

Wayne teen admits sniping  
with paint ball gun. Page 4A.

The northwest lower  
peninsula welcomed the ski  
season Friday. Page 8A.

# Doctor faces trial in death of comatose patient

BY JOE SWICKARD  
Free Press Staff Writer

A Detroit doctor was ordered Friday to stand trial on murder and poisoning charges for allegedly overdosing a 74-year-old comatose patient in May at Grace Hospital.

In an emotional appeal, defense attorney Justin Ravitz asked Detroit 36th District Judge David Bradfield to reduce the charge to manslaughter because Dr. Donald Caraccio, under the stress of his own father's terminal illness, "took leave of his senses" when he gave Juliette Cherry-Sapp massive injections of potassium chloride.



Dr. Donald Caraccio would face a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole if convicted.

of passion and not reason" and the product of "skewed, distorted and possibly demented" thinking.

## State House OKs serving of muskrat; action opposed

BY CHRIS CHRISTOFF  
Free Press Lansing Bureau Chief

LANSING — Muskrat meat soon may be served legally in Michigan, but that doesn't mean it's safe, according to public health experts.

State muskrat eaters claimed victory when the House approved a bill Thursday allowing muskrat and other wild game to be served by non-profit organizations if they post a sign warning the meat was not inspected by state or federal agencies. State health laws now require that commercially sold muskrat meat come from approved sources, although there are no such sources in Michigan.

Rep. Jerry Bartnick, D-Temperance, sponsored the bill and predicted Senate approval. The bill has the approval of acting state Public Health Director Raj Wiener.

But public health associations oppose the bill, arguing that the state should control uninspected, trapped muskrat and other wild game, which they say has high levels of disease-causing bacteria.

Bartnick pushed the bill for two years to end skirmishes between health officials and muskrat eaters in the Detroit downriver area. He said muskrat dinners have been a tradition there since the 1700s, and are served especially during the lenten season by churches, VFW posts and other non-profit groups.

The new law would not apply to restaurants or other commercial food servers.

Health experts point to a 1987 five-state study by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency showing almost all trapped muskrats examined carried a bacteria found in sewage that causes human illness. Also, the health inspectors say, an Ontario disease agency in October 1987 reported that three men who handled muskrats caught "rabbit fever," a disease that can be contracted through the skin and cause diarrhea and vomiting.

Bartnick said adequate cooking kills any disease-causing bacteria in muskrat, and labeled the health experts' arguments alarmist.

"You have a greater probability of getting ill from inspected chicken or pork than wild game," said Bartnick, a muskrat fan who compares its taste to a cross between duck and squirrel.

He added, "The health people believe they should have the right to inspect everything people eat. We want to cut down the size of state government. If they had their way, see MUSKRAT, Page 4A

According to medical testimony in Caraccio's two-day preliminary examination, Cherry-Sapp, of Detroit, was

terminally ill and would have died within "minutes, hours or days" of her ailments, including gangrene, heart disease and kidney failure.

But, Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair said that "she may have been under a sentence of death, but no one has the right to assume the role of executioner."

If convicted of first-degree murder, Caraccio, 33, would face a mandatory sentence of life in prison without parole. He remains free on \$100,000 personal bond. No trial date was set.

Caraccio, his eyes red with tears, hugged his wife, Patty, as he and family members hustled past reporters and

photographers in the Courthouse hallway.

Outside court, Ravitz, saying he is sure his client will be cleared at trial, said the circumstances surrounding the death prove Caraccio's actions "were not particularly rational."

According to testimony, Caraccio, a resident physician, had a nurse get him the potassium chloride and gave the injections in front of the nurse and a medical student while Cherry-Sapp was connected to a monitor which sounded a loud alarm when her heart stopped.

Afterward, Caraccio told his super-

visor he had given the injections, but still filed medical reports indicating Cherry-Sapp had died of natural causes.

Ravitz said the death was "not simply a mercy killing" but "a hybrid case" of a caring doctor under enormous stress. He said the role of Caraccio's father's illness will be a major factor in the trial.

