

3A FRIDAY, DECEMBER 19, 1997 TIMES HERALD PORT HURON, MICHIGAN 3A

WHOM TO CALL: TO DISCUSS LOCAL NEWS Gary Miles, city editor, 989-6257 Kim Estep, regional editor, 989-7641 Bob Gross, River District, 765-4081

LOCAL & STATE

MICHIGAN NEWS IN BRIEF

Court sets up guidelines for liability at roller rink LANSING — Roller rink operators can't guarantee that no one will fall or collide with another skater. But that does not mean they are off the hook if someone gets hurt because the risk of skates are unsafe, the Michigan Court of Appeals has ruled. A special panel of the court set up to settle a disagreement over the law released a decision Thursday. It reversed a Wayne County Circuit Court ruling and said it should not have dismissed a lawsuit filed by a man who broke his ankle while skating.

Rod Stewart faces suit over kicked soccer ball DETROIT — A woman who says Rod Stewart injured her when he kicked a soccer ball into the audience at a concert has filed a suit against the singer in federal court. Candace Conroy of Taylor filed the \$75,000 lawsuit in U.S. District Court. She claims she suffered unspecified head, neck, face and mouth injuries after she was hit by a soccer ball kicked by Mr. Stewart during a March 18, 1996, concert at the Palace of Auburn Hills.

Two women, boy found slain in Detroit home DETROIT — Two women and a boy were found fatally shot in the head Thursday in their home here, police said. The 5-year-old boy died on the way to the hospital, while his 19-year-old mother died at the house, said Officer Tommy Wilson. A 42-year-old woman also died in the multiple shootings, which happened about 12:55 p.m. Their identities were not released. No motive for the shooting had been determined.

State board endorses buying North Fox Island NORTHPORT — A state board has recommended buying North Fox Island and keeping it as a natural area open to the public. The Natural Resources Trust Fund Board also proposed buying property on the north shore of Teal Lake near the Upper Peninsula cities of Ishpeming and Negaunee. The acquisitions were among 19 endorsed Wednesday by the board. Altogether, the 19 proposed acquisitions totaled \$13.1 million. The board also approved \$3.7 million worth of park, trail and waterfront improvements.

Kent teen-ager convicted in mutilation slaying GRAND RAPIDS — Jurors who listened to a tape of a Kent County man mutilating a teen-ager's severed head found him guilty Thursday of murder, rejecting defense claims of insanity. There was no doubt that Federico "Kiko" Cruz of Sparta killed David Crawford, 17. The case centered on whether he was mentally ill in April 1996. Mr. Cruz, 18, suffocated Mr. Crawford along railroad tracks in Sparta. He then cut off the victim's head, took it home and mutilated it while a camera rolled.

Man accused of hiding AIDS from sex partners TRAVERSE CITY — The women were thrilled and impressionable, police say. Easy prey for a smooth-talking sex offender with a terrifying secret. He carries the AIDS virus. James Wallace Jones is believed to have had sex with at least 10 women since his release from prison last June, police say. He had served 4½ years for attempted criminal sexual conduct with a minor. On Thursday, he was arraigned on four counts of failure to inform a sex partner he was infected with HIV. He also is charged with criminal sexual conduct and faces life in prison if convicted.

From Times Herald wire services.

MICHIGAN The Kalamazoo Municipal Airport became Michigan's first licensed municipal airport in December 1929. Source: MichLiaison 11.

CORRECTIONS AND AMPLIFICATIONS The Times Herald strives for fair and accurate reporting, and we regret any time an error is made. It is the policy of this newspaper to correct substantive errors as fast as they appear in its news columns. Please bring errors to the attention of Gary Miles at 989-6257.

Marine City commission takes lawyers' advice

Officials mum on next steps

By BOB GROSS Times Herald MARINE CITY — The Marine City Commission moved to accept the lawyers' recommendations regarding lawsuits filed against the city involving a current police officer, the former treasurer and the former city clerk.

The commission made that decision at its Thursday meeting, following a closed, executive session where commissioners heard an update on negotiations with the Police Officers Labor Council regarding a new contract with the city's police officers and an update from its lawyers about pending litigation. When asked what those recommendations regarding the lawsuits were, City Manager David Richards said: "I can't tell you that."

