

Area Highlights



AIRLIFT: Duane Packer of Lawton (standing) and Dr. Roger Beyer of Paw Paw use a map to locate the small Central American nation of Belize. The two were honored by the Three Rivers

Lions Club for donating medical supplies to a hospital in Belize. The airlift of supplies to the hospital was coordinated by the Lions Club. (H-P photo)

Van Buren medical donations welcomed in Central America

By DENNIS COGSWELL
H-P Paw Paw Bureau

PAW PAW — The efforts of two Van Buren County men helped send two truckloads of medical supplies to a primitive hospital in the tiny, impoverished Central American nation of Belize.

Dr. Roger Beyer, a Paw Paw obstetrician and gynecologist, and Duane Packer, president of Packer Foods in Lawton, recently received plaques from the Three Rivers Lions Club for collecting and donating the supplies.

The supplies included sutures, wheelchairs, bandages, anesthetics, artificial limbs, and other items, and were flown to Belize in November in two C-130 cargo planes by a U.S. Air Force Reserve unit from Selfridge Field near Mount Clemens.

Packer was on hand for a ceremony, attended by the U.S. ambassador and the Belize's Minister of Health, at which the supplies were presented. He said local officials seemed to be very grateful.

He said the hospital in Belize's capital is generally well maintained, but was built in the late 1800's and is primitive by modern standards.

"They just don't have too much to work with," he commented.

Packer said he got some of the supplies in a trade for canned goods processed by his company, and originally planned to sell them.

He said he was approached by a friend, Richard Ward of Three Rivers, who told him about the needs of the hospital in Belize, a small, poor country which was formerly known as British Honduras.

"I had been in Central America before, so I had a good perspective



of what the problems were," Packer said.

Packer said Ward is affiliated with Wings of Hope, a pilots' group that provides medical relief to Third World countries. He said Ward helped organize the project in conjunction with the Three Rivers Lions Club.

In the meantime, Beyer said he had been gathering medical supplies for donation to a clinic in the Philippines through the personal physician of former President Ferdinand Marcos.

When Marcos was deposed, the donation fell through, and Beyer

and Packer decided to pool their supplies for use in Belize.

In addition to their donation, Three Rivers Area Hospital also donated several pieces of equipment, including operating tables, cribs and sterilizers. Several other companies donated warehouse space, packing materials and transportation of the supplies to Selfridge.

Beyer said he is now collecting other medical supplies to donate to the hospital. He said anyone who has equipment, such as a used pair of crutches, is welcome to contact him.

Woman, police disagree on Van Buren slaying

By DENNIS COGSWELL
H-P Van Buren Bureau

HARTFORD — James E. West was posing no threat to police when he was shot and killed by a Van Buren sheriff's deputy Tuesday night, according to his girlfriend.

Shari Heffington, 27, disputed a statement released by Undersheriff Dale Gribler that West, 45, was advancing toward police and had raised a machete, just before he was shot by Deputy Craig McDannel shortly after 11 Tuesday night.

She also said two shots were fired and that the first only struck West in the leg.

According to an autopsy, West died of a single shot from a .357 magnum revolver, police said.

"He never pulled the machete up, it was down beside him," she said in a telephone interview Wednesday night from East St. Louis, Ill., where she is staying with a relative. "He never went after them."

Heffington had called police to a home at 310 S. East St., Hartford, after she said West threatened her with a knife.

Detective Sgt. Jeff Wallis of the state police post at South Haven said Heffington's claims conflict with a tape recorded statement she gave him immediately after the shooting.

In the statement, Heffington said "he (West) was fixing to pick it (the machete) up, to start swinging it," according to Wallis.

This morning Heffington said she did not recall making that statement.

Wallis said that prior to learning West was dead, Heffington described West as an "assaultive, nasty person who was definitely posing a threat." He said she also stated that she believed West "was going to hurt me."

Wallis said her statement also conflicts with those of McDannel and Deputy Brad Shaw, who told him West had raised the machete to head level in what they determined was a move to strike at them.

McDannel has been a sheriff's deputy since 1976. In 1985, he was selected as Van Buren County's Law Enforcement Officer of the Year by the Paw Paw Optimist Club for his work in training dogs to



CRAIG McDANNEL
1985 photo

sniff out drugs.

"He (West) never even slowed down," Wallis said. "It was a continuous, deliberate walk at them with the machete."

Heffington claimed that after she witnessed West being shot in the leg she was taken outside by a Hartford police officer and placed in a patrol car.

About a minute later, Heffington said she heard a second shot, but was not allowed to go back inside the house.

A statement issued by Gribler said West was struck by a single shot, and Wallis said an autopsy conducted Wednesday morning found only a single bullet wound in the chest.

Asked about that discrepancy this morning, Heffington said she believed she saw blood on West's right leg, but admitted it could have come from his chest.

