



## Ice Breaker

By Emily Kirk

Every week at SSI begins with an ice breaker, where the campers get to mix and meet each other. This year's ice breaker started with each student having a name stuck to their back, which they were not allowed to read. As soon as they were allowed, students began to buzz from person to person, trying to figure out their new identity by asking yes or no questions about the name stuck to their backs. Once they figured out who they were, they had to find a person with a corresponding character. "It was fun to see all the pairs come together," said Deborah Ploski, a Representative and first-time attendee of SSI. The names came from many different subjects, from Bible characters to movie heroes to toys. Through finding their pairs, the campers made lots of new friends. Representative Jonathan Dixon said, "It helped because I went up and talked to people that I wouldn't have otherwise," Senator Lydia Saldanha agreed. "I did get to know quite a few new people." Overall, the icebreaker was a success. Everyone seemed to enjoy themselves, and couples were united ranging from Adam and Eve to Barbie and Ken. Some people were especially pleased with their new alter-egos, such as Mr. Muffet, who was dubbed Barney Fife. He was later reported to have made a face and said, "It was a conspiracy!"



## Oaths taken; Dies are cast

Late yesterday evening, 42 Michigan State Representatives and 13 State Senators were sworn into office. No press releases were issued and the ceremony passed without incident. This year's legislative season promises to be stimulating, with both the house of Representatives and Senate reporting a full docket of bills to be considered over the coming week.



## Cash for clunkers: Jalopy or dreamboat?

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The new "Cash for Clunkers" program is generating quite the buzz, billed by supporters as a fix-it for just about everything, and by detractors as being too narrow and restrictive to really do much good.

President Barack Obama last month signed the legislation into law after it motored through Congress on the back of an Iraq war-funding bill. The goal is to rescue the battered auto industry by spurring new car sales and save the environment by helping consumers buy more fuel-efficient vehicles, while easing their financial distress.

Once it gets rolling later this week, the \$4 billion program will offer incentives of \$3,500 or \$4,500 to those who trade in a qualifying gas-guzzler -- car, SUV or light truck -- for a comparable new vehicle that gets substantially more miles per gallon.

Similar to successful European efforts that already are projected to result in 400,000 to 500,000 more new vehicle sales this year than otherwise would be the case, backers say the U.S. version could add 1 million sales at a time when Chrysler and General Motors are emerging from bankruptcy. Both are operating on government loans.

Without the program, auto-makers in the U.S. are on pace to sell 10 million new vehicles in the United States this year -- down from 16 million in 2007 and 13 million in 2008, according to Edmunds.com, which compiles data on the industry.

The credit the buyer receives depends on the type of vehicle purchased and the difference in fuel economy between the new and old vehicles. The credit is deducted from the retail price, so the buyer never actually sees the money.

The law allows only for the purchase of new vehicles that get at least 22 miles per gallon and cost no more than \$45,000. It also requires the old car to be destroyed. Some parts may be sold, but not the engine or drivetrain.

As far as the trade-in is concerned, the buyer must own the vehicle for a year (through proof of insurance) before getting rid of it. It also should be less than 25 years old before the intended trade-in date, be in drivable condition, and have combined city/highway fuel economy of 18 mpg or less (check [www.fuel-economy.gov](http://www.fuel-economy.gov)).

Supporters say all this adds up to a win-win. Critics -- and there are many -- aren't as enthused. Some environmentalists don't think the program boosts fuel economy enough, with the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy complaining that the program "aims primarily to clear Detroit's

unsold inventory from the storage lots," rather than to seriously cut fuel use.

Countering that, opponents say the environmentalists' fuel-economy thresholds are so high that foreign brands benefit disproportionately, because their lineups tend now to have more small, fuel-efficient vehicles.

Other critics focus on the limited window of opportunity. The program expires Nov. 1, or whenever the money runs out. Given that its backers initially proposed spending \$4 billion to promote the purchase of a million vehicles, and that a similar program boosted Germany's car sales 40 percent in May, the spigot could run dry before November.

Of course, Congress might relent and extend the program, which is paid for through the \$787 billion economic stimulus package. For now, the funding cap may help by pushing fence-sitting buyers to act. Area dealers say Cash for Clunkers already has captured buyers' attention and may even be dampening sales as vehicle shoppers await the help.

"The program hasn't really kicked in yet because the government still has to write the rules under which [it] will operate," said Craig Bickmore, executive director of the New Car Dealers of Utah. "Once it becomes available, we're hoping it will help unleash a lot of pent up demand for new cars."

The rules are expected to be set by Thursday or Friday.

## Police say Woodland Mall Stabbing is Gang-Related

By [Chris Zoladz](#) - WZZM13.com 2/12/2007

KENTWOOD - A 17 year old will be arraigned Tuesday on felonious assault charges after being arrested in connection with a gang-related stabbing at Woodland Mall.

Kentwood Police say the chaos that erupted at the mall on Saturday was the result of a fight between two gangs: the Bemis

Street Boys and Eastern Avenue Boys.

17 year-old Jon Tae Mayberry was stabbed during a large brawl. Security officials evacuated shoppers when the brawl grew on the main floor of the mall.

Kentwood Police say the violence may have been in retaliation for the shooting death of 16-year-old Kenneth Dear. Dear was killed in November at the Funspot Skating Rink on South Division Avenue in Kentwood.

Police Chief Mattice says many of the people caught on surveillance video at Woodland Mall were also captured on tape at the Funspot in November.

The stabbing victim suffered minor injuries. He is expected to be released from the hospital Tuesday. A mall security guard was also slightly injured.

## Announcement

### Observer Staff

The Observer is opening up future editions to Michigan State Senators, Representatives, lawyers, Chaperones, Aide-de-Camps, and staff for guest columns, letters to the editor, articles to inform the public on pending legislation, correction requests, etc. Submissions must be received no later than 5 p.m., to be considered for the next day's newspaper. Articles must have the author's name and caucus/track information in order to be considered for publication. Articles cannot exceed 700 words.

Submissions should be emailed to [observerssi@gmail.com](mailto:observerssi@gmail.com). We at the Observer are excited to serve our community and are committed to integrity and objectivity in all our endeavors.

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