have been harassed. Some have written letters to the *Observer* and later asked that those letters not be run for fear an opponent of the plan would seek "retribution." Others refrained from clapping during the public hearing, because there has been so much dissent against the plan.

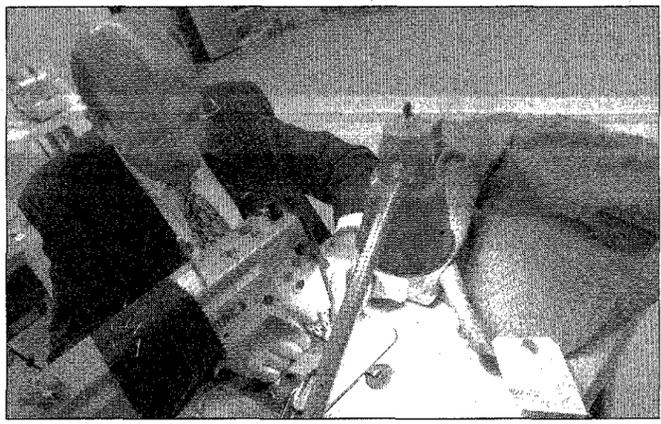
Board members had approved the Legacy plan 6-1 at their Dec. 5 meeting. Opponents of the plan - including Livonia parent Mark Wojcik - asked the board not to move ahead and approve the minutes of that meeting on Monday.

Wojcik said: "Let the public have some input. We feel like we've been left out of the decision."

The school board did pass the minutes of its previous meeting, 7-0. Trustee Tom Bailey, the lone voice against the plan, clarified that his support of the minutes, part of the Consent Agenda, signified only that those minutes were factual.

Immediately following the vote, one man left the meeting yelling "You're all fired" to board members and "especially you, Liepa" to the superintendent.

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



Tailor Albert Harb, a Livonia resident, puts his 58 years of experience to work in his Farmington Hills shop.

TOM HOFFMEYER | STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

He's a classic tailor

58-year vet sews up label of being a 'master'

BY STACY JENKINS
STAFF WRITER

Not many people can be called a master at what they do.

But Alfred Harb of Livonia is certainly a master at his craft. He is among the elite, but shrinking circle of classic tailors who can turn yards of fabric into stunning garments.

"It's just miraculous what he does with cloth," said George W. Wheeler, a customer of Harb's Classic Tailor business located in Pepper Square at Haggerty and Grand River in Farmington Hills. "He is a master. If he can fit me, he can fit anybody because I'm built like a bear. He just did a beautiful job."

Harb, 71, learned to be a tailor at age 12, when he was in sixth grade in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"I was one of eight boys and we all had to learn a trade," said Harb, who moved to the United States in May, 1963. His father gave him three choices: become a tailor, a shoemaker or a barber. "I chose to be a tailor."

In "the old country," Harb learned the art of making suits, top coats, shirts and

other garments. This sets him apart from others, said Weda Harb, his wife.

"Albert is different because he is a genuine tailor," she said. "Albert doesn't do an 'on the surface' job, he does the real thing, that's how he was taught. The art of tailoring is dying. Young people are just not interested."

Weda Harb said they were surprised to see how many clothing items were available in stores in the United States when they came here in the 1960s. There were no clothing factories in Ramallah when Harb was growing up, so tailors were relied upon.

Now, Harb is one of few remaining authentic tailors in the area. Harb's Classic Tailor business was at Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi for 10 years before he moved it to the West Oaks shopping plaza in Novi for five years. He retired, but soon came out of retirement to open his store, The Classic Tailor, in Farmington Hills, just two months ago. He does everything from hemming trousers to hand-crafting suits for about \$2,000. He recently made a top coat for a customer for \$3,500. His attention to detail is remark-

able, noted his wife.

"Albert likes to measure the customer," she said.

Fred Ansara has been a customer for 15 years.

"This guy can make a suit. He is a master," said Ansara. "He can fit it perfectly to your body. If you have one leg that's shorter than the other, no problem, you look perfect."

After 58 years in the business, sewing comes second nature to Harb, and he still enjoys it.

"I enjoy sitting down and making a suit," he said, not looking up from his buzzing sewing machine. "Making suits is an art."

The Classic Tailor is located at 39269 Grand River, in the Pepper Square shopping plaza at Haggerty. Albert and Weda Harb can be reached at (248) 888-0018. The shop is open for business 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday through Friday and 9 a.m. - 4 p.m. on Saturdays. Harb does alterations, men's designer clothing and even leather and zipper repairs. Same-day service offered on alterations, if possible.

