

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Kent Circuit Judge Rules Waste Case Can Proceed

GRAND RAPIDS — Kent County Circuit Court Judge James Redford ruled late last week that a hazardous-waste lawsuit could go forward, a case that stems from the alleged dumping of contaminated soil at the former Monroe Avenue Water Filtration plant.

Redford denied the defendants' motion to dismiss the case and also denied a motion from Superior Environmental Corp. to be removed as a defendant.

At the same time, Redford removed Dan Howard as a plaintiff in the lawsuit because Howard failed to file an affidavit of personal damage with the court.

The judge's decision means that William Q. Tingley and William Tingley III can proceed with their action on the basis that they may have suffered greater harm than the general public would have during the alleged illegal transfer of 26,000 cubic yards of toxic soil from the construction site of The Boardwalk in 940 Monroe Ave. NW to the water filtration plant at 1430 Monroe Ave. NW in 2000.

William Q. Tingley and Howard are partners in ProtoCAM Inc., a machine-tooling business at 1009 Ottawa Ave. NW.

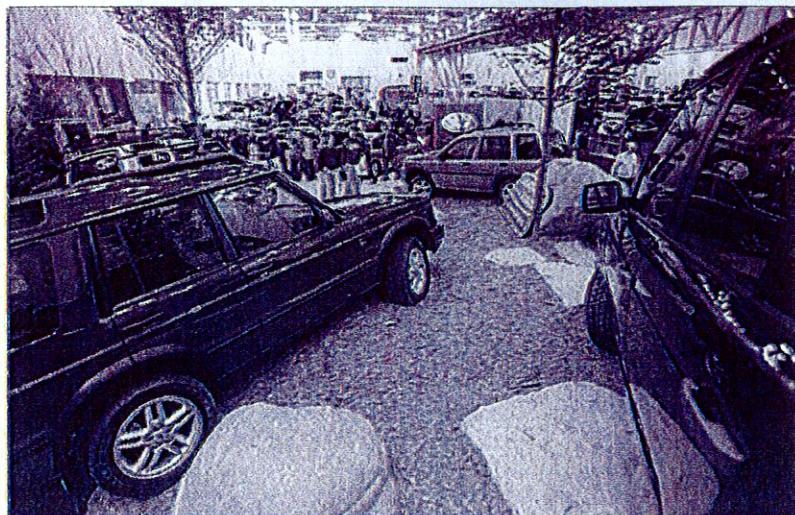
William Q. Tingley III is the plant's general manager.

The plaintiffs claim they were exposed to a number of contaminants when the defendants allegedly removed soil from the work site by using an easement the company has access rights to.

Besides Superior Environmental, other defendants are 900 Monroe LLC, 940 Monroe LLC, Pioneer Construction, Dykema Excavating and the city of Grand Rapids.

Redford granted a motion from Fifth Third Bancorp and removed the bank as a defendant in the case.

— David Czurak



COURTESY SHOWSPAN INC.

DeVos Place is expected to host many of the latest showroom vehicles this week when the 7th Annual Michigan International Auto Show opens.

## A Really Big Showroom

### Auto Show Starts What Could Be A Good Sales Year

By David Czurak

GRAND RAPIDS — More than 300 new models from over 30 automakers will be parked under the expansive DeVos Place roof this week, as the Grand Rapids New Car Dealers presents its 7th Annual Michigan International Auto Show.

The auto show, produced by Showspan Inc., is expected to showcase many of the latest showroom vehicles such as the Ford 500 convertible, Chevrolet's retro HHR, and the new coupe and convertible versions of Pontiac's Grand Am.

The new car dealers use the auto show as an unofficial kickoff to the new sales year. An estimated 70,000 potential buyers will walk the gallery space from Thursday through Sunday to get an up-close view of whatever might grab their attention.

Last year, the nation's consumers purchased 16.9 million cars, pickups, vans and SUVs, or about 20% more than they bought in 2003. And dealers around the country had a very good December as they sold 111,000 more vehicles than they did in the same month of the previous year.

Although no one tracks car sales in the metro

area, some dealers are on a nice roll as they head into the show. But will it continue?

George Erickson, senior regional analyst for the W.E. Upjohn Institute for Employment Research, thought there were a few reasons car dealers can be optimistic about sales in 2005. One factor in the dealers' favor is that the price of a new car remains fairly affordable.

