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Two Sections  
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## 'Companions' name thinly veils sex for sale

By STEVE KELLMAN and SUZANNE HOLLYER  
Staff Writers

The folks at Jasmine's Companions never used the word "prostitution," but the Novi-based escort service seemed more than willing, for a fee, to arrange intimate meetings between women and prospective customers for the purpose of sex.

Jasmine's Companions, the subject of a two-month investigation by the *Novi News* and *Northville Record*, appeared to be a well-kept secret to everyone including Novi city officials. Yet the business run out of a home off Eight Mile Road appeared to violate at least two Novi ordinances, and act as a prostitution ring.

Since Jasmine's Companions was contacted by a *Novi News* reporter two weeks ago, the business has not been answering phone calls. Last Tuesday, Jan.

PROSTITUTION  
IN  
NOVI

21, the number was disconnected.

A Sept. 25 *Metro Times* ad for Jasmine's Companions said the company specialized "in creative fantasy fulfillment," while a Jan. 8 ad had it "specializing in unique companions, outcall massage only." Novi has an ordinance that forbids local businesses from offer-

ing outcall massage, the practice of sending a masseur or masseuse out to a person's home or hotel room. But Jasmine's Companions did not register as a Novi business — another ordinance violation — despite the fact that its phone number lists a Novi address under the name Jasmine's Services.

Susan Biemer, with the Novi city clerk's office, said neither Jasmine's Companions nor Jasmine's Services was listed as a city business. She promised to send the company a business registration form.

The Novi police department seemed unaware of the operation as well. Novi Police Chief Doug Shaeffer expressed curiosity about the service, saying, "We may call and ask for more details and we'll assign a detective to look into it." But the business never answered his calls, and a police officer sent to the location found no one home.

Shaeffer said the police department investigates such businesses "as they're brought to our attention," whether by the media, concerned citizens or police officers themselves who notice the ads in the paper (see related story on page 3).

He admitted that escort-type services are a burgeoning business throughout metro Detroit. "They're located all over the metropolitan area," he said. "But it's going to be our policy to vigorously pursue these operations when they appear ... because we don't want them in our community."

Jasmine's Companions' phone number was registered to a home on West Glenhaven Circle in Novi, near Meadowbrook and Eight Mile Road. The homeowner's phone number is unlisted.

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Feds give nod  
to M-5 funding  
despite criticsBy JAN JEFFRES  
Staff Writer

The Federal Highway Administration has paved the way for the Haggerty Connector, Alternative 4A, calling the project the only "prudent" and cost-efficient way to provide freeway access, reduce traffic jams and improve public safety in the region.

Overruling objections from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the federal government is now prepared to pay 80 percent of the \$90.6 million costs, with most of the rest to be picked up by the Michigan Department of Transportation.

Because the EPA and the U.S. Fisheries and Wildlife Service — as well as the City of Novi — have contested plans to replace in St. Clair County most of the wetlands lost here, the highway administration cautioned that "additional adjustment may be needed before this process is complete."

The major barricade to surmount now is a pending application for a construction permit, now under review by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. An answer is anticipated in March.

Jim Kirschensteiner, project engineer for the Federal Highway Administration's Lansing office, said uncertainty over the permit means a start-up date for the project is not available.

"We really don't have any idea right now," he said Friday. "There are some people who feel the DNR will issue a permit and other people who feel they won't. It's kind of hard to read it right now."

An additional roadblock could be a Novi resolution suggested by Council Members Robert Schmid and Joseph Toth to withdraw support for the Haggerty Connector.

The question has not yet been discussed by the council, but if the resolution were passed, it would kill the project.

"There are some people who feel the DNR will issue a permit and other people who feel they won't. It's kind of hard to read it right now."

Jim Kirschensteiner  
Project Engineer

The highway administration's record of decision was signed Jan. 7 by E. V. Heathcock, Director of the Office of Planning and Program Development.

Cost estimates have shot up over past six years from \$80 million to \$90 million, due to inflation and increased real estate prices.

"There is a lot of speculation going on in that quarter in terms of land ownership. This shoots the costs up," Kirschensteiner said.

The landscaped Connector would reduce accidents, improve emergency service response times, reduce energy consumption and cutback on air and noise pollution on Haggerty Road, the record of decision noted.

The road improvement package includes:

- The Haggerty Connector (M-5): The 3.5 miles of a six-to-eight lane boulevard would extend from the I-96/I-696/I-275/M-102 interchange at Twelve Mile Road north to Pontiac Trail. Twelve Mile Road would be constructed as an interchange with bridges. All cross roads to the north would be improved as grade-level intersections with traffic signals.
- Twelve Mile Road is proposed to be re-constructed as a six-lane

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Photo by HAL GOULD

## Wood carving

Local wood carver Ron Morin demonstrated his skills recently to members of the Novi Historical Society in the old town hall. Shown in this photo are some of his works, from small

statues to a realistic rendition of a bird. He worked on a carving of a boat while he spoke to the members of the group.