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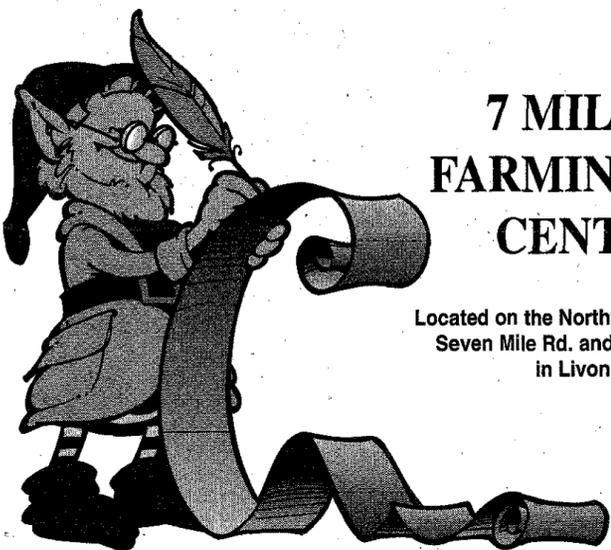
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Listings for the Community Calendar should be submitted in writing. They can be mailed to Sue Mason at 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, by fax at (734) 591-7279 or by e-mail at smason@oe.hometown.com. For more information, call (734) 953-2112.

Upcoming Events

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 winter 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.

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 packet. 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.

BINGO

VFW Bingo

Veterans of Foreign Wars 3323 Auxiliary has bingo 6:30 p.m. every Thursday at 1055 S. Wayne Road, Westland. There is a snack bar. The post has bingo at 1 p.m. every Sunday at the same place. Call (734) 326-3323.

Dems hold bingo

The Metro Wayne Democratic Club has bingo 10:45 a.m. every Monday at the Wayne Ford Civic League, on Wayne Road south of Ford in Westland. For information, call Jan or Cliff at (734) 591-1694 or Cliff at (734) 729-8681.

St. Mel Church

Bingo begins at 6:45 p.m. Fridays in St. Mel Church activities building, on Inkster Road north of Warren. Doors open at 4 p.m. Food is available.

Shamrock Bingo

Bingo begins at 11 a.m. Wednesdays at the Knights of Columbus Hall, 35100 Van Born, east of Wayne Road in Wayne. Doors open at 9 a.m. Food is available. Proceeds go to charity. Call (734) 728-3020.

K of C Bingo

Pope John XXIII Assembly of the Knights of Columbus Council 1536 hosts bingo games at 6:45 p.m. Thursdays. The games are in the Livonia Elks Lodge, 31117 Plymouth Road, one block east of Merriman in Livonia. Call (734) 425-2246.

Metro Wayne

The Metro Wayne Democratic Club offers a bingo at the Wayne-Ford Civic League on Fridays. Doors open at 9 a.m. with bingo starting at 10:45 a.m. An all-you-can-eat breakfast buffet is available for \$3. For more information, call Cliff Johnson at (734) 729-8681.

FOR SENIORS

Friendship Center

The Senior Resources Department (Friendship Center), 1119 N. Newburgh, Westland, offers a variety of programs for older adults. The Web site www.ci.westland.mius offers more information. Call (734) 722-7632.

Crochet & Knit

A crochet and knit group meets 9:30 a.m. every Thursday at the Friendship Center on Newburgh near Marquette. Beverly Kaminski is the instructor. Participants should bring a type "G" crochet hook. Those interested can sign up at the center's front desk or call (734) 722-7632.

Visually Impaired

The Visually Impaired Persons (VIPs)

support group meets 12:30 p.m. every Friday at the Friendship Center, 1119 N. Newburgh, Westland. Participants share information and meet others. Those interested in joining can be scheduled on a bus route for transportation. For information, call (734) 722-7632.

Choir

The Senior Choir, under the leadership of Robert Cassidy, is open to those who like to sing. It meets 9:30 a.m. Thursday. For information, call the Friendship Center, (734) 722-7632.

Hearing checks

Every third Tuesday of each month, a representative from Personalized Hearing Care of Westland will check and clean hearing aids free, 2-3 p.m. by appointment only. Call (734) 722-7632 for more information.

