

SECOND FRONT PAGE

Saturday, February 14, 1998

Detroit Free Press

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Jury believes self-defense claim

Man not guilty of murder, but his lover faces prison



Campaigning starts on a negative note

Let's make note of the cheerful quality of some of the early campaigning marking the beginning of Michigan's 1998 politics season.

GOP Chair BEST DEVOS: In a fit of gratuitous name-calling (via news release) this week, DeVos accused Democratic U.S. Sen. Carl Levin of "poised rhetoric," "hypocrisy," "stealing from the offering plate" and "political double-speak" on the issue of campaign finance reform.

Has been among a handful in Congress trying to reform and reduce the amount of soft money in politics, i.e., money not subject to federal contribution limits.

Had allowed his own senatorial fundraiser, Ruth Broder, to serve as treasurer for Victory '96, which collected and distributed substantial amounts of soft money from a March 1996 Michigan fundraiser with President Bill Clinton as guest.

Unmentioned by DeVos, of course, was the fact that Levin has been consistent and straightforward in acknowledging that both Democrats and Republicans abuse soft money, that it would be foolish to expect one side or the other to unilaterally disarm and that any reform will have to be bipartisan.

Also unmentioned by DeVos was the fact (which she has forthrightly acknowledged in the past) that the DeVos family has been a huge soft-money contributor to the GOP.

MICHIGAN DEMOCRATS: Chairman Mark Ergler, at his class-warfare best, fumed earlier this month about how Gov. John Engler uses working families "as a patsy so he can reward his wealthy friends and supporters with unfair and unwarranted tax windfalls" and then announced a radio ad campaign to sully up Engler on the issue.

The ads belittled Engler's State of the State taxcut proposal for a five-step reduction in the income tax from 4.4 percent to 3.9 percent, beginning in 2000 as too little, too late, as "a lousy buck" a week, etc.

It was low-brow stuff at best. Unmentioned, of course, were any specific Democratic alternatives and ah! — the fact that on State of the State night, lots of Democratic legislators applauded the governor's taxcut proposal and boasted of having the idea first.

STATE CHAMBER'S REBUTTAL: The Michigan Chamber of Commerce, a well-heeled, election-year arm of the Michigan GOP, shut back this week with radio ads of its own.

They were nasty? Nope — just paucite. Kids and a teacher in a make-believe classroom whacked the Democrats for "revisionist history," rambled selectively about Engler's record in office, especially tax cuts, and ended with this exchange:

Student: "Oh, those Democratic Party ads are revisionist history?" Teacher: "That's right, Mike." Blah, blah, blah...

Anyway, we asked Karen Hickomb-Merrill of Common Cause in Michigan what she thought of all the early negative advertising (not paid for by anyone's campaign and, thus, not subject to any sort of spending limits). She sighed and said:

"It's going to make the campaigns in Michigan even more negative than they have been." Yuck.

In brief

McMillin vs. RABERT: Tom McMillin, who until recently was managing Gary Arntin's very long-shot GOP primary campaign against Gov. John Engler, says he'll announce today for the seat held by U.S. Rep. Dale Kildee, D-Flint, since 1977. So far, McMillin, an Auburn Hills city councilman and a Pat Buchanan delegate to the '96 GOP National Convention, is the only GOP'er to surface for the seat. Is Arntin still McMillin's candidate for governor? It's running for Congress, McMillin responds.

BY HUGH McDIARMID JR. Free Press Staff Writer

A not-guilty verdict for a Royal Oak Township man charged with second-degree murder left his lover in a bizarre situation Friday.

Royal Oak Township convicted by a felony the first jury says never happened.

by Circuit Court.

Two juries — one for each defendant — heard the testimony simultaneously. On Tuesday, the other jury deliberated less than six hours before finding Yelena Kazmina guilty of being an accessory after the fact to a felony.

Prosecutors said Shkhiyan stabbed Yevgeny Belov last March 18 during an argument in a Royal Oak Township apartment parking lot, severing an artery in his leg from which he bled to death.

blood from the knife and hiding it in an attempt to protect Shkhiyan from criminal prosecution.

Jurors in Shkhiyan's trial told attorneys after the verdict that they believed his claim that he used the knife in self-defense as Belov attacked him. Defense attorneys portrayed Belov as a violent, bitter man who had harassed the couple and threatened to slash Kazmina.

The not-guilty verdict likely won't affect Kazmina's conviction, several legal experts agreed Friday. Kazmina's lawyer, Howard Arr-

hauf, could not be reached for comment Friday.

Jose Faneago, Shkhiyan's lawyer, said Kazmina's jury may have convicted her even if they didn't believe murder was involved. Jurors were instructed to convict her if they thought the stabbing was a felony — felony assault, for example, Faneago said.

