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Thursday
November 11, 1999

TODAY

OPINION

Local editorials: *The Plymouth-Canton high school marching band comes in for some well-deserved kudos. City commissioners are asked to do their homework on today's opinion pages.* /A14

AT HOME

Luxurious living: *Luxury is more a part of everyday living, at least in the kitchen and bathroom, as indicated by recent seminars at the Michigan Design Center in Troy.* /D8

ENTERTAINMENT

Film: *Discover "The Magic of Flight" at the new IMAX theater opening Friday, Nov. 19, at Henry Ford Museum in Dearborn.* /E1

Theater: *Schoolcraft College's "Merchant of Venice" is a wonderful production you won't want to miss.* /E3

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Inhalants played role in fatal crash

A student from Starkweather Center in Plymouth died in a fatal crash. A court hearing reveals how and why.

BY MATT JACHEMAN
STAFF WRITER
mjachman@oe.homecomm.net

Shortly after inhaling from a can of pressurized dusting spray, Sarah Cappuccitti of Canton "fished out" at the wheel of a Ford Tempo and the car lurched across eastbound I-96, went up the freeway embankment, through a fence and struck a tree.

That was how two passengers in the car described the Sept. 20 crash in Livonia that killed a friend, 17-

year-old Canton resident Alisha Roberson, who was sitting in the front seat. Alisha was a student at Starkweather Education Center in Plymouth.

"She had her head down and, uh, she was passed out," Natalie Reynolds said of Cappuccitti, who is charged with manslaughter, during a preliminary hearing in 16th District Court Tuesday. "She wasn't looking at the road."

The hearing ended when Judge Robert Brzezinski sent the case to Wayne County Circuit Court. Cappuccitti, 20, is to be arraigned there on Tuesday, Nov. 23. She could face up to 15 years in prison if convicted of manslaughter.

About 45 seconds before becoming unconscious, or "fishing out," Reynolds said, Cappuccitti had inhaled Dust-Off, a brand of pressurized spray designed to clean computers or photo equipment. It was the sec-

The defendant is charged with manslaughter. Witnesses said she inhaled from a can of Dust-Off before the fatal crash.

ond time she had done so as she, Roberson, Sarah Vitto and Reynolds traveled from Canton to Fairlane Town Center that evening, Reynolds said.

When Vitto, sitting next to Reynolds in the back seat, "yelled at her" not to inhale Dust-Off while driving, Cappuccitti replied, "No, I know how much to take and I won't fish out," Reynolds testified.

Roberson, who had also inhaled Dust-Off in the

Please see INHALANTS, A2

Parents in abuse case will do time

BY TONY BRUSCATO
STAFF WRITER
tbruscato@oe.homecomm.net

A Plymouth couple charged with sexually abusing their own daughters, as well as other children, will be spending time in prison as the result of a plea agreement.

The Wayne County prosecutor's office confirms John Bittenbender, 44, and his wife, Kathaline Mae, 41, agreed to a plea bargain in exchange for not having the facts of the case brought out in court.

During sentencing on Nov. 16, in front of Wayne County Circuit Judge Prentice Edwards, John Bittenbender is expected to plead guilty to three counts of criminal sexual conduct in the third degree. Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Daniel Less said the sentence agreement would see Bittenbender get 10-15 years in prison.

"The offer was negotiated, and Mr. Bittenbender accepted it because he didn't want to put his family through more grief," said Sam Churikian, the attorney for Bittenbender. "He wants to put closure to this ordeal as best he can."

Less said Kathaline Bittenbender will plead guilty to one count of engaging a child in a sexually abusive activity. He said Edwards could sentence her for up to 20 years in prison.

Both are currently being held in the Wayne County jail in lieu of \$950,000 bond each.

During the couple's preliminary examination last February, Less said the father abused the girls while the mother took pictures.

The father was initially charged with four counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct, as well as two counts of third-degree criminal sexual conduct, for assaulting his teenage daughters. Less said the mentally impaired girls were sexually abused for 10 years.

He was also charged with third-degree criminal sexual conduct, plus another charge of sexually abusive activity, in a separate case.

The mother had originally been charged with two counts of first-degree criminal sexual con-

Please see PARENTS, A6



On stage Dave Ebersole of Canton, in character as Siward, reacts to the death of his son Young Siward, portrayed by Andrew Freels of Plymouth, as MacBeth (Phil Boileau of Canton, upper left), battles MacDuff (Kevin O'Callaghan of Plymouth), during a rehearsal of "MacBeth." Phil Boileau of Canton (above left) as MacBeth, embraces Jessica Krueger of Canton as Lady MacBeth.