Marine City Attorney Thomas M. Clemens Jr. did not return phone calls this morning seeking comment. Among the lawsuits against the city is one filed by Officer Brad Kolcz. Officer Kolcz is suing for wrongful termination resulting from an incident in which he arrested a man on outstanding warrants. The man claimed Officer Kolcz used excessive force. The man, Joseph Kleckner also is suing the city and Officer Kolcz. Officer Kolcz was fired by former

City Manager Michael LaChance on Feb. 2, 1996. Officer Kolcz later pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor and was reinstated in June 1996. He filed a lawsuit against Mr. LaChance — who was fired by commissioners on Feb. 15, 1996 — and the city in September of this year in U.S. District Court. He was asking for damages "substantially greater than \$250,000" on each of eight counts. Former City Clerk Carol Odette and former City Treasurer Anna

Gaynor have filed claims against the city, claiming they were terminated or forced from their jobs in retaliation for a sexual discrimination lawsuit against the city. That lawsuit was dismissed in the city's favor and is being appealed. During a recent mediation hearing, Mrs. Odette and Mrs. Gaynor were offered a total settlement of \$700,000. That was rejected. The lawyer for the women, Janet Toolay of Detroit, could not be reached for comment this morning.



Marysville teachers protest lack of contract

Tom Marshall, a Marysville Intermediate School teacher, above right, was among the pickets outside the Marysville Middle School building during the school board meeting Thursday night. The teachers have been without a contract since Aug. 30, and about 70 people took part in the picketing, said Fred Voss, a seventh- and eighth-grade teacher at Marysville Intermediate School who also is on a contract negotiations team. Mr. Voss said a sticking point in the negotiations is a proposal to decrease insurance benefits. Superintendent Charles Andrews could not be reached for comment this morning.

Errors cast doubt on credibility of state school dropout report

By JUSTIN HYDE The Associated Press LANSING — Michigan's dropout rate for the 1995-96 school year was 7.2% August. Thursday, it was 6.4%. It will likely change again next week. The Department of Education released its annual report on retention and dropout rates Thursday — and quickly threw its reliability into doubt. State officials say many districts do not have the resources to track and report the numbers accurately. But school officials say rigid definitions mean many pupils who might be in class are counted as dropouts. "There have been recent improvements in the data," said state Superintendent Arthur Ellis. "But the data is still unreliable and unworthy."

The state did say 51 schools reported negative dropout rates, a mathematical impossibility that indicates the data from the schools is not valid. Other schools had graduation rates of more than 100% — another sign of error. In spite of that, the report tells legislators that the state's dropout rate was 6.4% and that the graduation rate was 77.7%. The numbers for the year keep changing because schools are continually revising their numbers, said Jean Shane, an educational consultant with the Department of Education. "Garbage in, garbage out" is one of our favorite sayings," she said. "Many districts don't have the resources to spend on it, or

to have a statistician in charge." Ms. Shane said the state gave districts many chances to fix the numbers, and tried to get in touch with districts that had unlikely or outlandish data. The highest dropout rate was reported in Taylor, where 33.9% of the district's students supposedly dropped out during the year. In addition, the graduation rate was calculated as 18.4%. Diane Szalka, assistant superintendent for instruction in Taylor, called the numbers "ridiculous." "We're a transient community, and a student that leaves here and goes to another district won't ask for records right away. If nobody asks for the records, they end up being listed as a dropout," she said.

Engler may need new running mate

By KATHY BARRIS HOFFMAN The Associated Press EAST LANSING — Republican Party Chairman Betsy DeVos thinks Gov. John Engler will have to add one more item to his list of pre-election chores: find a new running mate. Speaking Thursday during a taping of public television's 'Off the Record' program, Ms. DeVos said she has not spoken to Lt. Gov. Connie Binfield about whether she will run again. But Mr. DeVos thinks Lt. Gov. Binfield, 73, a former teacher, may be ready to leave the Capitol after serving eight years in the House, eight in the Senate and eight as lieutenant governor. "It is her decision. But my gut tells me she's going to say, 'I'm going to enjoy the last years of my life with John,' her husband," Ms. DeVos said. She declined to speculate on whom she thinks Gov. Engler should pick as a running mate if Mrs. Binfield decides not to run. But she strongly defended the governor's right to ask voters for a third term, although he said previously he would only serve for two terms and future

governors will be limited to serving eight years. "I believe he fully intended to only run two terms. But the third term that he is going to run for next year is absolutely called for because he has put this state in such a terrific direction," she said. "To turn away from that now, I think, would be a mistake." Democratic Party Chairman Mark Brewer, who appeared on the show with Ms. DeVos, accused Gov. Engler of being a hypocrite and said Democrats plan to make his decision to run for a third term a key campaign issue. "You're talking about someone who made a public pledge, a promise, to only serve two terms, and now we want to hear, 'Well, term limits applies to everybody else except John Engler,'" Mr. Brewer said. "He's skating along the edge and using a technicality in the law to avoid" stepping down. Term limits kick in next year for state House members, but will not take effect for the state Senate or statewide offices such as governor and attorney general until 2002. Mr. Brewer and Ms. DeVos,