Charges possible  
in tanker  
disasterBy JAN JEFFRES  
Staff Writer

M & L Petroleum Company will not be charged with negligent homicide in the fiery death of a tanker-truck driver on I-96, but the state police may still seek to press charges against the firm based on alleged motor vehicle code violations.

The Oakland County Prosecutor's office decided earlier this month that M & L Petroleum — which has a history of vehicle violations — could not be charged with negligent homicide because the driver, Novi resident John Ziants II, was partially at fault.

Sgt. Larry Richardson of the Michigan State Police Northville Post said Thursday the prosecutor's office determined that the driver was responsible to ensure the vehicle was safe to drive or else he should have refused to do so.

Describing it as a catch-22, Richardson said, "If a driver knows there's a problem, he should not drive."

Ziants, 32, perished Nov. 12 when the left front steering tire of the vehicle blew out, causing him to lose control of the truck. The tank was torn open under the Meadowbrook Road overpass, spilling 13,000 gallons of fuel which subsequently ignited.

Richardson said he learned that Ziants on Nov. 7 — the Thursday before the Tuesday accident — told

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## Board defended for Strain decision

By SUZANNE HOLLYER  
Staff Writer

The Novi school district's \$25,000 settlement with former band director Craig Strain was in the best interest of the district and the alleged victim, a former school member said Thursday, despite criticisms the board has received for that decision.

Strain was paid \$25,000 and given the opportunity to receive state-funded retirement benefits that he had earned from 27 years of service in public schools. Those benefits include \$25,000 a year.

Strain resigned Jan. 9 as part of a settlement with the school board. Strain had been suspended with pay from his position as band director since October when a student accused him of

sexual misconduct.

The school district made the right decision in settling with Strain, according to former school board member and retired educator Gilbert Henderson.

"In my opinion, the settlement may have saved this district a pile of money," Henderson said, calling the board's decision "prudent, rational and compassionate."

The alleged victim was protected from cross examination by Strain's attorney during what could have been days of tenure hearings, Henderson added.

Henderson lent the school board his support at a Thursday meeting after he saw some Novi residents and the *Novi News* take the board to task for its decision.

The board's settlement with Strain included a provision prohibiting Strain from bringing future legal action against the school district.

If the district had fired Strain, the former band director could have appealed the board's decision to the teachers' tenure review board. Legal fees during such an appeal process would have cost more than the \$25,000 the school district gave Strain, board President Stephen Hitchcock said.

The agreement, printed in a document called a "Memorandum of Understanding," said the school district was to pay Strain \$25,000 prior to Dec. 31.

The school district also agreed to continue paying Strain's \$54,870 salary through Jan. 17.

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Don't miss your chance to save dollars & get acquainted with local business

TAKE A NEW LOOK!



## Student asks for King birthday off

By SUZANNE HOLLYER  
Staff Writer

Martin Luther King Jr. Day won't go unrecognized by Novi schools if Novi Middle School's student council president has his way.

Student Brandon Griffin told the Board of Education at its Thursday meeting he would like the district to recognize Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday in the future. Brandon suggested the district give students the day off or use half of the day to educate students about the civil rights activist.

He asked the board to consider it at their next meeting.

Parent Terri Galido told the board she agreed, and former school board member Gilbert Henderson commended Brandon for his courage in addressing the school board.

"Martin Luther King would be darn proud of you. I'd be proud if any of my four kids got up and did that," Henderson said.

Brandon's father, Henry Griffin, pressed the school board for a response. Griffin said the community is uneducated about King.

"You would be surprised how many people in the community don't know the man's name much less what he stood for," Griffin said.

Griffin said the school board would look bad if it did not recognize King's birthday in some way.

Board President Stephen Hitchcock told Griffin the district is in the midst of a three-year contract. The days students and teachers will receive off already were established in contract negotiations, Hitchcock said.

When the district negotiated contracts, Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday was not a national holiday, Trustee Raymond Byers added.

Board Vice President Robert Schram said the issue had never come up in Novi schools before.

Schram said King was a great man, but the board member would not support a day off for students to celebrate King's birthday.

Learning about King in school would be more productive, Schram said. Schram said he would like the school district to get input from Novi's black community, including Griffin and his family if interested.

"I would sure support a recognition day for Martin Luther King," Schram said.

Superintendent William Barr said he would research the issue and bring a recommendation for action to the board at a future meeting.





