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Betty DeRamus

Young blacks, big cars don't equal drugs

Suppose you saw a 20-year-old black man driving a \$30,000 car down Jefferson. Would you suspect he'd just swiped the car from someone's driveway? Or would you think he'd bought it with a handful of pipe-stained \$100 bills?

Actually, the young man is a junior at the University of Michigan, majoring in communications. His family lives in Farmington Hills. His mother is a decorator, and his father is an auto company manager. Last week, he spent a lot of time in his college dorm, cramming for finals.

None of that does him any good, though, when he and his friends stroll around Greektown or drive through Detroit in his brother's shiny new car.

He says he once was stopped three times within 20 minutes while driving the car.

He also says a 22-year-old friend with an open bottle of booze in his car was handcuffed, searched and held in the backseat of a police car for 45 minutes, all the while being grilled about selling drugs.

HE REMEMBERS walking around Greektown with a friend one night, drinking and flirting with girls and then being stopped by two policemen on motorcycles.

"Without hesitation, we both turned up against the wall in the usual 'up against the wall' stance, feet spread apart, hands on the wall above the head," he says.

"The other officer got off his bike and stood right next to Carl, yelling into his car. 'Spread them further apart, boy. Move your feet further back from the wall. Further!'"

"Carl was practically horizontal to the ground, and that's when the officer did it. From behind he kicked Carl's feet from under him and in one swift motion picked him back up with a clenched fist in Carl's groin.

"What you looking at?" the other officer shouted at me. I immediately turned away. He then searched Carl top to bottom.

"Don't be walking around these alleys at night," the officer said. "He said, 'You may think you're bad, but there's always somebody better.'"

Then the other cop put his 2 cents in, saying "I don't wanna see you around here anymore. Now get out of here!"

The young man also remembers the night he was shot by two men trying to steal his car. When the police arrived to investigate, he says they laughed when they heard he was from Farmington Hills. They then got ticked off when he couldn't describe the men who shot him.

WHAT MAKES this young man's story interesting is the fact that last week a national study pointed out that white students in grades six through 12 are more likely than black students to use alcohol and drugs.

According to the study by the national Parents Resource Institute for Drug Education Inc. (PRIDE), white males were most likely to use drugs, followed by black males. Black females were least likely to use drugs or liquor.

The Atlanta-based group surveyed 296,180 white students and 59,898 black students in grades 6-12 at 958 schools in 38 states, including Michigan during 1988-89.

Its findings don't reflect what people believe or watch on television every night.

Most people think drug abuse is primarily a black, inner-city problem, a problem fueled by black kids who drive \$30,000 cars and carry beepers in their back pockets.

Yet white kids are constantly pressed and pushed to try drugs, too, and are far more likely to have the money to buy them.

The PRIDE study isn't likely to change the minds of the cops the U of M student claims have been hassling him. It sure hit me in the gut, though.

The next time I see a youngster wheeling a big-ticket car, I'm going to try to keep an open mind. Maybe the kid really is a drug dealer. I'll tell myself. Or maybe he's just a college student with money-making parents — and miserable luck.

De Ramus' column appears Sundays, Tuesdays and Thursdays in The Detroit News.

City attorney represents more than Dearborn

By Carrie Dowling
 Detroit News Staff Writer

People often ask James Humphries why he would work for the city of Dearborn, where blacks have not always felt welcome.

He tells them his father once dreamed of becoming a draftsman, but the doors were slammed in his face because he was black. His grandfather, one of Detroit's first black police officers, endured indignities that Humphries will never forget.

So for him, the chance to become Dearborn's first black assistant city

attorney — and the city's ranking black official — was almost a responsibility, not just an opportunity.

"If, in fact, they killed two birds with one stone by hiring an attorney who is also a minority, then I'm thankful for the opportunity," Humphries said. "Perhaps I'll have to put in more hours, ask more questions, work a little harder. It comes with the territory."

"And I would say to other blacks: Come and take the challenge. Hey, I played football with Bo Schembechler," said the University of Michigan graduate and former middle guard.

"No challenge is too great — that's what we learned. Step up to it and give it your best shot."

IN OCTOBER, Humphries, 31, became Dearborn's 10th full-time black employee out of more than 800 full-time city workers. Two years ago the city, which borders Detroit, had none.

City officials hope more blacks will follow.

Recently, when officials had difficulty attracting blacks to the nearly all white city, they dropped the residency requirement.