Exercise

Simply Jazzercise is designed for exercisers older than 40. The program provides a low to moderate workout. The exercise improves strength, flexibility, balance, posture, coordination and cardiovascular endurance. It incorporates simple dance routines with walking or jogging patterns and resistance exercises. Wear loose-fitting clothing and comfortable shoes. Light weights and an exercise mat are suggested. Classes are 10:15 a.m. Monday, 5 p.m. Wednesday, 10:15 a.m. Friday, at \$3 per person per class. Sign up at the front desk at the Westland Friendship Center or call (734) 722-7632.

Travel Group

The Friendship Travel Group meets 1 p.m. the second Friday of each month (unless a large event is scheduled) in the Westland Friendship Center, 1119 N. Newburgh. Programs include celebration of birthdays, door prizes, description of new classes or programs, speakers from tour companies, overview of day/overnight trips and refreshments. Call (734) 722-7632.

Dyer Center

The Wayne-Westland school district's Dyer Senior Adult Center offers activities Monday-Thursday at the center, on Marquette between Wayne and Newburgh roads. Mondays, Senior Chorus at 1:30 p.m.; Tuesdays, arts, crafts and needlework at 9:30 a.m.; Wednesdays, kitchen band, 10 a.m., bingo at 1 p.m.; Thursdays, ceramics, arts, crafts at 9:30 a.m.

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/Plymouth CantonVVA 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/capliberators/.

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.

Tutoring 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.

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Westland, MI - Car accident injuries are often misunderstood. The pain from automobile accident injuries can last weeks, months, even years down. After an accident, many feel frustrated because they don't know how they should feel, how long it should take to get better and what they should do. A free report has recently been available to accident victims that reveals...

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Ann Arbor - A new free report has recently been released that reveals how breakthrough medical technology is offering new hope for sciatica sufferers. Discover how research has proven non-surgical decompression 86% successful in treating debilitating back pain. Find out how NASA's accidental discovery led to the most promising treatment today. For your free report entitled, "How Space Age Technology Is Solving Back Pain Without Drugs Or Surgery!" Call 1-800-862-6185 for the toll-free recorded message. Supplies are limited - call now. If phone lines are busy, visit: www.free-discreport4u.com

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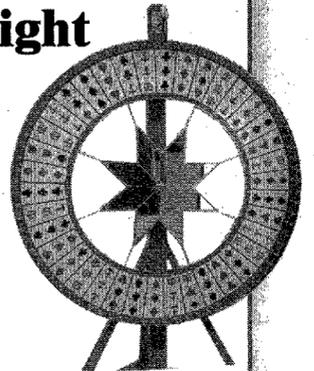
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Hopeful Butler says roadblocks stall economy

BY ALEX LUNDBERG
STAFF WRITER

Keith Butler says there are too many roadblocks between the people of the United States and economic success. There are too many taxes, too many regulations, too many lawsuits and an educational system that is failing despite being one of the most expensive in the world.

Butler is one of three men running to be the Republican party's nominee for the U.S. Senate and challenge incumbent Sen. Debbie Stabenow in November. The other candidates are Acton Institute think-tanker Jerry Zandstra and Oakland County Sheriff Michael Boucharde.

Butler, a former Detroit City Councilman and Republican activist for many years, said the people who know him



Butler

can't get their kids educated," he said. "We need people who understand what life is like for people on the street."

He's getting into the race for the U.S. Senate because he's concerned that the direction of the country is going means that his children and grandchildren are not going to have the same opportunities he had. The country has to change.

"The tax policy has made the country not a desirable place to invest," Butler said.

know he's a person who can get things done.

"For 30 years, I've been the person people come to when they can't get jobs, when they

"We've got the highest corporate income tax in the world. We've got the most burdensome regulatory environment in the industrial world and we're the most litigious society in the world. We're falling radically behind the rest of the world in education. Add that together and we're going to have a falling standard of living."

He said the tax code is 60,000 pages long and costs American businesses \$223 billion in compliance costs — which end up costing the nation jobs. For the nation to move forward, taxes will have to be slashed appreciably and tax loopholes reined in.

"We've got to get rid of all exemptions except the ones for home ownership, care for the elderly, rearing children and educational opportunities," Butler said. "We need to stop

the corruption of the tax code. It's unfair and it's arbitrary, we waste a ton of money every year just complying with it."

