

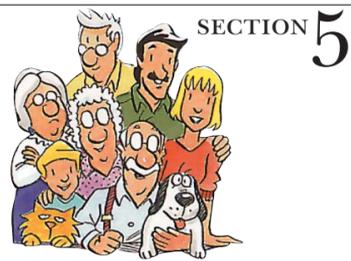
Neighbor

Comics

The Pickles Gang

brightens up your morning

— Page 3



SECTION 5

F12M12

Bank cracks cover on children's-book donation campaign

Improving literacy among impoverished students is a daunting, uphill battle.

One way to help the fight is sitting on our bookshelves, and likely covered with a thin layer of dust. Through the end of the month, Elgin's First Community Bank is collecting new and used preschool and elementary schoolbook donations for its Community of Readers Program.

The aim of the collection, program founder Karen DeBack said, is to donate as many books as possible to organizations that serve underprivileged Elgin Area



Kerry Lester
Our schools

School District U-46 families. Donation hours are weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. and from 9 a.m. to noon on Saturdays at the bank's two Elgin offices: 165 S. Randall Road and at the corner of Big Timber and McLean Boulevard.

Party like it's 1949: As Elgin Community College kicks off

its celebration of a milestone birthday, prepare to have a swinging time.

Tickets are now on sale for Elgin Community College's annual Founders' Day Brunch. The event, which features a vintage 1949 theme, will take place on Sunday, Jan. 25, at the Fox Valley University and Business Center, 1700 Spartan Drive, Elgin. It's also the first event in the yearlong 60th anniversary celebration of the founding of the college. Entertainment will include a Frank Sinatra impersonator and 1949-styled singers. Several awards also will be

given during the brunch. The ECC Distinguished Alumni Award recognizes a successful ECC student who graduated before June 30, 2004. The ECC Pacesetter Award recognizes a successful ECC student who graduated after June 30, 2003.

Other awards given at the brunch include the Friend of ECC Award and the Exceptional Friend of the ECC Foundation Award. This year special recognition will be given at the brunch to the first individuals who graduated from ECC between the years of 1951 and 1956.

Brunch guests will be treated to an open champagne reception followed by an upscale gourmet menu. Tickets are \$75 per person and must be purchased in advance. For more information, contact ECC Foundation at 847-214-7377 or visit www.elgin.edu/eccfoundation.

Catholic placement tests: I still remember my St. Viator placement tests like they were yesterday — clutching a handful of freshly sharpened pencils in my sweaty palms, and praying to make it through the three-hour trial.

This Saturday at 8 a.m., eighth-grade students planning to attend Catholic high schools across the Archdiocese of Chicago in Cook and Lake counties undertake similar tests at their respective high school campuses.

Students are asked to bring two No. 2 pencils and a check for the \$25 exam fee made payable to the school.

Test results will be mailed to students by mid-February. For answers to questions related to placement testing, a guide for students and their families is posted on the Archdiocese's Web site at archchicago.org.

Township continues its tree recycling program

If Dundee Township highway department employees stood up all the Christmas trees that have come through their recycling program during the last 12 years, they'd have enough to form a couple of forests.

They've already chipped enough to lay miles of walking

paths in the open space sites. And they have accepted enough to put a sizeable dent in the state's landfills.

Their work continues, and they have

no one to thank but residents who drive and drag their used fresh-cut Christmas trees to the Route 72 highway garage.

Some have already been dropped off, said Larry Braasch, highway commissioner.

"We start getting some the day after Christmas. Those are the people who go away for New Year's and want them out of the house," he said. "It's comical to see how some of the people get them here. I wish I had a movie camera. But at least they get here."

The township will accept the trees if they are clean of ornaments, tinsel and lights. If they are not, employees could be injured when they put the trees through the chipper.

On a good year, those trees could number 800, Braasch said. "That was our peak. We received that many in the early years of the program. Now, we'll receive from 300 to 400 trees. In recent years, people haven't been dropping off as many fresh-cut Christmas trees. I can only guess they haven't been buying them. Maybe they were decorating with artificial trees."

Whatever the reason, the program continued, the trees were chipped and the paths were laid. Highway employees mix the evergreen chips with chips of other trees.

Evergreen trees chips are thin. The paths need to be a couple of inches thick so they stand out when they settle after being placed on the group.

"With 400 trees, we can lay five or six miles of paths," he said. "That helps the township save money on buying chips. We can also lay the paths quicker."

If it weren't for the township Christmas tree recycling program, residents would have no other option than putting the trees by the curb for garbage companies to pick up. More would also be dropped along rural roads. The recycling program will continue until Thursday, Jan. 15. The trees should be dropped off behind the garage close to the back of the building.

Elgin's delicious hidden gem

Business park's Cafe Roma well worth seeking out, patrons say

BY HARRY HITZEMAN
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Terms like "hidden gem" and "best-kept secret" are tossed around like a wilted house salad for some restaurants.

But these are apt adjectives for regulars at Cafe Roma, an Italian eatery that opened in Elgin earlier this year.

"The whole staff goes out of their way to make sure you have a fantastic dining experience," said customer Ray Horan, a Naperville resident.

