STATEWIDE

Michigan loses 2 more soldiers in the Iraq War 7B



Selfridge event honors Tuskegee Airmen

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Wednesday, July 19, 2006 Metro dept.: 313-222-6600, localnews@freepress.com

Protesting Unger sent to prison

'Jury has spoken,' judge says in handing down life sentence

By FRANK WITSIL

MANISTEE - Proclaiming his innocence to the end, Mark Unger was sentenced Tuesday to life in prison without parole for killing his wife,

Florence, nearly three years ago while vacationing in Benzie County.

"I was wrongfully convicted of this crime and I am innocent," the 45-year-old Huntington Woods man said in court Tuesday.



the verdict against him in his wife's murder was ridiculous. He received a mandatory life sentence.

Just before the sentencing, Unger's attorney, Robert Harrison, asked Benzie County Circuit Judge James Batzer to overturn the jury's June

21 guilty verdict on the basis that there was no evidence to support it.

MACOMB

Batzer said that would not be appropriate. "The jury has spoken," Batzer said.

A widespread blackout in Benzie County, where Florence Unger was killed, forced officials to move the sentencing, which was set for the 19th

See UNGER, 7B

What's next for Mark Unger

Mark Unger likely will spend the rest of his life in a Michigan prison after being sentenced Tuesday. He is expected to be transported soon to the Charles Egeler Reception and Guidance Center Annex in Jackson.

The center serves as the main intake office for new male pris-

Once Unger arrives, he will be

evaluated to determine the appropriate facility for permanent imprisonment.

He has been incarcerated at the Benzie County Jail since being charged with first-degree

He was given credit Tuesday by Circuit Judge James Batzer for 132 days served.

IT'S SHOWTIME



last year but had to audition again with other women who want a shot at making the team. About 150 women attended the tryout.

Women line up to join Pistons dance team

Only 18 to 20 are likely to get invite

BY NAOMI R. PATTON FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

They wore mostly black spandex, several with belly rings that sparkled from afar, and the occasional set of thick, false lashes that could be seen from a luxury suite.

They stretched, preened and waited, and stretched

again. Then, it was showtime. Nearly 150 local women showed up at the Palace of Auburn Hills this week to audition for the upcoming season of the Detroit Pistons dance team Automotion. But only 18 to 20 of them are expected to get calls on Thursday inviting them to join Automotion for its 11th season.

Despite their odds, they came in droves with a resume, a headshot and \$20 to give it a shot. Some applicants were veterans trying out as they must every year for the team. Others, like La-Donna Tennant, 21, of Detroit



Bethanie Amann, 20, of Superior Township, wearing No. 53, looks for her number Monday to see whether she made the first cut. She did.

were newcomers.

"I just want to give her my support," said Paulette Bedgood of Detroit. She had driven Tennant, her daughter, to the audition.

Tennant, a former cheerleading captain at Mumford High School and current

cheerleader for Ferris State University, was eager to give Automotion a try.

"I'm excited and nervous at the same time," Tennant said. "I don't know what to expect."

See CHEER, 7B

Calls for help bombard metro **Detroit charities**

By SHABINA S. KHATRI

Many of metro Detroit's charities are reeling this summer — and not just because of the heat.

Rising temperatures and joblessness have hit at a time when many local charities already struggle with a soaring demand for basic needs like clothing, food and shelter.

The problem is one that James Barrowman — once a helper, but now seeking help is still coming to terms with.

"Last year, I was making a good living," said Barrowman, 25, who was laid off from his roofing and siding job two months ago. A missed mortgage payment cost him his Warren home, but Barrowman

said it wasn't until his girlfriend recently became pregnant that he decided to request assistance.

"It was extremely hard for me to ask for help, but I told myself I'm not the first one," he said while waiting Tuesday at the Roseville headquarters of the Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team (MCREST). "And now it's not just about me.'

But charitable groups in the state — be they large or small are feeling the crunch. At United Way for South-

eastern Michigan, calls to its 2-1-1 help line reached 6,700 last month — double the number of calls received in June 2005.

"This isn't just an urban/

See CRUNCH, 7B

Authorities seek abuser of bald eagle

Wildlife investigators want to know who captured a bald eagle in the Upper Peninsula, clipped its wing and tail feathers so it couldn't fly and spraypainted its head brown.

The mistreated, emaciated adult eagle was found in the woods near a house June 30, but how it got there is still a mys-

"It was abused and near starvation," said Todd Bruntjens, who picked up the bird the day it was found, hopping in dense woods. "It's a total disgrace."