PCEP players take on 'Macbeth'

The Plymouth Park Players will stage the William Shakespeare tragedy "Macbeth" Nov. 18-20 in the auditorium at Salem High School.

The student production has been in rehearsal since September, said Gloria Logan, director and head of the PCEP drama department.

"We're using Scottish clan tar-

tans to help identify the families as one of the visuals that will clarify the story and characters," Logan said.

"Shakespeare was not only a great artist, he was a great businessman," Logan said. He wrote plays to appeal to the people of the audience. So he filled them with human passions - love, ambition, hate, jealousy, nobili-

ty, loyalty..."

The cast and crew includes 75 Plymouth Canton and Plymouth Salem students. Technical director is Paul Beard, with costume supervision by Penny Kindrake.

Performances are at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$5.

For tickets or information call (734) 416-7723.

Police still unsure about bullet fired into passing car

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

A man whose vehicle was struck by a bullet last month said he is disappointed with what he described as a lack of urgency from 911 dispatchers.

A Plymouth man, who asked not to be named, said he was heading home at around 10 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 14, when the shooting occurred. He was getting off M-14 at Sheldon when he heard a loud pop. He drove to his Plymouth home, where he discovered a bullet lying on his floor and a bullet hole in his passenger-side door.

He was alone in his sport-utility vehicle and alone on the highway when the incident occurred. He called 911 after discovering the hole and the bullet.

He said his initial call to 911 was handled poorly.

"I was transferred three times," he said. "What was disturbing about it was that I had just been shot at. The 911 response I got I thought was kind of pathetic. There are \$1 million homes a mile away from where it happened."

"The very first person I talked to should have sent someone to the scene immediately. Maybe I'm just naive." Troopers from the Michigan State Police arrived at his

home 20 minutes later," he said.

"They were very nice and very helpful," he said, adding that they came back several days later for a follow-up. Police told him the bullet was from a pistol.

He doesn't believe he was targeted.

"It was like a completely random act," he said.

Plymouth Police Chief Bob Scoggins said the city initially took the call, but transferred it to Plymouth Township when learning the incident took place there. From there, the Michigan State Police handled it, he said.

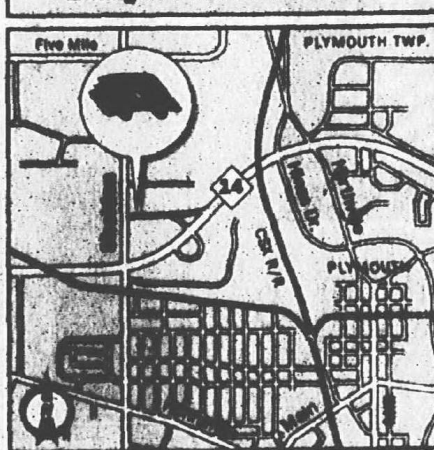
"I understood a call (about the shooting) did come in and was transferred to Plymouth Township," Scoggins said. "It was a call outside of our jurisdiction. There was some confusion, either on the part of the caller or dispatcher."

Adding to the confusion, Scoggins said, was the fact that a third jurisdiction - the Michigan State Police - was involved.

Plymouth and Plymouth Township dispatch services were separate until Nov. 1, when the Plymouth Community Communications Center went into effect. All city and township 911 calls are now answered at the center, which is in the Plymouth Town-

Please see MYSTERY, A6

Site where shot was fired at vehicle
Exiting M-14 at Sheldon Road



Board to interview final three

BY TONY BRUSCATO
STAFF WRITER
tbruscato@oe.homecomm.net

The Plymouth-Canton Board of Education has narrowed its search for a permanent superintendent to three candidates.

At Tuesday night's board meeting, trustees discussed which of the four remaining candidates they would invite back for a second interview. All seven of the trustees had Phyllis Wilson, deputy superintendent of Columbus (Ohio) Public Schools, on their short list of candidates they wanted back a second time for a more in-depth interview.

Four of the board members had William Weber, assistant superintendent at South Redford Schools, on their list. Four trustees also had Kathleen Booher, superintendent of Berkley Schools, on their list of candidates to bring back.

The list of five candidates quickly became four when Thomag Gay, Redford Union superintendent, withdrew from the selection process.

In a letter to the consulting firm con-

Please see SCHOOL BOSS, A6

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