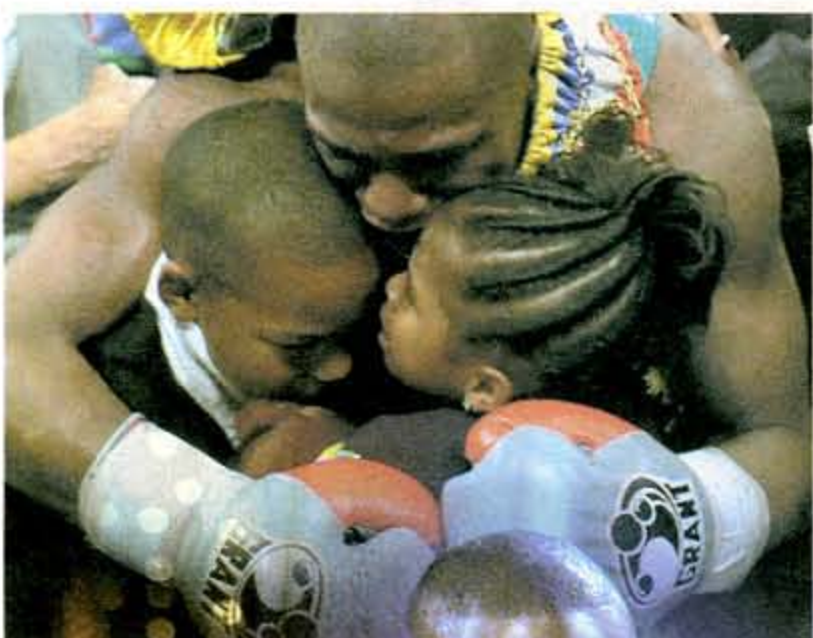


NEWSMAKERS OF THE YEAR

We mourned our president, and danced with our star



Double the fun: Boxing champion Floyd Mayweather Jr., took center stage in the boxing ring and on the dance floor. In top photo, he embraces two of his children after defeating Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas. In photo above, he displays some fancy footwork as a contestant on the "Dancing With the Stars" television show.



MIKE LLOYD
EDITOR OF THE PRESS

We buried our president. It was a poignant beginning to the year 2007. President George W. Bush, Vice President Dick Cheney, former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton as well as other national figures have visited his grave. The museum which bears his name, this year became a shrine to his memory.

The immense outpouring of respect and love the first week of January showed Grand Rapids at its patriotic finest, a significant moment. But there were others. In what has evolved into an annual review, I asked our editors photographers and reporters to nominate people worthy of recognition for their acts, noble and ignoble, as Newsmaker of the Year.

Noble would certainly describe the spirit of philanthropist Peter M. Wege. Cash donations and an environmental commitment spurred his participation in the American Cancer Society's Hope Lodge and a new dance center for the Grand Rapids Ballet Company. His \$20 million gift provided the underpinning for the architectural gem at the center of downtown, the Grand Rapids Art Museum. He successfully pushed a "green" agenda while museum director Celeste Adams made sure the building was an artistic triumph.

The triumph of justice was another '07 landmark. Dr. Robert Stokes was sent to federal prison for more than a decade for massive Medicare fraud. That verdict doesn't even touch the avalanche of claims from former patients that his work was medically dangerous.

Krista Kotlarz-Watson wife of CyberNet CEO, Barton Watson, also was sentenced to a lengthy federal prison term for bank fraud and mail fraud. The sham company she and her late husband set up bilked businesses for bogus computer services.

Still treading water is Michael Vorce, the high-flying boat broker who apparently made yacht-loads of money selling hulls he didn't have. His paper navy caused a tidal wave of bad-debt write-offs for local banks. No criminal charges have been filed against him. So far.

However, this year did offer evidence that justice delayed is not necessarily denied. The rape and



Small wonder: Charlie Delano, 7, meets Pastor Josh Buck. The boy gave the money he been saving for his first hearing aid to help the Buck family build a new home.



Janet Chandler

murder of Janet Chandler, 23, abducted from her clerk job at a Holland motel, finally was solved. After escaping detection for nearly 30 years, murder trials ended in convictions for five former prison security guards as well as Chandler's roommate back then.