Bald eagles are protected as a threatened species by state and federal laws, and no one is allowed to possess them without a special permit.

Bruntjens and his wife,

Reward offered

There is a \$1,200 reward for information leading to the arrest and conviction of whoever had the bald eagle, and the person or people could face fines and prison time. Anyone with information on the eagle or wildlife poaching can call 800-292-7800, 24 hours a day.

Gayle, run a rehabilitation center for raptors at their home near Brampton.

When the eagle was found, it was weak and emaciated because it hadn't eaten in days. It couldn't fly and could only hop a few feet.

"When we got it, it kind of hung its head like it was depressed," Bruntjens said Tues-

See EAGLE, 7B

A juror questioning a witness? It's possible

aybe you've dreamed of bringing an arrogant witness to his knees — think of Tom Cruise breaking Jack Nicholson in "A Few Good Men" — but never got around to graduating from law

Maybe you long to visit the scene of a notorious murder — or the supermarket aisle where your neighbor slipped and broke her hip.

Or maybe, like a certain middle-aged newspaper columnist, you just remember things better when you write



BRIAN DICKERSON

them down.

If you're a prospective juror in search of a more proactive, participatory courtroom experience, Michigan's highest court wants to

In an initiative that could empower jurors to query

witnesses or request field trips to the scene of significant events, the state Supreme Court has proposed more than a dozen reforms that could dramatically alter the experience and impact of juries throughout Michigan.

The proposals range from minor changes, such as allowing jurors to consult their own notes during deliberations, to significant innovations, such as allowing judges to moderate debate-style panel discussions in which opposing expert witnesses could ask one another questions or answer those posed by jurors.

Chief Justice Clifford Taylor, who was appointed to the high court by then-Gov. John Engler in 1997, told me he

asked Justice Stephen Markman, another Engler appointee, to develop a list of proposed rule changes after hearing colleagues at a conference of chief justices extol the benefits of a more participatory jury experience.

"Many of these changes, such as allowing jurors to discuss testimony among themselves during breaks in a trial, strike the ear of an American lawyer as quite suspect," Taylor conceded in a phone interview. But judges whose states have implemented similar rules report that they "work wonderfully."

Taylor says he and his colleagues will seek input from the lay public as well as lawyers and trial judges for

six months before deciding whether to implement any of the proposed changes in Michigan. But "if they enhance the truth-seeking function," he adds, "we should look hard at them."

Critics often complain that the state Supreme Court's incumbent Republican majority has made it too difficult for ordinary citizens to bring their cases before a jury, and some plaintiffs' lawyers I spoke to Tuesday are suspicious of the court's interest in juror empowerment.

But state Supreme Court spokesperson Marcia McBrien says justices are only looking for ways to make jury service a less-daunting obligation.

"We don't ask people to go into a physics lab and conduct an experiment without knowing anything about physics or being allowed to take notes or ask any questions," McBrien notes. "Ought we not be trying to make this process as easy as we can?"

McBrien says justices are particularly interested in hearing what Michigan residents who've served on juries think of the proposed changes, which can be viewed at www.courts.michigan.gov /supremecourt/Resources /Administrative/2005-19 .pdf.

Contact BRIAN DICKERSON at

bdickerson@freepress.com.

LOCAL DEATHS

Sgt. Al'Kaila Floyd: A 'very respectful young man'

He was mannerable and a mentor. And now friends and family members of Army Sgt. Al'Kaila Floyd are preparing to say good-bye to him.

Sgt. Floyd, 23, formerly of Grand Rapids, died July 13 in a German hospital, the U.S. Department of Defense confirmed

"He was a wonderful kid. There wasn't anybody that didn't like him," said Lisa Frain, whose son and Sgt. Floyd were friends in high school. "Just a very, very respectful young man. Never swore. ...

"I think this is his third tour in Iraq, and I thought that was admirable," she said.

Sgt. Floyd's family is arranging the details of his funeral.

Sgt. Floyd was the second soldier from Michigan to die because an armored vehicle drove over an improvised explosive devise near Ramadi, Iraq, on July 8. He was the 93rd member of the armed forces with Michigan ties to die in the war in Iraq.

Specialist Joseph Paul Micks of Rapid River died immediately. Sgt. Floyd, the vehicle's gunner, died last week as his family was traveling to see easkari@freepress.com. The Associhim in Landstuhl Regional ated Press contributed to this report.

Medical Center in Germany, said his uncle, Glenn Floyd of Grand Rapids.