Regulations need to be scaled back. He said there's no reason for the country to be importing timber from Canada when Michigan saw mills are surrounded by forests except for regulation. The level of regulation nationwide, he said, prevents people from starting new businesses and stifling the existing ones from growing.

In the same vein, he said the country needs tort reform. Along with getting rid of frivolous lawsuits that clog the courts, he said there should be caps on lawsuits and victims to get more than lawyers do when rewards are handed down by juries.

"Medical liability is out of control," Butler said. "Doctors

get out of medical school and need \$500,000 premiums to work, it's driving up the cost of health care."

Finally, he said the country has to take a more serious approach to education. There's no way the country can be 22nd in math and science achievement and second in education spending.

"The system is antiquated," he said. "We're sending kids home at 3:30 and they're off all summer. They're not going home to harvest anymore. We need a longer school day and a longer school year. We cannot afford to turn out millions of kids without the skills they need to compete."

For someone who spent years as the pastor of Word of Faith International Christian Center Church in Southfield, the most Butler would say about his social agenda was

that he was pro-life and pro-traditional family. He said he would be spending a lot of time in the coming months extending his message beyond southeast Michigan.

"I'm going to advertise wherever I'm not known," Butler said.

What he does want known is that, while he has held elected office, he's not a career politician. He said he's built operations from the ground up and knows how to deal with taxes and meet payrolls. In terms of the election, he says he knows how to get votes where they'll count.

"I have an ability to get Democratic votes," Butler said. "The Republican party continues to put forward candidates who can't do that. I've been a producer all my life, I get things done. Debbie Stabenow is not a producer."

Treasurer sets hours for holiday

The offices of the Wayne County treasurer will be open for business 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Dec. 27-29 for walk-in tax payments. Online tax payments can be made via the treasurer's Web site at www.treasurer.waynecounty.com.

The office will be closed Dec. 23, Dec. 26, Dec. 30 and Jan. 2 and will reopen on Jan. 3.

The office of the Wayne County treasurer is at 400 Monroe in downtown Detroit.

Flying away: Metro Airport ready for busy holiday season

Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport (DTW) is expected to be busy between now and Jan. 3 as Christmas approaches and schools and businesses close for the holiday. However, departing local passenger traffic is not expected to be as heavy as in years past.

The busiest travel days are expected to be Dec. 21-23, Dec. 26, 27 and Jan. 2 and 3.

This is what passengers can expect to see and hear at DTW:

Sixteen area groups of musicians and local schools will perform at various times throughout the week leading up to Christmas to spread cheer throughout both the Smith and McNamara Terminals. This is the airport's 15th Annual Holiday Music Program.

Referenced in USA Today and Executive Travel magazine as a great place to "spend time and money," the McNamara Terminal offers anything from books, to a massage, or even a gift for your pet. The Terminal features over 80 shops and restaurants.

Super Bowl XL merchandise is available at numerous retail locations inside the Smith and McNamara Terminals. Travelers will be able to find a full line of Super Bowl XL memorabilia, including shirts, ball caps, and many other items that may be on a sports fan's wish list — or someone who wants to own a piece of history.

On-airport parking deals include \$6 per day parking in over 5,000 designated spaces in the airport's Big Blue Deck. While parking in the Blue Deck

is most convenient for travelers flying out of the L.C. Smith Terminal, the Yellow lot is walking distance from the Berry Terminal — with a cost of just \$7 per day; and the Green Lot will be open for a flat rate of \$10 per day. Free shuttle bus service is available to and from any terminal.

Short-Term Parking is ideal for brief visits, and the airport recommends meeters and greeters park short-term, and meet travelers in the luggage claim areas, instead of waiting at the curb fronts. Short-Term parking is \$3 for the first 30 minutes, \$5 for the first hour, \$7 for two hours, and \$3 for each additional hour.

Northwest Airlines (NWA) recently opened 19 new gates on a completely rebuilt C concourse in the McNamara Terminal ahead of schedule.

The concourse features high-glass curtain walls for an open and airy atmosphere and includes six sets of new restrooms, seven elevators, five sets of moving walkways, four family restrooms, two sets of escalators and two ATM's. The gates are used by NWA commuter partners Mesaba and Pinnacle Airlines flying as Northwest Airliner.

Last month, the Airport Authority added something meeters and greeters have been asking for — a coffee shop with snacks — in the McNamara Terminal domestic luggage claim. Caribou Coffee serves a wide variety of coffee drinks and pastries.