Also out of Holland came Erik Prince, son of the late auto parts millionaire Edgar Prince. He is president of Blackwater USA, a security firm with mega Defense Department contracts in battle zones like Iraq and Afghanistan. Blackwater got him in hot water when a team of his employees killed 17 civilians in a street shoot-out in Baghdad. His undercover operations came under the harsh lights of a televised congressional hearing. To date, the U. S. remains in Iraq. So does Blackwater. It's politics. The tail (or tale) still wags the dog.

Toula would understand. The three-year-old border collie is smart enough to understand. Yes, she can fetch slippers. She also opens the refrigerator and flushes the toilet. In a Petco-sponsored contest, she was voted, "America's Most Talented Dog." Then there's seven-year-old Charlie DeLano of Plainfield Township, born deaf in one ear. He was saving pop-can money for a hearing aid. But he heard about efforts to build a home for Josh Buck, a local pastor paralyzed from a swimming accident. The pastor became Charlie's new priority. "If you give with a loving heart and help others, God will bless you," explained Charlie with understated grace.

Also looming large, although at 6-foot-5 he had no choice, was Grand Rapids Police Chief Harry Dolan. He provided inspirational leadership to a department devastated by the death of Officer Robert Kozminski, ambushed in July on a domestic violence call. Dolan's commanding role in that tragic situation was followed unfortunately by an embarrassing sex scandal with officers and dispatchers in sexual liaisons in cruisers and closets. But Dolan's last headline was "Good bye," returning to North Carolina as top cop in Raleigh.

Chief Dolan wasn't the most flamboyant figure to leave city government this year. That candidate would be 2nd Ward Commissioner Rick Tormala. He chose to go after Mayor George Heartwell's seat, rather than just continue to kick it. But in August, Heartwell won re-election and Tormala's time in office was over. Though, at year's end, Clerk

Terri Hegarty's resignation, had former commissioner Tormala wistfully petitioning for that job. Someone else who might be praying for a better outcome is Denise Isom, assistant professor of education at Calvin College. An African American, she helped with the college's push for faculty diversity. But the college's board has boxed in that diversity, refusing to grant her an exemption from its policy on "theological integrity." To keep her job, she must attend a church in ecclesiastical fellowship with the Christian Reformed faith, Messiah Baptist, where she belongs, does not qualify.

Beyond these and many other staff suggestions, the top choice as Newsmaker of the Year was decisive. By a knockout, actually. Floyd Mayweather scored a TKO over Ricky Hatton in Las Vegas Dec. 8 to defend his welterweight world championship title. He also won in May in a much more hyped fight against Oscar De La Hoya.

"He may be the most remarkable athlete ever to come out of Grand Rapids," said assistant sports editor Amorak Huey. "Our biggest newsmaker," said sports writer Gretchen Flemming. "Our mega-star," echoed fellow writer Greg Johnson.

In more than a decade of professional boxing he has 39 wins and 24 knockouts, winning world titles at the welter, lightweight and superfeatherweight levels. He's never lost. In the ring, the man who calls himself Pretty Boy did suffer one knock-out this year. The judges took him down for the count in an early round of "Dancing with the Stars." "He's loud, arrogant, rash, extravagant, intelligent and interesting to watch," said Photo Editor Hoyt Carrier II. "I've never considered a jock for newsmaker, but Floyd, for better or worse, did more than anyone else to raise the national image of Grand Rapids this year."

E-mail: milloyd@grpress.com



Barking up right tree: Toula, a Plainwell dog, was named America's most talented pet.



They made headlines: From left, Calvin college professor Denise Isom's decision on where to worship created controversy; Celeste Adams and Peter Wege at the Grand Rapids Art Museum's Christmas tree lighting; Grand Rapids City Commissioner Rick Tormala, gave up his seat in a failed run for mayor; Blackwater USA founder Erik Prince testified before the House Oversight Committee about private security contractors; Michael Vorce perpetrated a phony boat loan scam; Krista Watson, wife of the late CyberNet CEO, was sentenced to seven years in prison for her part in an elaborate fraud scheme; Dr. Robert Stokes was convicted of cheating insurance companies and performing unnecessary surgeries on patients.