about our parties. Let's stick to that, OK?" She reminded Mr. Brewer that the Democratic National Committee has had to return millions of dollars in illegal campaign contributions, while money given to Republican causes has been "honest, straightforward, legally collected money." But Mr. Brewer did not stop there. "Why don't we talk about the access and influence that the Amway Corporation has purchased with that money. It has broken in bills passed last summer (or) a provision in a bill that's going to block the merger of hospitals in Grand Rapids," he said. "Time after time, it's been demonstrated that Amway, the DeVos family and many, many other soft-money contributors to the Republican Party have bought access and influence." For her part, Ms. DeVos said Mr. Brewer was stretching facts and the truth. "Why doesn't your party start obeying the law?" she said. "The fact is, your party doesn't have good ideas." The program will air Dec. 26. He's right."

Currier will leave post

Communications chief takes job in private sector

By PAUL EGAN Times Herald Robert Currier has resigned as St. Clair County's communications director, effective Jan. 7. Mr. Currier, 42, said he has accepted a job in the private sector and submitted his resignation to Sheriff Dan Lane Wednesday.

The job, with a company headquartered out of state, is related to the emergency telephone number 911, Mr. Currier said. "There will be an industry announcement about it in the next 30 days," he said. "It was an opportunity that was presented to me, and I look at it as a positive career move." He said he will be able to work from home and commute to live in the area. The communications director is responsible for coordinating the county's emergency dispatch services for fire, police and ambulance. In the job for 10 years, Mr. Currier said the high point of his career with the county was bringing in enhanced 911 on time and under budget in 1994. Enhanced 911 immediately dispatches a dispatcher with a caller's address.

The low point was the November 1996 defeat of a millage request to pay for the improvement county emergency communication system, he said.

Some chiefs, most of whom answered the county-sponsored survey anonymously, criticized Mr. Currier for not responding to their concerns. "We had our ups and downs," Port Huron Township Fire Chief Bob Howe said. "Mr. Currier's Nobody's as good as I want them to be — even me."

"Bob did a lot of very good things for the community. He tied a lot of things together that were kind of loose before. He'll be missed."

Retirement party honors Moeller By MELANIE S. MATHEWS Times Herald Family, friends and co-workers bid Larry J. Moeller farewell on Thursday night at his retirement party. "I'm really happy for him, and I'm going to miss him," said Mary Butcher, a second-grade teacher at Thomas Edison Elementary School. Mr. Moeller will resign after 18 years as superintendent of the Port Huron Area School District at the end of the year to become chief executive officer of Citizens First Savings Bank in Port Huron, Michigan. State Sen. Dan DeGrosz, R-Port Huron, and State Rep. Terry London, R-Marysville, were among the well-wishers. There were 285 guests invited to the private gala at the Thomas Edison Inn, said Ruth Wallace, executive director of human resources. Mr. Moeller stood next to his wife, Sylvia, and smiled as friends shook his hand. "I'm tired," said laughing. "No, I'm honored and pleased." Thomas Shurkey, super-

intendent of the East China School District, said he called Mr. Moeller every time he had a difficult issue in his school district. "I couldn't tell you how many times I have contacted him over the years. He had a way of using common sense," he said. The evening also included a video tribute, with pictures of Mr. Moeller as a child on up to recent years. The music in the background played "My Way" by Frank Sinatra. "My Way — it's just how Larry does things," Ms. Wallace said. Mr. Moeller's oldest brother is Ron, and his wife, Norma, also attended. "It's a celebration, but it's not for him to leave the school district," said Rep. Moeller.

Becky Moeller, Mr. Moeller's niece, came in from Denver. "I came just to see him because I'd said he was not in control of the festivities." Sylvia Moeller, adding, "It's very hard on him when he's not in control. He's right."

Currier was paid \$32,902, not including benefits. "He is going to be a tremendous loss to the department," Sheriff Lane said. The county's aging communication system was frequently knocked out by lightning, but Mr. Currier was always able to get it operating again, once working a 36-hour stretch, he said. The county's aging communication department can apply for the job, but it's likely the county will have to look outside, he said. A survey this summer of St. Clair County police and fire departments revealed widespread unhappiness with the county's communications system. Some chiefs, most of whom answered the county-sponsored survey anonymously, criticized Mr. Currier for not responding to their concerns. "We had our ups and downs," Port Huron Township Fire Chief Bob Howe said. "Mr. Currier's Nobody's as good as I want them to be — even me."