For additional information travelers can also visit www.metroairport.com or call (734) AIRPORT - (734) 247-7678, during normal business hours.

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OUR VIEWS

And to all, a very Merry Christmas

There's been a lot of discourse in the news lately about wishing people a "Merry Christmas."

Some people are afraid to say Christmas, concerned they may offend non-believers or believers of other faiths.

The early Christian church adapted the ancient mid-winter holiday as Christmas, a time to celebrate the birth of Jesus, who in the New Testament telling was born in a stable, when his parents couldn't find room at the inn. To Christians, Jesus is the Christ, foretold by the prophets as the Messiah and redeemer of mankind, the son God.

In his short ministry, Jesus brought a message of love, moral strength and salvation that has spread to every corner of the world.

Many Christians worry that the religious significance of the day is being lost. For many people, Christmas has simply become a day for visiting family members, eating a special meal and giving gifts to those they love.

And while all of those things have their place, for devout Christians, this is also a season to meditate on the meaning of Jesus' life, death and resurrection. For Christians, Christmas is a beginning that leads to the fulfillment of Easter.

But the Christmas story has been embraced by even those who do not consider themselves devout Christians. It is the story of a baby, lying in a manger, worshiped by simple shepherds and traveling kings. From these simple beginnings would come a religion teaching love, kindness, forgiveness and the promise of eternity for those who believe.

It is a time of hope, a time to share with believers and non-believers alike the simple message of the angels "Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men."

Merry Christmas.

Feast on the diversity of winter celebrations

Most of us who celebrate Christmas look forward each year to the family dinner for which grandma and the aunts each prepare a special dish. Each specialty enriches the meal, and without the traditional foods, the celebration dinner is diminished.

So it is that, around the world, numerous winter celebrations mark the calendar. Each one is special to an ethnic group or religion, and though different from the traditional Dec. 25 observance of Christmas, their diversity enriches us with an understanding of how people around the world live.

Moreover, they are a history lesson in how great religions were developed.

Sometimes the differences come within the Christian religion. For instance, the Russian Orthodox Church follows the old Julian calendar, with Christmas coming 13 days after the Roman Catholic observance, on Jan. 7.

Flipping back the pages of the calendar, there are other history lessons, notably with Hanukkah, which this year begins Dec. 26. Perhaps having more ritual than a Christian Christmas, the Jewish festival of lights lasts for eight days. A new candle in the menorah is lit each night, recalling the rededication of the holy temple in Jerusalem after their victory over the Syrians.

According to the traditional retelling, the Jews had found only enough oil for one day to light the temple, but it lasted for eight, giving them time to find another supply of oil.

Turning back the calendar farther still, one would be remiss to not mark a celebration — the winter solstice — that likely preceded all the great religions.

The winter solstice has been marked throughout the world, from the Incas whose celebration was banned by their Christian conquerors, to the Chinese who celebrate Dong Zhi on the shortest day of the year. From the Germans to the Spanish to the Scandinavians, what we now consider to be the beginning of winter was somehow celebrated.

Celebrations of the holidays have evolved, and now the African American community marks Kwanzaa from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1 with new traditions involving family, community and culture in a season of meditation and recommitment. It is not a substitute for Christmas, nor is it political. It does involve remarking on work, responsibility and economic strength.

Whether it's the Buddhists, who celebrate Bodhi on Dec. 8, or the five-day Hindu celebration of Diwali that marks their new year, there is a celebration during the winter months throughout the world. As diverse as we are, that is a universality in which we all share.

Just as each special dish builds a dinner, the history and traditions of religious and secular celebrations over the winter months feed into a history line, ending with who we are today.

This year, let us gather around the table of such diversity and feel enriched for the experience.



Leave Christ in Christmas

What happened to "Merry Christmas"? The merchants, schools and the general population seem to be forgetting what we are really celebrating this month. It is the birth of Jesus.

The word Christmas came from the words Crests mass, or Christ's Mass and referring to the religious ceremony of mass. Though no one really knows the day Jesus was born, modernists say that the Roman Emperor Constantine set Dec. 25 as a Christian holiday back in the 4th century (336 A.D.) to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

In a total world population of around 5.5 billion, there are more than 1.8 billion Christians (ref: 1994 *Britannica Book of the Year*), making it the largest religion worldwide.

In the U.S., out of a total population of 281 million people, there are 241 million Christians or 85 percent of the population. Because Christians follow Jesus and His word (the Bible), the birth of Jesus is important to us.