Kazmina could get up to five years in prison during a March 19 sentencing by Oakland County Circuit Judge David Breck.

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Yelena Kazmina, left, and Mikhail Shkhiyan were charged after a fatal stabbing.

DINNER IS SERVED

New soup kitchen has strong appetite to help the needy

BY MOLLY ABRAHAM Free Press Staff Writer

Levin Hickson looked around his east side Detroit neighborhood a couple years ago and saw change.

Loft apartments emerging from old brick structures. New construction. A shopping strip catering to middle-class tastes.

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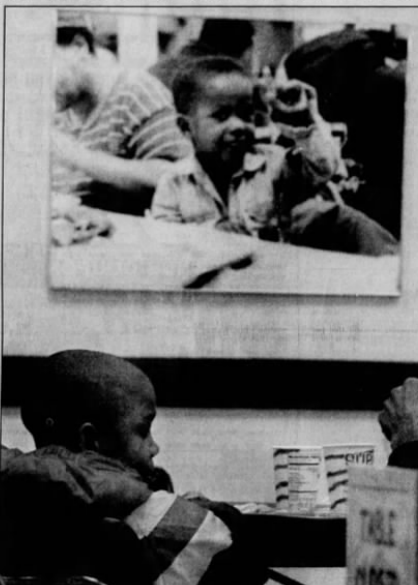
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DeMontrose Brown, 8, has a bite to eat at Conner Soup Kitchen, which officially opens Sunday.



The Rev. Jim Leary, director of the new facility, talks to volunteers Thursday. For the past three weeks the kitchen has been offering free evening meals to the working poor.

Jury acquits 2 of benefiting from Detroit houses

BY TIM DORAN Free Press Staff Writer

A former Detroit Planning and Development Department supervisor and a suspended city police officer were acquitted Friday of charges that they illegally sold and rented city-owned houses.

After a two-week trial, a Wayne County Circuit Court jury found Virginia Beher, 50, not guilty of two

counts of embezzlement and two counts of conspiracy to commit loan fraud, the attorney, Gerald Sniderman, said.

Sniderman said, "I was acquitted on five counts that included larceny, witness fraud and conspiracy to commit larceny."

The two Detroiters were among 13 people charged after an investigation into corruption in the depart-

ment. Charges against another Sniderman client, Deane Larkins, were dismissed, the attorney said. Some others of the 13 are awaiting trial.

Three people were convicted in October on charges of conspiracy to convert city-owned property to their own use. They are awaiting sentencing.

Beher was accused of arranging for people to buy city-owned homes

at less than market value. She was charged in three separate cases.

One was dismissed, Sniderman said, and the third is scheduled for trial in July.

"It's almost not fair," he said. "It's almost like they charged her three times so they could get acquitted."

Beher was acquitted. Page 10A

Judgment, payment not same

Big pollution award may not be collected

BY DAWSON BELL Free Press Staff Writer

The check is definitely not in the mail yet on a record-setting \$16-million judgment awarded the state this week in a pollution lawsuit against the owners of a closed Oakland County landfill.

Waterford Township Circuit Judge Jessica Cooper entered the award Wednesday, declining to set aside a default judgment against one former owner and a former manager of the Waterford Hills Landfill on Gale Road who did not appear for trial last summer.

Attorney General Frank Kelley hailed the decision, which he described as the largest pollution award in state history, and chastised the defendants for "unparalleled arrogance toward the court... and the people."

But whether the defendants have the money, or whether it can ever be collected from them if they do have it, is far from clear.

One of the defaulting defendants, former landfill manager James King, has no lawyer. His whereabouts are unknown, Assistant Attorney General Brian Devlin said Friday.

Another defendant in default, former owner Gene Hirs, is in sequestration and does not have large assets, said his lawyer, George Heitman.

Hirs' company, Waterford Sanitary Landfill Ltd., which was also found to be in default, is defunct and has no assets, Heitman said.

Two other defendants, John and Robert Ranco, who bought the landfill from Hirs in 1986 and ran it until it was ordered closed in 1990, are also defendants. They await a liability hearing in April.

The state and Waterford Township incurred the \$16-million cleanup cost after pollution from the landfill contaminated groundwater.

CLOSINGS

Monday is Presidents' Day. There will be no mail delivery.

The stock markets will be closed.

In Wayne County, the clerk's office will be open but Wayne County Circuit Courts will be closed. In Oakland and Macomb counties, the clerk's offices and courts will be closed. All federal offices and U.S. District Court will be closed.

State offices, including Secretary of State branches, will be closed. City of Detroit offices will be open. Buses and the People Mover will run on regular schedules.

Some banks will be closed. Some local government offices may be open. Contact your city, village or township clerk.

Monday is forecast as partly sunny with lows in the lower 20s to highs in the 40s.