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Novi couple fights to keep girl's custody

By JAN JEFFRES
Staff Writer

Stephanie, 8, has lived with her foster parents Jackie and James Meade since she was four days old. The Meades, Novi residents, hope to adopt the child; they say her biological mother, Lisa Randall, originally agreed to this. "She said she wanted us to raise her baby. Her family told us the best thing for the baby was for us to raise the baby," Jackie Meade said last week. "When she came out to our home and told us she wanted us to adopt Stephanie, at that point we were her mom and dad." But when Stephanie was three-and-a-half years old, Randall decided she wanted her daughter back and began a legal battle now pending before the Michigan Court of Appeals, for the third time. The child's biological father has not contested the Meades' guardianship. Stephanie's story is often compared to that of the custody battle over Baby Jessica, waged by the DeBoers and the biological parents,

the Schmidts. The Meades have won the support of the Ann Arbor-based DeBoer Committee For Children's Rights. "It really is possible that Stephanie is going to be taken away . . . Stephanie is in great peril here. She is one of many children in peril. We want people to realize the immediacy and the gravity of the situation," said Annie Rose, a spokesperson for the DeBoer Committee. Wednesday, the committee and several attorneys, including the Meades' lawyer Scott Bassett, will launch a petition drive to plead for legislation to give "third parties," — people who are not biological parents — legal standing and the right to go to court to plead for the custody of these children. Their four years' worth of legal bills have wiped out the Meades' savings; the couple filed for bankruptcy last spring. Three weeks ago, the Stephanie Meade Legal Fund, with the motto "Never Another Broken Heart," was organized with the committee's help. Stephanie is the couple's only

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Photo by BRYAN MITCHELL

Turkey Trot

Because of bad weather, the 500 seventh and eighth graders of Novi Middle School who participated in the building's annual Turkey Trot last week had to walk, jog and run inside . . . down the halls of the school. In the 15-minute walk/run, the youngsters raised \$235 in cash and more than 1,000 food

items for the Novi Emergency Food Fund. The event teaches students community service and fitness, teachers say. Above, the Middle School turkey "high fives" one of the participating students.



Photo by BRYAN MITCHELL

Bookish fashions

(Left to right) Library director Brenda Evans, Barbara Willis of the Friends of the Library, and Assistant Library Director Pauline Druschel model the tote bags now on sale at the library as a fundraiser. Through December, the Friends of the Library will be selling the fashionable tote bags on Saturdays from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and Sundays from 1-4 p.m. at the library. The bags are handy for toting a variety of items, but would be especially useful for carrying library books.

Board praises ChildWatch program

By RANDY COBLE
Staff Writer

Members of the community continue to work on bringing the ChildWatch protection program here, and they've received some encouraging words from the Novi schools Board of Education. The board received an update from Novi Police Department Detective Todd Anger Nov. 18 on the progress of ChildWatch. The program sets up a network of homes in the community where children can go in the event of an emergency. Members of the board praised Anger and school PTO officials for their efforts, and expressed strong support for the program. "This is a wonderful program and I support it wholeheartedly," Trustee Julia Abrams said. "It's so important for the kids to have a place to go." Anger is Novi's Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE) officer



and has been working with PTO parents recently to get the ChildWatch program up and running. From its beginnings in Grand Rapids in 1979, ChildWatch has now spread to hundreds of Michigan communities. In the tradition of Helping Hands and similar programs, it recruits community volunteers to post signs in the windows of their homes. The ChildWatch logo signs are a beacon to children, telling them they have a safe place to go in the event of an emergency. Un-

like earlier programs, however, ChildWatch trains both volunteers and children. Police screen volunteers and then conduct a one-hour training session for those selected to join the program. Complimented by videos for school-age children, ChildWatch teaches both groups what to do in the event of an emergency and what details to look for when reporting an emergency to police. "Police, schools and the volunteers all work together in this," Anger said. He praised the efforts of Novi PTO members for their help in getting the program off the ground. Novi Woods' PTO in particular has made the issue a priority. "This would be a monumental task for me to try and do alone without the help of the community," Anger said, "and I certainly appreciate it." Anyone can get involved, Anger

noted: ChildWatch isn't limited to PTOs or any other groups. From stay-at-home parents to retirees to anyone with an interest, he said, ChildWatch can use volunteers, both to do the preliminary work in getting it started and as program volunteers. Those interested in ChildWatch can contact Anger for more information at 348-7100. Some issues remain to be worked out, Anger said, including funding the cost of the program and writing its by-laws, as well as drafting guidelines for the screening process. Work is progressing on those matters, he said. Board members expressed strong support for ChildWatch and indicated they'd likely pass a formal resolution of support for it when PTO officials bring it before them. Members also praised Anger and the PTOs for their efforts in developing the program.

'Another good season' for malls

By CRISTINA FERRIER
Staff Writer

Shoppers poured into Twelve Oaks Mall Friday, in anticipation of what is generally known as the biggest shopping day of the year. But Twelve Oaks Mall manager Phil Morosco said that, although the mall was filled to nearly 100 percent capacity that afternoon, he anticipated even heavier traffic on the two Saturdays before Christmas. Those days, he said, are generally busier than the day after Thanksgiving. "The day after Thanksgiving, despite the media's continual reminders, has not been the busiest shopping day of the year for 5 to 7 years," Morosco said. "The last Saturday before Christmas or the Saturday before that are really the busiest." Morosco said shoppers this year also seem to

be following a pattern that he noticed last year — beginning their holiday shopping very early in November. Still, he said, the day after Thanksgiving is considered to be an important indicator of whether merchandisers can expect a brisk holiday sales season. "People see Santa Claus coming down Woodward Avenue in the Thanksgiving parade, and they start thinking that it's time to get ready for the holiday. "It's going to be another good year," he predicted. Morosco said he gauges the amount of traffic at the mall by watching the parking patterns in the lot. The areas off Novi Road fill up the fastest, and as the number of shoppers increase the back parking areas begin to fill up and cars stretch farther toward the edge of the lot.

Morosco said he and the rest of the mall staff anticipated a busy day Friday and made preparations to handle the crowd. Valet parking and an additional information booth were among the additions, and are features that will be retained permanently after the season is over. "Today, more cars than ever are being handled by valet since we first started offering it several years ago," he said. "And with the extra information booth (located inside the valet parking entrance) people can pick up their shopping bags, strollers and other items that will help them shop (conveniently)." Twelve Oaks also was offering other traditional holiday features beginning Friday, including Santa Claus and the "North Postal System," which allows children to write their Christmas wish list and send it through a chute to the "North Pole."

Specialist might open ITC to public

By RANDY COBLE
Staff Writer

The Instructional Technology Center (ITC) of the Novi school district may soon see a new face. The Board of Education may hire a technology specialist to help students and staff use the new computer network being built in the district.

What exactly such a person would do in his or her job, or whether he or she should be a certified teacher, an administrator or carry some other designation, are issues district administrators are to study and report back on to board in a future meeting. Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Rita Traynor pre-

sented the proposal for the new staff person at the board's Nov. 18 meeting. Officials, she said, "feel very strongly" that the ITC needs another full-time person to complement the efforts of technology specialist Jim Fry. Fry, she said, has a very busy schedule, working with students and staff all over the district to

teach them about the technology that is coming to their buildings. When he's gone from the ITC, she noted, there is no technical specialist on duty who can help with the computers. (Traynor praised Fry, saying that he often gives extra time in the

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