Micks and Sgt. Floyd were members of the 54th Engineer Battalion, 130th Engineer Brigade, based in Bamberg, Ger-

Sgt. Floyd was a 2001 graduate of Ottawa Hills High School in Grand Rapids, where he was a member of the wrestling team and the Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps.

portunities in Grand Rapids, his uncle said. "He was going to make a career of it," he added. We're all real proud of him."

year-old nurse based in Indiana, said Sgt. Floyd was a mentor to her when she started Junior ROTC at Ottawa Hills.

"You could always count on him to be there for you if you needed," Krenz said.

Sgt. Floyd's survivors include his grandmother, Charlene Tatum, who raised him and his siblings after their mother died; his twin brother, Al'Jaila, and sisters Luzinka Morgan and Tokia Hampshire.

248-351-3298 or

But she didn't

message from him Monday af-

Dickinson, called her later that

day in tears from their home in

Ft. Bragg, N.C., she knew it

An Army chaplain was in

"I knew what that meant,"

Sgt. Dickinson belonged to the U.S. Army Special Opera-

Vicki Dickinson said her

son, the youngest of five chil-

dren, "always tried to make

light of some things so I would

Iraq was a "dangerous and ugly

School graduate, Sgt. Dickin-

son played percussion in band,

and was an athlete, playing

football, basketball and tennis,

Vicki Dickinson added that

he was quite popular with the

girls. "He was a cutie pie," she

Sgt. Dickinson, who had be-

gun studying to be a physi-

cian's assistant, was the father

of a 2-year-old daughter, Abi-

He also was planning to

He called home for Abigail's

Vicki Dickinson said she

"I feel that he still accom-

"He believed in his country,

plished his very last mission –

his men are still alive," she said.

A memorial service

scheduled for Thursday at Ft.

vice for him in Battle Creek if

She plans a memorial ser-

"I never thought my son

birthday July 2 and sang "Hap-

was eager to see her son, who

adopt his four stepchildren when he returned home from

But she said he did tell her

A 1998 Harper Creek High

his mother said. "My baby's

tions Command and was in Iraq on his third tour of duty. He served two tours in Af-

ghanistan before that.

When his wife, Glorygrace

think it was a big

deal when she

hadn't received a

wasn't good news.

their home.

not worry.'

his mother said.

said while laughing.

Iraq, his mother said.

py Birthday" to her.

Creek in August.

believed in his family.'

he is not buried there.

Bragg, she said.

said.

place."

gail.

gone.'

ternoon.

Staff Sgt.

Dickinson

Michael

Sgt. Michael Dickinson: Felled by sniper in Iraq

By NAOMI R. PATTON

Dickinson was scheduled to come home from Iraq by the end of July.

But the 26-year-old Battle Creek native, who was on patrol with a Marine Corps unit in Iraq, was killed Monday by sniper fire.

Death Motices



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He joined the military partly because he saw limited job op-

Spc. Elisabeth Krenz, a 21-

Contact EMILIA ASKARI at

Vicki Dickinson of Battle Creek, Army Staff Sgt. Michael said she chatted with him by email almost every

MCPI L. Age III of Ched Berry, Ravinson, ternary of Daton and Young, Mangar staff July V. 1906. Detected reasonable Life, Lies-ry, and Patrick pergent and Market Vision (Inc. Into Patrick pergent) and Native Nation (Inc. Into Patrick pergent). NUMBER'S DOY LINE TO SHEET MICHIGAN TO THE STATE OF THE SHEET SHEE



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DOMALD District App for, of Layers, that Art 1999, 1909

ne l "Brobytoy" Hopkins was planning to visit Battle

Contact NAOMI R. PATTON at 313-223-4485 or

would not come home,"

npatton@freepress.com.

UNGER | Killer gets life prison sentence

From Page 1B

Circuit Court in Beulah, to a court in neighboring Manistee County, about 30 miles away.

Florence Unger, 37, was killed at Watervale, a resort in northern Michigan. Her body was found Oct. 25, 2003, floating in Lower Herring Lake.

A jury concluded that Mark Unger forced her over the edge of a 12-foot-high deck and then drowned her. Florence Unger had filed for divorce about a month before she was killed.

Harold Stern, Florence Unger's father, who spoke in court Tuesday, said Mark Unger is going to "a horrible place," not just after leaving the courthouse — but afterward, too.

"For his despicable crime, he deserves to rot in prison for the rest of his life in this world. And in the words of one of his own earlier witnesses, in eternal hell in the next."