Erickson pointed out that the Auto Affordability Index, compiled by Comerica Bank, showed that a median-income wage earner could buy a new average-priced vehicle for 20.6 weeks of earnings in 2004. A year earlier, that index stood at 21.2 weeks.

Another factor that should please dealers is automakers are competing against each other more actively now by rolling out more new models faster than they did in the past. Erickson said there is a sense of urgency among manufacturers to get their latest products in front of the public first.

"They've shortened the production cycle to get new and fresher products out. In the past, car companies probably ran models for too long and had too many models that were tired. It was very hard to move these because they looked the same each year," he said.

Today, since the auto companies can't raise prices, the only way they can gain revenue is to increase market share and that means coming out with new models almost on an annual basis. That

See Show, page 8

## Byron Bank Elevated To 'Five Star'

### But Past Presidents Voice Concerns

By Anne Bond Emrich

BRYON CENTER — Bauer Financial just upped Byron Center State Bank to Five Star status — the No. 1 rating in the financial services industry.

"We were really pleased to be rated a Five Star institution," said President and CEO Patrick Gill upon acknowledging the news Monday. From a historical standpoint, Gill said he didn't know when, if ever, the bank had previously achieved a Five Star rating.

"But it's certainly the first time we've received that rating under the current management team," he added.

Private companies like Bauer Financial that analyze and rank the quality of commercial banks reporting to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. usually assign each institution a letter grade or numerical ranking to indicate the institution's safety or soundness, which is typically determined using data based upon some variation of capital assets, management earnings and liquidity factors, according to the FDIC.

Byron Center State Bank, a subsidiary of OAK Financial Corp., celebrates its 84th birthday next month.

News of the bank's elevated Five Star rating came less than a month after two shareholders — past presidents Willard and John Van Singel — sent a letter to some of the company's shareholders expressing concern about the bank's management and future direction. The Van Singel family has held shares in the company for more than 50 years.

In recent years, the bank has

See Bank, page 8

## CONTENTS

Comment	4
Inside Track	5
Family Business Matters	20
Business Calendar	22
Change-ups	23
Investment Report	24
Stock Charts	24
Public Record	25
Executive Suite	25
Street Talk	26

## Griffins Market Across State

### Detroit-Area Firm, Red Wings Selling Local Pro Hockey Club

By David Czurak

GRAND RAPIDS — As the Grand Rapids Griffins skated into the final stretch of their ninth season, team management has made some business moves they feel will help the club score with more out-of-town sponsors and paying customers.

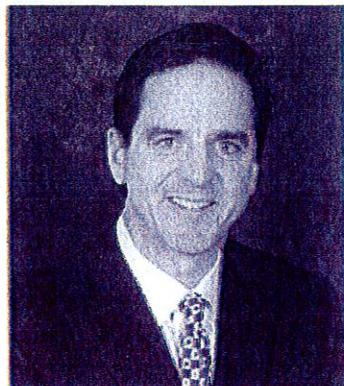
The American Hockey League franchise, owned by Dan and Pamella DeVos and David Van Andel, has entered into an agree-

ment with Dietz Trott Sports and Entertainment of Bingham Farms. The Griffins hired Dietz Trott, owned by Michael Dietz and David Trott, to sell sponsorships to Detroit-based companies that do business here. The contract runs for the remainder of this season and into the off-season next summer.

"We've got a great thing over here with the city, with the arenas and with the market. We think we can do a better job of spreading that word and we just need a little help doing it," said Bob Sack, executive vice president of sales and marketing for the franchise, who closed the deal with Dietz Trott.

"These guys have some contacts and some business connections that we've somewhat been lacking in," he added. "We're not

See Griffins, page 7



BUSINESS JOURNAL PHOTOFILER PHOTO  
Dietz

## Ramp Spaces May Shuffle

**City Pushes For  
More Visitor  
Parking Downtown**

By David Cawth

**GRAND RAPIDS** — Business owners along and near Monroe Center may get a parking break this spring, if city commissioners let Parking Services spend \$50,000 on a second access system for the Monroe Center parking ramp.

Parking commissioners recently passed a plan that would set aside 150 spaces on the lower levels of the ramp at Fulton Street and Ottawa Avenue for visitors and move monthly parkers currently on those levels to the upper floors. It's roughly the same plan the city uses in its ramp at Pearl Street and Bonita Avenue, which has the same readable auto-access system that Parking Services wants to buy for Monroe Center.