The celebration of giving gifts at Christmas started in the U.S. around the middle of the 1800s. This tradition was from the wise men (the Magi) bringing gifts to Jesus. As recounted in the Bible's book of Matthew (2:11), "On coming to the house they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped Him. Then they opened their treasures and presented Him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh."

This gift giving has grown to be a big boom for the stores and malls today. The period between Thanksgiving and Christmas are, by far, the biggest retail sales weeks of the year.

Christian missionaries from the earlier Germanic pagan midwinter holiday of Yule appropriated the Christmas tree, Christmas ham, holly, mistletoe and Yule Log. Before Christianity arrived, the celebration of the winter solstice was widespread and popular in northern Europe.

Instead of doing away with every tradition owned by pagans, Pope Gregory I permitted the Christian missionaries to allow the innocuous ones and placed a Christian significance to them. As early as 700 A.D. the missionaries used the triangular shape of the Fir Tree to describe the Holy Trinity of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It was referred to as God's Tree and by the 12th century was being hung, upside-down, from ceilings at Christmastime as a symbol of Christianity. The Christmas tree came over from Germany and then England in the early 1800s to the U.S.

If the people in the United States and the merchants insist on removing Christ from Christmas, maybe they should also give up the Christmas Day off from work as well, since one ties directly to the other. If they want to do away with Christmas, maybe they shouldn't have Good Friday off, as that is when Christians reflect on Jesus dying for us all, to forgive us of our sins. Also, Easter is when we celebrate Jesus rising from the grave.

If you start going away from Jesus, you may as well not have any of these days off to worship either. I'm sure your bosses would be glad to have you working

instead of taking a holiday at the company's expense.

Let's not forget the purpose of Christmas and keep Christ in Christmas. Thank you.

Jack Stange
Westland

Insurance isn't gift

It's a difficult time. We are regularly bombarded with stories about how various corporate or public organizations are finding it necessary to cut back or eliminate employee "health benefits." It's kinda as if these were gifts to the employees, and we sorta need to take them back so that we can keep on employing everybody.

Now, I am old enough to have been involved in the negotiations that brought "health insurance" to one group of employees, and it wasn't a gift. No one sent out a notice that said, "Hey we decided to give all you wonderful workers health insurance."

Health insurance premiums were negotiated in lieu of pay. The insurance came to us instead of, or as part of, a pay raise. So when folks say they need to take it back, they are trying to take something a lot of people struggled, sometimes for years, to get and it wasn't a benefit, it was part of our pay for our hours and days of work.

I don't want to drive any company out of business, but there are a lot of folks without health care and too many kids going to bed hungry, and someone is buying those \$250,000 houses, and you don't have to be terribly bright to see that things are out of balance and the working people don't need to be lied to about how they got what little financial security they have managed to keep.

Jim Cook
Westland

Ashamed of Church decision

Last week, *The Detroit News* ran an article about two metro area priests who were barred from duty. One of them was C. Richard Kelly, former pastor of St. Thomas A' Becket Parish in Canton. Father Kelly was accused of sexually abusing a minor 33 years ago in his first parish assignment, a charge he absolutely denies and for which there is no apparent supportive evidence.

I am a member of St. Thomas A' Becket parish. I can unequivocally say that Father Kelly was the most caring, charismatic and effective priest I have ever known during my 62 years of Catholicism. He always made our religion come vibrantly alive and relevant to our everyday lives. He was not only our parish leader, but a highly respected and well-known figure in the Detroit metropolitan area.

I cannot begin to put into words the distress I feel over the church's decision in this matter. It has chosen to accept one man's unsubstantiated accusation against another man who has devoted his entire adult life to serving the church. The archdiocese maintains that it is a credible accusation. However, their definition of the word "credible" is something "that possibly could have happened."

LETTERS

Well, I could make up all kinds of stories about things that possibly could have happened!

I strongly believe that the church did what it felt was politically expedient. It is afraid to stand up to the general public and state that some of these priests who are being accused are not guilty. I believe what happened to Father Kelly is a travesty of justice — no man should be judged guilty based upon one man's accusation and apparent lack of evidence. The manner in which he has been treated is very unchristian, and I'm ashamed and angry with my church for its behavior.

This whole priestly pedophilia issue from the beginning has had overtones of a Salem witch hunt. I would never want to trivialize any true accusation of molestation. But in this case, the excellent reputation that a great man has built up over the span of a 30-year priestly career has been evaporated by a misty, shaky story of something that quite possibly may not have happened.