Stern told the court that Florence Unger was named after her grandmother, who died in 1965. They are buried in the same cemetery. He said she loved children — and cherished her own, Max, 13, and Tyler, 10, who are in the custody of Stern

and his wife, Claire Stern. Unger has not had contact with his children since he was arrested May 19, 2004.

And, drawing from testimony during the seven-week trial that Florence Unger was too afraid to be on the deck alone, Stern said his daughter was afraid of the dark, like many people — because "bad things happen in the dark."

Stern said Unger murdered is set for Aug. 28. his daughter to satisfy his "own selfish needs" and to try to collect \$750,000 in insurance money.

He said that in the past two years, Unger's children have 'not asked to see their father" because "they know what he did" to their mother.

During Unger's brief statement in court, he said he would appeal the verdict, and that there was ample evidence to prove he was not a killer. He said that despite what he

called a "ridiculous verdict," his two sons know in their heart that he "would never do anything to harm them and their mother.'

"They know it. I know it. And most of all, Flo knows it,' he said. As in most first-degree mur-

der cases, Unger's parental rights are expected to be termi- Contact FRANK WITSIL at 248nated. A hearing in the matter 351-3690 or fwitsil@freepress.com.

Unger's mother, Rosenthal, and sister, Connie Wolberg, who were present in the courtroom throughout the trial, were absent Tuesday.

Harrison said it would have been too painful for them to at-

Rosenthal, who lives in Florida, has appealed to Oakland County Family Court to be allowed visitation with her grandsons. Her case is pend-

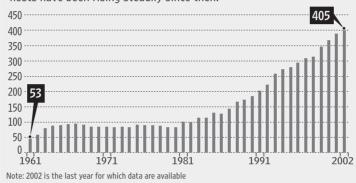
Unger is expected to spend the rest of his life in prison.

Batzer said: "He deprived his own children of their own mother — and by his own action, he deprived his own children of their father.

"It's like Humpty Dumpty. No one can put anything back together again.'

Occupied bald eagle nests

The number of Michigan's bald eagles was low until the early 1980s, after the pesticide DDT was banned. The numbers of bald eagle nests have been rising steadily since then.



Source: Department of Natural Resources

KOFI MYLER/Detroit Free Press

EAGLE | Abused bird is found in Upper Peninsula

From Page 1B

John Wenzel, an investigator for the state Department of Natural Resources in Escanaba, said whoever had the bird apparently was trying to disguise the fact that it was an eagle by painting the majestic creature's normally white head. An eagle's wingtips and tail feathers are also white.

"Someone has to know something about this," Wenzel said. His guess is that someone captured the bird and it either escaped or someone abandoned it near the place it was found.

The eagle wore a leg band,

which will eventually tell investigators where its nest was. That might help them figure out who captured the bird. Bald eagles, with their regal

served as the national bird since Their numbers nationally dropped to fewer than 450 nest-

heads and piercing eyes, have

ing pairs during the 1960s. Michigan had 53 nesting pairs in 1961. "In Michigan, our numbers have gone up steadily since the 1980s," said Todd Hogrefe, en-

dangered species specialist for for which figures are available,

Bald eagle (Haliaeetus leucocephalus)

■ Description: About 30 inches long with a 5- to 8-foot wingspan. They have a dark body and white head and tail with a large yellow bill.

■ Voice: Squeaky cackle and thin squeal. ■ Habitat: Along coastlines and waterways throughout most of North

■ Nesting: Built with sticks in a tall tree or on top of a cliff, where they lay two or three white

■ Lifespan: About 25 years in the wild and up to 47 years in captivity. ■ Food: Fish that they catch or steal from

■ Status: Chosen as the national bird in 1782. In the 1960s, less than 450 nesting pairs of eagles were counted in the lower 48 United States, even though Congress wrote a law to protect them in 1940. The worst threat to eagles was the pesticide DDT. which was banned for most uses in 1972. The eagle population has increased to more than 4,500 pairs in the lower 48 states, plus many more in Alaska and the rest of its range. Through the efforts of many programs and conservation efforts, their status has improved from endangered to threatened

Sources: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, www.worldkids.net,

MARTHA THIERRY/Detroit Free Press

Adult bald eagle

Bald eagle range

there were 427 nesting pairs otter meat donated by local trapfound, up from 343 five years

These days, eagles have even been spotted in Wayne and Oakland counties, he said. Their enormous stick nests, most often found in the tops of bare trees, are hard to miss.