"A lot of blacks simply weren't willing to move to the city because of its image," said Edward Williams, an assistant director for personnel. "So the requirement was gradually changed to say employees have to live within a 25-mile radius of city hall."

At issue is the city's ability to comply with a settlement reached with the U.S. Department of Justice, which sued the city for hiring discrimination. The city agreed to have the federal government monitor its

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HAROLD ROBINSON/The Detroit News
 Dearborn's first black city attorney, James Humphries.



Delores Chambers leaves a food van with dinner and blankets. "This is a blessing from heaven," she said.

Dinner for homeless stolen But Good Samaritans come to rescue of hungry

By Robert Ourian
 Detroit News Staff Writer

When he heard the homeless and hungry were waiting in a Cass Corridor food line stripped of food by thieves, Southfield restaurant owner Alex Winkler wasted no time.

"Give me 20 minutes," the Pickle Barrel Deli owner told a volunteer appealing for help.

Marty Goodman, owner of Lou's Deli in Southfield, ordered employee Craig Johnson and others into action.

"We gave them everything we could spare," Goodman said.

So, too, did dozens of others around Metro Detroit who were crushed by the news that thieves who raided a Jefferson Avenue warehouse threatened to steal what little Christmas many of the homeless hoped for.

Several truckloads of soup, chicken, ribs and roasts were stolen during the night or early Christmas day from the building a block away from Joey's on Jefferson restaurant, where volunteers met Monday to prepare the food for distribution.

The food was destined for 600 hungry and homeless waiting on street corners around Detroit for mobile meal trucks that are part of



Darlene Feldman, 'Blanket Lady' breaks news of food theft.

the annual Street Feast.

The food was also going to feed an estimated 800 homeless at the Cass Avenue shelter operated by Detroit Cover-Up, run by Darlene Feldman, known as the city's Blanket Lady.

Feldman sadly broke the news of the theft to the homeless as they filed into the shelter on Cass.

"Some things should be off-limits — even to the thieves," said Charles Powell, a homeless man who was hoping for a meal.

For a time, it appeared Feldman and Street Feast organizer Terry Cicala would have to call off the Christmas meal. But frantic

broadcast appeals for help turned the tide and fully restored the holiday spirit.

Merchants and residents from around the city brought food for the homeless. One man brought more than a dozen loaves of bread and packages of lunch meat. One youngster dropped off his piggy bank full of coins.

Volunteers at the Detroit Cover-Up shelter dug into their pockets, coming up with \$260 to purchase food to serve.

Meanwhile, volunteer driver Aubrey Platman, owner of Sweet Lorraine's Cafe in Southfield, phoned his family to say he would be working late Christmas night.

Although he was nearly two hours late because of the theft, his efforts, as well as those of other volunteers in the food vans, were not in vain.

At a street corner near Mack and Mt. Elliott, a dozen cold and hungry people streamed to the van to collect food, soup, soft drinks and blankets.

"The furnace went out, we didn't have any kerosene and we haven't eaten yet today," said Delores Chambers who lives on Heidelberg. "This is a blessing from heaven. God answers prayers. He does."

Bridge's safety barriers subpar, experts insist

By Louis Mieczko
 Detroit News Staff Writer

Mackinac Bridge safety barriers have not met national design standards for at least 15 years and played a key role in a fatal September accident in which a small car vaulted off the span, according to top U.S. highway experts.

At least six studies by some of the nation's most prestigious highway design institutes have condemned the curb-rail combination used on the Mackinac Bridge — an inner 11-inch pipe and a 38-inch outer railing.

Engineers say a low inner curb or barrier tends to lift an out-of-control vehicle up and possibly over an outer railing but a single barrier bounces it back onto the roadway. Current federal highway codes permit only a single barrier.

The Mackinac Bridge's inner curb "almost certainly" tossed a 1987 Yugo across the outer railing, killing 31-year-old Leslie Pluhar of Royal Oak, said Dean Sicking, associate research engineer for the Texas Transportation Institute at Texas A&M University.

"Everyone knows not to design that type of railing for a bridge," Sicking said. "The bridge probably is safer without the lower (inner) curb. Without the curb, she (Pluhar) would not have vaulted the outer railing."

While the Mackinac Bridge does not require an immediate change by law, Sicking and Richard Fessler, chairman of the state Senate Transportation Committee, call for remov-

al of the inner curb. Research engineers were questioning combination curb-rail designs as early as 1957, the year the suspension bridge opened between Michigan's Upper and Lower peninsulas, according to documents obtained by The Detroit News.