It's not just to accommodate Leo, but the other businesses on Monroe Center

We want them to find an easier place to park," said Pam Rusema, Parking Services director, of clients that come downtown.

Leo Bell, who owns Leo's on the ground floor of the Monroe Center ramp, said he has lost regular customers because they haven't wanted to park on the facility's top levels. He also was concerned about all the transient spaces that have been lost recently in downtown.

When the Monroe Center lot became the site of the new art museum, 150 visitor spaces were removed from the city inventory. Not long ago there were two lots and a ramp that offered visitors 90 minutes of free parking. Now only the Monroe Center ramp has free visitor parking, but the time limit has been reduced to an hour.

In November, Bell told parking commissioners that customer traffic to Leo's fell from 25 percent to 40 percent on certain days after the Monroe Center lot closed and Blue Cross Blue Shield moved into the former Stetkev's building on Monroe Center. Blue Cross is the city's largest monthly client in the Monroe Center ramp, holding 260 cards.

*See Shuffle, page 10*

## Griffins

*Continued from page 3*

asking them to market to individual ticket buyers. This is all about corporations that do business in West Michigan in some fashion, but are typically based in the Detroit area."

Dietz Trott opened its doors a little more than a year ago. Dietz is the driving force behind the business having sold Spotts Illustrated last year that owning the firm was the culmination of his lifelong dream. He was with Itch Holdings Inc. for 17 years, marketing the company's pizza business, the Fox Theater, the Detroit Tigers, Comerica Park and the Detroit Red Wings — the NHL franchise that made the Griffins its top affiliate three seasons ago.

"It's great to be involved with the organization and it's going to be a lot of fun to work with Bob and his group. I think we can help them increase their revenue over there," said Dietz, who added that he was meeting with a potential client just minutes after he spoke with the Business Journal.

Dietz didn't think it would be too difficult to sell the Griffins in Detroit because the game, despite the NHL lockout, remains very popular in the place they call Hockeytown.

"You don't just turn off your interest in hockey, you just have it go somewhere else. If you have children playing, maybe you put that energy into youth hockey," he said, while adding that corporate Detroit already knows of the local franchise.

"There are hockey fans throughout the state and I think the sponsors realize that. The sponsors are looking for ways to engage fans. There are a lot of opportunities out there and the Griffins are one of them."

On top of that contract, the Red Wings have agreed to market the Griffins to individual customers for the rest of this season. The local franchise has struck a deal with the Radisson East Inn, at 3333 28th St. SE, that allows the Griffins to offer Wings fans two club seats and a night's stay at the hotel for \$59. For their part, the Red Wings will e-mail this offer to its 17,000 season-ticket holders and others that are registered at the club's Web site.

## Dietz Trott Sports & Entertainment

**Who:** Michael Dietz and David Trott, owners

**What:** Services include sports and entertainment marketing, naming rights, hospitality, executive negotiations and event management.

**When:** Opened in December 2003

**Where:** Bingham Farms

**Why:** Selling corporate sponsorships for Grand Rapids Griffins.

Sack said this promotion was set in motion by the now-infamous lockout, back when it was just howling over the game but before it had landed with a vicious thud.

"This has kind of been planned since the fall. That once the second half of the season rolled around you get into the traditional hockey season, the prime time that is January through March, we wanted to make the pitch to the folks in Detroit as to what the Griffins have to offer," he said.

Many of those potential customers on the state's east side may have gotten their initial glimpse of the Griffins last week as Comcast Cable televised the first of six Griffins games Friday to 1.4 million households in Michigan. The telecast was seen in nine of the state's 10 largest cities, including Detroit, Flint, Pontiac and Saginaw. The next game is set for Feb. 5 when the Griffins travel to Rochester, N.Y.

Sack said the Griffins picked Dietz Trott over other Detroit-area marketers because of Michael Dietz's background and because both businesses were looking to build their presence in each other's neighborhood.

"There was a natural fit there. We wanted to dip into Detroit and he wanted to have a client presence over here. Both of us desired to reach into each other's backyard," he said.

"We're not only getting a guy who has corporate sports marketing savvy in Detroit, but we're getting a guy that truly understands what we play."



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