Sally L. Hamrick
Westland

Defending basic rights

Our country was born upon freedom from tyranny and basic rights for all people. Kangaroo courts in Guantanamo undermine our credibility with the rest of the world and weaken our case for rightful action in other parts of the world.

The rights and freedoms this country was based upon should be extended to all until they are proven guilty. To do otherwise renders all of our rights and freedoms null and void.

Roy Johnson
Redford

Like the Boy Scouts

The natural disasters that occurred this year have raised millions of dollars for large national charities. This is good, however, I strongly encourage people to not forget the many deserving local charities, as they deliver important life services to the needy in Southeast Michigan.

Boy Scouts are asked to "Do a good turn daily." This can apply to everyone in society.

Eric Rito
Beverly Hills

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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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 know there are very, very kind people in the world, but there should be more people like them. To be stranded and cold ... 'This is what we do,' that's what he said. They were so nice."

- Diane Diem, about the act of kindness of a young couple who stopped to help her when her car stopped running

Today's crisis just might spur tomorrow's economic recovery

Remember the old adage that it's always darkest just before dawn?

I'm inclined to believe that the potential for a real revival of our economy is lurking under the superficial but very painful surface froth on our present economic misery.

As evidence, consider this: "The bad news is that there is an enormous crisis in the automobile industry; it's a terrific challenge to the state, the companies, the workers, the unions. But the good news is that it's creating a sense of urgency that will help get some things done in the industry that needed to be done for a long, long time."

That's the word from David Cole, the highly respected president of the Center for Automotive Research. Cole's point is that if you want to get big and important things done, it often takes a crisis to motivate people to make tough choices.

"My biggest fear about what could happen to the domestic auto industry," Cole says, "is for people not to take sufficiently radical steps to get the industry back on its feet. The worst thing that could happen is to wake up some day and discover the entire industry is dead, the victim of a thousand little cuts."

Cole is absolutely right, of course. The entire auto industry (and much of manufacturing, for that matter) is in the middle of an enormous transformation of its old business model.

There are three main components:

■ The role of organized labor. A globalized economy means the United Auto Workers union has lost the ability to define wages and benefits.

It could do that back when the auto industry was a closed domestic market, and relations between labor and management were confrontational but mutually dependent.

Today's economic realities will require labor and management to collaborate if both are to survive.

■ The nature of work and pay. The days are over when high school dropouts could earn a good wage as an essentially unskilled auto worker. Today's manufacturing requires workers with a minimum two-year degree from a community college, and most guess that the high-productive, flexible manufacturing of the near future will require a four-year college degree. Today, it is high skills that are needed to lead to high productivity, and high productivity makes high wages economically possible.

■ Competition. In the old days, auto companies competed to bring their own unique design and engineering features to their products. But going it alone today is just too expensive.

So you see Ford and General Motors collabo-

rating on developing a new six-speed automatic transmission, and DaimlerChrysler, GM and BMW working together on hybrid technology for use on larger vehicles.

Cole calls this development "coopetition," and it's likely to become the norm in the relatively near future.

As a sign of what the future of the auto industry might look like, Cole points to the joint venture between DaimlerChrysler (Germany), Mitsubishi Motors Corp. (Japan) and Hyundai Motor Co. (Korea).

Located in union-friendly Dundee in Monroe County, the Global Engine Manufacturing Alliance employs a couple of hundred UAW members who earn standard union wages and benefits.

But nearly everything else is different. The minimum requirement for a production employee is a two-year community college degree; many workers have four-year degrees. There are few work rules; workers are cross-trained and work in teams, so there is essentially only one job classification.

Outside suppliers, some union and some nonunion, provide some 45 different business services to the plant, including building and equipment maintenance. Management top-siders and leaders of UAW Local 723, which represents the workers, both think it's a great arrangement.

Cole thinks plants like Dundee represent a hopeful future for the auto industry. Even though the 2007 contracts between the Big Three and the UAW are in effect being re-negotiated right now, it's more likely that Dundee-like arrangements will bubble up from the bottom as local plant managers and union local leaders realize there is much more to be gained from collaboration than from conflict.

I suspect that when we come to write the history of this period, we will realize the tipping point was the Delphi bankruptcy. It challenged the notion that great big companies would survive for ever, regardless of what happened to their costs or the market. In a slightly perverse sense, it's the UAW leadership that is the greatest beneficiary of Delphi's restructuring, because it made it crystal clear that it can no longer be business as usual.