The Bruntjenses have fattened up the eagle, nicknamed Rainier by the man who found it the DNR. In 2004, the latest year on his property near Garden Contact TINA LAM at 313-222-6421 or Corners. They fed it beaver and tlam@freepress.com.

pers, and fish. No one knows whether Raini-

er is male or female, but its own feathers are expected to grow in new in about a year. Until then, the Bruntjenses said they hope to repair the bird's feathers and start teaching it to fly again. If the eagle can fly, they hope to release it into the wild

CHEER | Women vie for spot on Pistons dance team

From Page 1B

Before the first round of auditions, Automotion director Rebecca Girard told the women to have fun with the choreogra-

"Try to learn something new

about yourselves," she said. "It's more than coming out here to dance," Girard said later. "It is a job. That's a surprise for some of them.'

Girard, a former dancer who came out of retirement at the age of 30 to join Automotion for a season in 1996, said she and the other judges look for women who are honest, well-spoken and "really understand this is a

"They're mini-celebrities,"

Girard added.

Automotion was named the "No. 1 thing fans love about the Palace" in an informal January Detroit Free Press survey called "100 Things We Love

About the Palace. David Wieme, Palace Sports Entertainment strategic communications director, said Automotion helped save the Pistons in the mid- and late

"The game becomes secondary," he said, and Automotion "becomes the show. It has worked well.'

1990s when wins were few.

Before Monday's list of first cuts was posted, the women said they hoped Automotion would work well for them too.

Like Girard, Heather Drake,

was trying to come out of retirement. A former Buffalo Jill for the NFL's Buffalo Bills in 2002, she took time off to get married and have a child.

Starkesha Brown, 21, Sterling Heights was the confident Automotion veteran, coming off her rookie season.

Required to try out again, Brown also was there to support friend and singer Keshia Jackson, 21, of Detroit, who was nervous, but ready.

With the list posted, 67 women advanced to the second round of cuts Monday evening. Half of those would make it to Tuesday's final round.

Those who made it through the first round rejoiced dis-

29, of Chesterfield Township creetly Monday. They had 10 minutes before they had to dance again. Those who didn't advance left quickly.

Brown advanced, but com-

forted Jackson, who didn't. Jackson lingered, stunned. She said she may try again next

"It's all good," she said, gaz-

ing at the arena floor. The women who made it through the first round of cuts had job interviews Tuesday. They also signed a contract that includes a ban on fraternizing with the players and strict guidelines for public behavior.

Contact NAOMI R. PATTON at 313-223-4485 or npatton@freepress.com.

CRUNCH | Calls for help bombard area charities

From Page 1B

suburban thing," said United Way President and Chief Executive Officer Michael Brennan, who introduced the group's new promotional campaign to the media Tuesday. "This is a regional problem.'

The Salvation Army reports a similar situation, with this year's demand for food services up 50%, compared with 16% over each of the past two years.

Russ Russell, director of development for the group's Eastern Michigan Division, said "180,000 more people have come to us this year than they did last year by this time."

"It's like ... having the entire

population of Flint coming to

our doorstep for help at one

time," he said.

Though MCREST, which provides temporary housing for homeless people in Macomb County, was able to accommodate Barrowman and his girlfriend, it has had to turn away hundreds of people over the past few months, said executive director Jimetta Lewis.

"It is very heartbreaking," she said Monday.

To deal with an influx of what leaders said are mostly younger, middle-class people requesting help for the first time, organizations are reaching for creative solutions.

MCREST, for example, is getting a jump on the holiday season's donation crunch by holding a Christmas in July campaign. The aim, Lewis said, is to build up enough of a reserve to carry the organization

Lending a hand

Here are some local organizations helping those in need: ■ Salvation Army of Eastern Michigan: 877-725-6424;

www.salvationarmyemich.org ■ United Way for Southeastern Michigan: 313-226-9200;

www.onewaytohelp.org ■ American Red Cross: 800-448-5433; www.semredcross.org ■ Macomb County Rotating Emergency Shelter Team: 586-415-5101,

www.mcrest.org ■ Covenant House: 313-463-2000; www.covenanthousemi.org ■ South Oakland Shelter: 248-546-6566; www.sos1985.org

through the new year.

The American Red Cross, which is battling a summer blood shortage, is giving donors tickets to eight local entertainment venues, including Second City Detroit and Mark Ridley's

Comedy Castle. 'We're all a little pushed to the extreme at \$3 a gallon,' spokeswoman Andrea Ward said, referring to gas prices.

The United Way is capitalizing on market research.

The "Signs" campaign uses

street signs as symbols to remind people of the need to support initiatives that improve neighborhoods and families.

The No. 1 reason why individuals do not contribute is because they weren't asked," Brennan said. "We want to make sure everyone has an invitation to participate.'

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