In testimony Friday, hospital clerk Barbara Crawley testified that almost 1½ hours before Cherry-Sapp was given the injections, Caraccio told her he was "going to save me some paperwork" about transferring Cherry-Sapp

from the intensive care unit. After the death, Crawley said, Caraccio told her: "See, I told you I was going to save you some paperwork."

Bradfield, in ordering Caraccio to face the murder charge, said the doctor had time to think about what he was doing, but chose to continue. He said Caraccio's false medical report showed he tried to cover up his actions.

Dr. Barry Lesser, Caraccio's supervisor, said Caraccio was "one of the finest" young doctors he has helped train and that he was astonished when Caraccio told him of injecting Cherry-Sapp.



HUGH GRANNUM/Detroit Free Press

## SKATING INTO WINTER

Skaters enjoy a sunny Friday on downtown Detroit's harbinger of cold weather, the Hart Plaza ice skating rink, which opened recently. The weekend promises to retain the wintry theme with cloudy skies and scattered snow showers forecast for today and Sunday. Details, Page 2A.

## Church-closing plan sparks confrontation

BY DAVID CRUMM  
Free Press Religion Writer

Although the chief spokesman for the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit and the chief opponent of archdiocesan recommendations to close 43 churches had been asked not to turn a Friday talk into a confrontation, anger surfaced as a Detroit audience heard the two discuss the issue.

"We were told about this plan by cable television. . . . This is how we were told about this by our communicators in the archdiocese and you want me to be non-confrontational?" said the Rev. Norman Thomas, pastor of Sacred Heart Church in Detroit and head of a group of priests and lay Catholics opposing the proposed closings.

Archdiocesan Director of Communications Jay Berman said he had judged the Sept. 28 television broadcast the only practical way to reach Catholics with the long and complicated announcement. But Berman acknowledged that the widely criticized method would not be repeated when

Cardinal Edmund Szoka issues a final ruling on the proposed closings in early January.

Berman and Father Thomas spoke under the sponsorship of the Michigan Ethnic Heritage Studies Center at the Rackham Building in Detroit's cultural center.

"Isn't it strange that of all the parishes that have been recommended for closing or merging . . . almost all of them are opposing this because we think we are alive and vibrant?" said Father Thomas.

The Catholic Church in Detroit remains committed to the city where its headquarters, major seminary and 48,000 Catholic households are located, Berman said. But he said it isn't likely the city's Catholic population will grow substantially because many Catholics living outside Detroit still fear the city.

"You won't be surprised when I tell you that I know people who think I'm nuts because I work downtown," he said. Each Christmas Eve, he said,

## Jay Berman said it isn't likely the city's Catholic population will grow substantially because many Catholics living outside Detroit still fear the city.

leaders at Blessed Sacrament Cathedral on Woodward Avenue in Detroit have trouble convincing Catholics to attend midnight mass because they fear crime.

Berman said the exodus of Catholics from Detroit was caused largely by the disruption of neighborhoods when freeways were built in the 1950s and '60s and by racial fears.

Father Thomas said archdiocesan officials should consult more fully with city pastors if they want to know how to improve the church's ministry in the city, rather than relying on the two committees of church leaders who drafted the closing plan in a series of closed-door meetings this year.

## Detroit cop acquitted in choke death

A Detroit Police officer who has been suspended without pay from the 8th (Northwest) Precinct was acquitted Friday of second-degree murder charges in the strangulation of a 43-year-old man with a history of mental problems.

In a non-jury trial, Recorder's Court Judge Dalton Robertson found William Barksdale not guilty in the death of York Goodwin, who died Dec. 28 after a struggle with Barksdale and another officer. The officers had answered a call to take Goodwin from his home to Detroit Receiving Hospital's Crisis Center for observation.

The Wayne County Medical Examiner found that Goodwin died of strangulation.

A police spokesman said Barksdale's case is under departmental review.

## Parents fight banning of yule play by school

BY DAWSON BELL  
Free Press Lansing Staff

LANSING — Some fifth-graders in the Waverly School District have been prohibited from performing a Christmas play that is based on the birth of Jesus, prompting protests from their teacher and some parents.

The school has prohibited the play — "No Room at the Inn," which is in a book of plays in the school library — citing a violation of the constitutional separation of church and state. The play, a non-biblical account of what is clearly the story of Jesus' birth, chronicles the tale of a coldhearted innkeeper who won't provide a room to an expectant mother, but whose personality is transformed after the baby's birth.