Heffington, who acknowledged that both she and West had been drinking and were probably intoxicated, said it was never necessary for police to use lethal force because there were five officers at the scene, and they should have been able to subdue West.

"They didn't have no business shooting him," she said. "They could have taken that knife away from him. If they'd have let me talk to him, I could have gotten him to

put it down."

However, Wallis said only Shaw and McDannel entered the house, while the other three officers remained outside. Heffington continued to maintain this morning that all five officers were in the house.

Heffington said she had dated West for about three years, and sometimes stayed with him at the home of his grandmother, Lorena Gray, where the shooting occurred.

On Tuesday night, she said she and West had gotten into an argument and that he had chased her with a knife. Heffington said she called police, as she had in the past, to calm the situation down, but didn't feel threatened.

"He wouldn't hurt anybody; he's not like that," she said.

In the statement, however, Wallis said Heffington stated that when West had assaulted her on a previous occasion, she had to hit him over the head with a beer bottle to stop him. Heffington acknowledged making that statement.

A Hartford officer was the first person to arrive on the scene, followed closely by four sheriff's deputies in two other cars, according to Heffington. She said she opened the door to let them in, and West was standing by two couches in the living room with the machete.

She said the officers told West two or three times to put down the machete. She said he raised it slightly as if to take a step, but did not put it above his head. At that point, Heffington said a shot was fired, and she saw West grab his right leg.

Heffington estimated police were 6 to 7 feet from West when he was shot. Wallis said the statement put the distance at 5 feet.

Heffington also claimed police did not tell her West had been killed until after she had finished making a statement at the Hartford Police Department.

West's brother-in-law, Jim Tanner of Bangor, said West frequently stayed the night while caring for his invalid grandmother. While acknowledging that West had a drinking problem, Tanner said he was not a violent person.

He said West had been receiving Social Security disability payments for severe arthritis which limited his movement for quite some time.

Berrien jobless rate rises to 8%

From the Associated Press

Unemployment in Berrien County rose from 6.9 percent in December to 8 percent in January, according to the Michigan Employment Security Commission.

Some 6,300 people were looking for work in January in what the MESC calls the Benton Harbor labor market, which covers the entire county. The unemployment rate here was 8.9 percent in January 1988, the MESC said.

Statewide, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate edged upward to 7.8 percent in January from 7.1 percent in December, with

4.2 million people employed and 358,000 people unemployed.

Employment was down in all 12 Michigan labor markets and the jobless rate was up in all but one, commission Director Richard Simmons Jr. said Wednesday.

But all 12 labor markets had lower unemployment rates than in January 1988, Simmons said.

The highest jobless rate was in the Flint area, where auto plant layoffs added to the usual seasonal job losses experienced elsewhere, Simmons said.

Flint's unemployment rate was up 2.3 percentage points, to 12.7 percent in January, from 10.4 per-

cent in December. Employment in the area slid to 163,600, a drop of about 4,900 jobs.

The rate in the Flint area in January 1988 was 18.2 percent.

The only area with a declining jobless rate was Grand Rapids, with a rate of 5.5 percent in January, down from 5.9 percent in December and 7.5 percent in January 1988.

Employment in the area totaled 341,200, down about 9,600 jobs from December. But unemployment — the number of people unsuccessfully looking for work — also dropped, by about 2,300 to 19,900.

SMCAS Board votes to offer EMT 1-year pact as director

By DEBRA HAIGHT
Niles Correspondent

NILES — The Southwestern Michigan Community Ambulance Service Board Wednesday night voted to offer Robert Schulz a one-year contract to be the service's new executive director.

Schulz, acting emergency medical coordinator since Nov. 15, said after the meeting he expects to accept the contract after a review of the fringe benefit package. He would be paid \$28,000 under the contract and, because of a temporary staffing shortage, would continue as an emergency medical technician at least until mid-May.

Schulz, 41, has been with SMCAS as an emergency medical technician since October 1987.

A resident of the Sister Lakes area, Schulz is a 23-year veteran of the Sister Lakes Fire Department and has been fire chief for eight

years. He and his wife, Pamela, have two children.

Schulz was one of three final applicants for the position.

The service had been without a director since Oct. 20 when the late James Ryder was suspended. Ryder committed suicide two weeks after the suspension.

The suspension came after it was determined that no audit of the service's financial operations had been completed since 1985, when Ryder became director.

An investigation launched in October has shown more than \$300,000 in taxes withheld from employee pay checks had not been forwarded to the state and federal agencies as required.

No new information on the investigation was provided during the meeting by board attorney Sean Drew or auditor James Scarpone. Drew said, however, that the

board and the community should "focus" on ensuring the continued operation of SMCAS. He added that while the investigation into what happened is important, it will not really matter if the service cannot be maintained and the tax problems resolved.