There's an old line that aptly catches today's requirement for collaboration, "Better to be in the train than on the tracks."

Here's hoping everybody pays attention — and here's hoping your holidays are merry and bright.

Phil Power is a longtime observer of politics, economics and education issues in Michigan. He would be pleased to hear from readers at ppower@cnnet.com. After a week off his column will return Jan. 5.



Phil Power

Annual candlelight vigil helps parents cope with their loss

The weather, unpredictable as it is in Michigan, never seems to be a problem for The Compassionate Friends when they get together for their annual candlelight vigil to honor children who have died too soon.

Last year, rain threatened the event, conducted in downtown Plymouth's Kellogg Park, but the raindrops stopped falling literally minutes before the 7 p.m. vigil. This year, snowflakes drifted down aimlessly, and of course it was cold, but nothing happened to dampen the event.

It could give you pause to wonder whether the children being honored by the ceremony are looking out for those gathered. Gail Lafferty doesn't wonder, though. She knows it, for sure.

"The kids definitely take care of us," she said with a smile.

Smiling comes easier now for Lafferty, a Livonia resident who lost her son, Max, at the age of 18 when he died in a car accident the day after Christmas in 1995. That's part of what makes this time of year hard — though for parents who've lost children, there's no such thing as an easy time.

What Lafferty does, though, is find things that help her get through the holidays, a season that might otherwise be lost to her. The annual vigil is one of those things.

"It gets hard, especially in December, especially around Christmas," Lafferty said, after sharing the trademark hug she has for just about everyone. "It helps me to work on this, though."

The Livonia chapter of The Compassionate Friends held its annual candle-lighting ceremony Sunday in Kellogg Park, braving elements that would have kept most people indoors — snow on the ground, temperatures below freezing, the Lions on national television.

It's part of an international children's memorial honoring — and, more importantly, remembering — children lost too young, the idea being to light candles at 7 p.m. in every time zone around the world. As the candles fade in one zone, they're lit in another, providing a 24-hour wave of light encircling the globe "in loving memory of all children that their light may always shine."

It's amazing to see literally hundreds of people come together, united in one common purpose, by a shared grief you have to experience to really understand. They gather around the Christmas tree decorated with ornaments bearing the names of children they've lost, a tangible expression of an intan-

gible feeling.

They share the moment with others in the same situation, bearing the same grief, hoping to connect with their lost child. They're gathered with friends, some long-time friends, some they see only on this night. Some lost their children only recently, others years ago.

There's a lot of repeat business at the vigil, people seeking solace and hoping to spread some.

"We get a lot of old-timers who come back for this, even though they don't even come to the meetings anymore," said Lafferty, treasurer of the Livonia chapter. "It doesn't surprise me. This is a special event."

Pat and Paula Gibbons agree. They've been coming since they lost their son, Dan, in an automobile accident four years ago. This year, they put up a Christmas tree in the park and decorated it with ornaments, pictures and testimonials to their son.

They attended Sunday's vigil with family, all gathered to help remember Dan, all happy to hear his name included with some 500 names read every year.

"You want to hear your child's name," Paula Gibbons said. "I've come a long way in four years, and The Compassionate Friends has been a big part of my healing. And time helps."

The Gibbonses lost Dan to a car accident. In the gathering, the causes of loss are all different — from car accidents to drug overdoses, from cancer to suicide — but the sense of loss is the same. The memorial features the singing of songs and the reading of inspirational poems.

The tears flow from the first minute to the last, from the eldest eyes to the youngest. Grieving parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters and friends all gathered to cry, to laugh — but mostly to remember.

That's the incredible part of this annual ritual, this yearly group hug that gets hundreds of people through one more holiday season. It's a difficult pain to imagine if you haven't gone through it, an impossible pain to manage if you have, a seemingly unbearable burden if you're just starting to go through it. But the candle-lighting ceremony helps.

"People feel good being here, although they're very sad, especially the newly bereaved," said Lafferty, who is getting through her 10th holiday season. "It's a special night."

Which might explain why the snow stopped.

Brad Kadrich is community editor of the *Plymouth Observer*. He can be reached via e-mail at bkadrich@hometownlife.com or by phone at (734) 459-2700.



Brad Kadrich

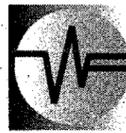
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