A group of parents are to meet with an attorney tonight to discuss possible action against the Lansing area school district.

"It's ridiculous," said the attorney, David Kallman, who said the children selected the play and that banning it violates their rights of free speech.

Nor can the play be viewed as a promotion of a specific religion, he said. "This is a fictional account of what happened. Jesus' name isn't even in it," he said.

Waverly Superintendent Jon Reynolds said the play was banned because "it could be viewed as a promotion of Christianity."

"It's a judgment call. It's a heck of a mess to be in. But you have to make a decision," he said.

Reynolds' decision to ban the performance, scheduled for Dec. 13, came before Thanksgiving, Kallman said.

Since then, Kallman and the school district's attorney have tried to negotiate a settlement and several parents have sought relief from the school board.

No agreement has been reached, however, and Kallman said a lawsuit might be filed. The parents have also considered holding the performance off the school grounds, he said.

The play was also performed last year, appearing on the district's cable television station and led to several complaints from other teachers, Reynolds said.

Terrie Huisken, whose daughter is in the class, called the play "harmless."

"It's not religious. None of what happens is really in the Bible," she said. Banning the performance unfairly penalizes children who have been in the district for years and look forward to being able to participate in the annual productions, Huisken said.

## Staffer named national/foreign editor

Joe Ritchie was promoted Friday to national/foreign editor at the Free Press.



Ritchie, who came to the newspaper as deputy national/foreign editor in 1986, has been responsible for national and foreign coverage for most of this year while former National/Foreign Editor Bill Roberts coordinated campaign and election coverage.

Roberts resigned in November to accept a job as executive business editor at the San Jose (Calif.) Mercury News.

Ritchie, 39, came to the Free Press from the Washington Post,

where he worked from 1975 to 1986 as a reporter and assistant foreign editor. Ritchie, who grew up in Chicago, is a 1970 graduate of Calvin College in Grand Rapids, and holds master's degrees from Ohio State University in German and journalism.

Ritchie's duties as national/foreign editor will include co-ordinating coverage from the Free Press' three foreign bureaus — Africa, Canada and Europe — and two domestic bureaus — Atlanta and Washington.

Ritchie's wife, Louise Reid Ritchie, is the Family Ties columnist on the Parent Talk page of the Free Press. A clinical psychologist, she also co-ordinates the Free Press' literacy campaign, A Gift of Reading.

The Ritchies and their sons, Jabari, 4, and Akin, eight months, live in Southfield.



JOHN COLLIER/Detroit Free Press

## QUIET, PLEASE

Holly Patzer, 9, of Vicksburg, prepares her bed Thursday night for an evening stay in the Media Center at Randolph Elementary School in Livonia. Patzer and a group of fellow fourth-graders were visiting Livonia this week as part of an exchange program where suburban and rural children compare communities and become pen pals. Livonia schoolchildren plan to visit Vicksburg next year.

## Police check bars to step up road safety during holidays

BY ROBERT MUSIAL  
Free Press Staff Writer

Hoping to reduce alcohol-related traffic fatalities and injuries between now and Jan. 1, state police on Friday launched a program to head drinking drivers off at the pass — or at least the bar stool.

Troopers from eight State Police posts, covering an area from Port Huron to Monroe and west to Ann Arbor, began unannounced visits to bars, said Lt. Al Slaughter, commander of the State Police Romeo post.

"We'll be checking to make sure intoxicated people and minors aren't being served," he said.

Slaughter said each post hopes to make up to eight inspections a night.

In addition, suspected drunken drivers pulled over near bars will be asked to identify who served them their last drinks, he said.

## Troopers from eight posts began surprise visits.

According to a State Police survey, more than 50 percent of the fatal car accidents between 1983 and 1986 involved alcohol. Of those arrested in the accidents, half had come directly from a bar, Slaughter said.

An earlier program, announced Nov. 29, urges drivers statewide to tie a red ribbon on their car during the holiday season as a sign of their pledge not to drink and drive. A coalition of 25 groups, including State Police and Mothers Against Drunk Driving, is promoting the idea.