THE BRIDGE'S safety barriers have been under close scrutiny since Sept. 22, when Pluhar lost control of her 1987 Yugo in 48 mph winds and slammed into the low inner curb. The hatchback then catapulted over the outer railing and plunged 170 feet into the frigid Straits of Mackinac.

Pluhar died of severe head and chest injuries but was still breathing when her car sank in 150 feet of water, according to an autopsy report.

Sicking speculated she might have been killed even if she had hit the outer rail directly because of her speed — estimated by state police at 55 to 60 mph but only 45 mph by witnesses — and the nearly head-on angle at which police say she struck the inner curb.

Pluhar's family has sued the Mackinac Bridge Authority, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and the authority's engineering firm for negligence in operating the Mackinac Bridge.

OFFICIALS for the authority have consistently defended the bridge railing system, and they point to the official state police accident report, which blamed the Pluhar

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First Step: Shelter offers way out for abuse victims

By Gregory Skwira
 Detroit News Staff Writer

Things are quiet these days at First Step, a shelter for battered women in western Wayne County. The 30-bed shelter is less than half full and only a few children can be heard playing in the hallways.

Those empty beds would make Executive Director Judy Ellis happy, except she knows they hide some ugly truth.

"This is the time of the year when women are going to take an extra beating in an effort to hold the family together through the holidays," she said. "But in January, the phone starts to ring. We'll be overwhelmed and that continues until spring."

For abused women, the holidays present an agonizing dilemma: Stay with a volatile and violent spouse or flee with the kids into the uncertainty of a new life in the middle of what should be a happy family season.

"Like the call we got the other night," Ellis said. "The woman said she couldn't take the kids away at the holidays. She said some kind of

Christmas for them was better than nothing."

Cheryl, 29, made a different decision. After her husband spit on her and threatened her with another beating at a Christmas party two weeks ago, she took her two children, aged 2½ and 9 months, and moved into the First Step shelter.

It was the third time she had left her husband during their four-year marriage. The violence began just two weeks after the wedding, she said. Cheryl agreed to talk on the condition that her real name not be used.

FIRST STEP is a private, non-profit organization that serves 35 communities in western Wayne County and downriver. It's supported by United Way, government grants and private contributions. Two shelters in Wayne County run by other groups service Detroit, Ellis said.

The News agreed to conceal the

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Bittersweet Christmas for family of Pan Am terrorist victim

By Carrie Dowling
 Detroit News Staff Writer

Framed in gold and displayed on the white brick mantle of Georgann Fuller's fireplace is a bright silk scarf cheerfully decorated with horses on a pale blue background.

Her husband James had planned to surprise her with it last year. It was found in the burnt rubble of Pan Am Flight 103's cockpit, still wrapped in Christmas paper and almost completely intact.

The scarf is a bittersweet symbol

of the fiery airplane explosion over Lockerbie, Scotland, which killed her husband of 21 years and 269 others on Dec. 21, 1988.

It has been a little more than a year since she and her two teen-aged children learned Fuller died, the victim of an unknown terrorist's vendetta.

"WE WERE just numb. Today was much easier than I thought it would be," she remarked to her son, Chip, 19. "I was a little worried about how it would go, opening the pres-

ents under the tree. But it makes a difference because we're not in the same house anymore."

Not long after the death of James Fuller, a top executive at Volkswagen, the family moved from its Bloomfield Hills home to a slightly smaller one on a quiet, tree-lined street in Birmingham, away from the memories that haunted them.

Yet Fuller cannot forget. And she isn't ready to let go. Every day, dark rumors and questions with no answers plague her. Why did this happen? How could it have happened?

Did someone let it happen? Why has no one been arrested in the bombing?

And when will it happen again?

"I do think the truth will be known one day," she said, touching a knitted green wreath pinned neatly at her collar. On the lapel of her red wool sweater is a button with the warning: "Terrorism and apathy: A deadly combination."

"I DON'T want to be an angry person, but it's difficult," she said. "I don't want it to take over my life. My husband wouldn't have wanted that."

He was such an alive and fun-loving person. He would want me to let go of it, to make peace with it. And when it's time to do that, I'll know."

In the meantime, she spends a good part of her days working with a group of families who had loved ones on the doomed plane. Called The Victims of Pan Am Flight 103, the group has called for better airport security and the government to make public serious bomb threats against airlines, something she believes

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