"I venture to call it one of the best-kept secrets (in Elgin). You have to seek it out. I tell people about it all the time. It's high quality and not just slapped together," he said.

Frank and Jennifer Redisi, a Bartlett couple, opened the cafe over the summer.

Nestled in a business park at I-90 and Randall Road, behind Country Inn and Suites, Cafe Roma's main clientele is the corporate lunch crowd.

But the Redisis recently expanded to dinner two days a week — Thursday and Friday nights — because of growing demand.

"We have a quick, casual concept, but more upscale," said Frank Redisi, the executive chef who drew inspiration for the eatery from living in Rome in 1989.

"We make everything from scratch. We cater obviously to a business crowd."

Give Redisi a small window, and he'll describe importing finely ground "double zero" flour to make pizza dough or having fresh-cut French fries at 9/16," which are thicker and pair better with meat.

The bottom line is there's care and passion behind every dish — new and old.



Six months ago Frank and Jennifer Redisi opened Cafe Roma in the Randall Point business area. They recently added some evenings to offer something for the dinner crowd.

"It's authentic Italian. We don't use any tricks. It's extra virgin olive oil, fresh garlic. There's no phony seasonings," he said.

Jennifer Redisi said her husband's passion for food, along with their personal, skilled attention, help bring people back.

"We're tucked in here. It's sort of a hidden gem. People even call it that. They're like 'Oh my God, it's so nice back here,'" she said.

"It's not the same old same-old. That's probably the biggest

hurdle we have, getting people to find us. Once they do, they become loyal customers."

Ask the couple to name a signature or must-have dish and they pause.

"We are a lot more flexible," Jennifer Redisi said, adding they'll ask customers: "What do you have a taste for? We can customize it."

"Even before we were married, (Frank's) been an amazing cook. He's been passionate about it his whole life."

Still, more folks are realizing

there's more than downtown Elgin and Randall Road if you want to find a good place to eat.

Sleepy Hollow resident Carol Schoengart said she found out about the cafe while planning a luncheon for a community group.

"I'm absolutely enamored with Frank's salad. I can sit back and eat it three times a day," she said.

"The lettuce is always fresh. I'm sure he picks it over every day. You never find a piece that's not completely fresh."

The cafe also is a good spot for Schoengart's husband, Gert, who is not a huge fan of Italian fare.

"There's a variance wherever you go. Some places are better than others. This one is very good," he said.

"They try new things."

• Cafe Roma is at 2175 Point Blvd., Elgin. Lunch hours are 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday-Friday; dinner is served from 3-9 p.m. Thursday and Friday. Call (847) 836-ROMA or visit www.tastecaferoma.com.

Behind the scenes: Outtakes from the blotter

BY GENE HASCHAK
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At the end of each year, we always gather together some of the more humorous items we have obtained throughout the year from police reports.

This year's wacky happenings in the police are not quite as funny as some from years past.

There were no drunk Chihuahuas, no moviegoers passing gas and no air conditioners falling on cars.

However, we hope you enjoy these.

How they got caught

• The robber got the purse he wanted on Jan. 3, but the cops soon got him. After the 18-year-old snatched a purse in an Elgin parking lot,

"I have no driver's license and I am an illegal immigrant."

Speeder who admitted far more than the obvious

a witness noticed what happened and began chasing him. The offender lost his credit card during the pursuit and arrived home only a few steps before the police got there.

• South Elgin police stopped a 23-year-old driver on Jan. 16 for driving 16 miles an hour over the speed limit. He immediately jumped out of his car, threw up his hands in the air and yelled, "I have no driver's license and I am an illegal immigrant."

• When Elgin police caught a teen driving on the sidewalk in the early morning

hours of June 9, they said she was multi-tasking. She was driving on the sidewalk while she attempted to eat a sandwich and drink a soft drink. She was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol and unlawful consumption of alcohol.

• Sleepy Hollow police charged a 37-year-old Gilberts man with two counts of DUI, driving while license revoked, improper lane usage, illegal transportation of alcohol and failure to wear a seat belt. His arrest on Sept. 8 was a no-brainer. He was driving

through town drinking a can of beer with the top down on his SUV convertible in the pouring rain.

• In November, a man was called in to the South Elgin Police Department to be interviewed about a counterfeit bill that was recovered. The man appeared ruffled when police told him why he was there. Then he blurted out, "Oh, I thought I was here to be questioned about the dope in my safe."

• Sleepy Hollow police did a well-being check on two roommates at 3:15 a.m. on Nov. 20. Both appeared intoxicated. After the police left, there must have been a fight between the two because the police were called back to the home 45 minutes later. One reported that his roommate was wanted on a LaSalle

County warrant for possession of marijuana.

• He just couldn't quit playing doctor. A 47-year-old Elgin resident without a medical license was arrested on Dec. 17 after he diagnosed an undercover cop with two blood clots in his head. The same man had been arrested in Gilberts in 2004 for practicing medicine without a license when it was discovered he had an office there with a waiting room, examination room and storage room for medications.

What happened?

• In April, a witness saw a man with a knife chasing another man down the hallway of an Elgin public housing building. The pursuer

See **OUTTAKES** on **PAGE 2**