In connection with the tax debt, the board approved the sale of one of the service's "ambitrans" vehicles, with the proceeds to go to the Internal Revenue Service and other government agencies.

Schulz told the board that the service has received an offer of \$16,000 for the vehicle from a Muskegon area company. According to board member Thomas Athanas, the ambitrans unit in question was purchased last year for \$22,500 and has a current value of \$17,100.

According to Scarpone, some of the \$300,000 missing from the ambulance service may have been



ROBERT SCHULZ
Sister Lakes fire chief

used to purchase the ambitrans and a similar unit last year.

The ambitrans is equipped with wheelchair lifts and is used to transport patients in non-emergency situations.

The sale was being proposed, according to Athanas, because the service found last month that it could make a profit with only one unit in operation.

Meeting set for growers who use migrant laborers

LAWRENCE — A Friday meeting is scheduled here for growers who hire migrant workers.

The focus of the meeting, according to program chairman Sandra Avery, will be growers' responsibilities under the federal Immigration and Reform Act, including various reports they must fill out and hiring of legal aliens.

The meeting will be at the Van Buren Vocational-Technical Center on South Street, starting with registration at 8:30 a.m. It is being sponsored by the Southwest Michigan Migrant Resource Council.

Speakers will include James Montgomery, U.S. Immigration and Natural Resources district director, Detroit, and representatives of the U.S. Department of Labor, Social Security Administration and the Michigan Department of Civil Rights.

Avery said admission is free. Lunch will be available at the Voc-Tech Center for \$5. The meeting is scheduled to end at 4 p.m.

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Asbury Brass concert site changed

The location of a free public concert by the Asbury Brass Quintet has been changed due to the unprecedented request for seating reservations, according to Dar Davis, executive director of the Krasl Art Center, St. Joseph, sponsor of the concert. The concert will be held at 8:15 p.m. Friday at First Congregational United Church of Christ, 2001 Niles Ave., St. Joseph. The concert was originally scheduled for the art center. The decision to move the concert was made Wednesday after the call-in reservations exceeded the number that could be accommodated at the art center.

Berrien parks official says Silver Beach verdict is near

By BILL CASH
Special Correspondent

NILES — Beach lovers may know this month whether Berrien County will lease Silver Beach in St. Joseph to operate as a county park this summer, according to Randall Rood, parks director.

The county Parks and Recreation Commission held a closed session at Wednesday night's meeting to discuss the proposed lease. While the parks commission took no action after reconvening, Rood this morning said he expects the county Board of Commissioners to act this month on the proposed agreement which is based on a feasibility study.

The county board regular monthly meeting is next Thursday.

LECO Corp., which owns the popular beach, has offered the county a chance to lease the property for use as a public beach this summer. The company has leased the beach to the City of St. Joseph in recent years, but discontinued that arrangement and put the beach up for sale because of disputes with the city and homeowners near the Lake Michigan shoreline.

Last month, the commission after a closed session voted to recommend the county board consider a

one-year lease of Silver Beach. The commission also voted to submit a grant application for the acquisition of Silver Beach, subject to the findings of the feasibility study.

Rood has said previously he is studying the expected costs of maintaining the property.

In other matters, Rood told the commission the lack of snow has reduced the number of visitors to county facilities at Love Creek Nature Center and Madeline Bertrand County Park. This year's total was about half last year's 8,000 visitors. The decline has affected the department's income as well, he added.

Instituting a new fee schedule this winter helped the parks department recover some of the lost income, but 1988 income thus far stands at \$5,760. Last year's income for the same period was \$9,160, Rood said.

Rood said the first annual Ski-A-Thon, held Feb. 11 after two postponements, yielded a profit of \$2,460. These proceeds will be placed in the Berrien County Parks Fund in the Berrien Community Foundation.

There were 19 participants in the Ski-A-Thon, and 19 sponsors. Rood told the commission that the event has a lot of fund-raising potential.

The parks commission reviewed a revised cooperative agreement with the St. Joseph County (Ind.) Parks and Recreation Board regarding the adjacent county parks on the state line.

In the past, St. Patrick's Park and Madeline Bertrand Park shared a common entrance, as well as the gate receipts from the entrance. With the establishment of a year-round entry fee and season pass for Madeline Bertrand, the Berrien Parks Commission has decided to maintain a separate entrance for its park.

The proposed agreement has each organization being responsi-

ble for the independent operation of their respective parks, including independent entrances, with the roadway between the parks to be closed except for special situations.

Rood said there have been difficulties at Madeline Bertrand with the opening of a separate entrance. During the winter, cross country skiers would enter St. Patrick's park, rent skis, and ski Madeline Bertrand's trails without paying the trail fee.

Visitors who entered directly at Madeline Bertrand had to pay entry and trail fees, and had to bring their own equipment.