

METRO

Canton weighs license plate readers

Police plan Feb. 7 educational presentation at town hall

Miriam Marini
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

In today’s age, Big Brother is more than watching — he’s everywhere. In our pockets, our homes and on our streets.

The fight against surveillance is quickly becoming futile as technology progresses and dependency on it becomes commonplace. It’s become less of a fear and more of an accepted truth: You’re being watched.

The latest wave of surveillance making a stronghold in Michigan is automatic license plate readers, with Canton joining a growing list of communities weighing the use of the technology to increase the efficiency of law enforcement officials. Police say the cameras

would help investigators close cases and make the process of catching suspects easier, but critics point to the dangers of over-surveillance and the potential threat it poses to civil liberties.

The Canton Police Department is planning to deliver an educational presentation on the benefits of license plate readers at a town hall on Feb. 7 to gauge residents’ thoughts on installing a camera system at the intersection of Michigan Avenue and Beck Road. The Police Department has already secured approximately \$40,000 in grant funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance to pursue a pilot program, but officials are looking for resident input before giving the green light and signing the contract with Motorola Solutions.

“There will be some community members that will have concern just for various reasons, some of the reasons are that they just don’t quite understand what they’d (LPR) be

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used for,” said Chad Baugh, director of police services for the Canton police. “Some of the immediate feedback was concerns about traffic enforcement. This is not to be used for traffic enforcement, this is used to help assist investigators to identify those responsible

for crime.”

License plate reader systems, known as LPRs, consist of cameras that take photographs of vehicles and record license plate numbers, date, time, and the make, model, and color of the vehicle, along with GPS coordinates. The surveillance technology carries some controversy and is opposed by privacy rights advocates, however, police forces nationwide have begun adopting them, citing increased productivity, efficiency and closed cases.

According to HometownLife, LPRs are used by Michigan State Police, Warren, Dearborn, Dearborn Heights, Kalamazoo, Southfield, Flint, Jackson, Wyoming, Ecorse, Lincoln Park, Troy, Sterling Heights, Chesterfield Township, Van Buren, Metro Airport, Livingston County, Grosse Ile, Grosse Pointe Park and the Oakland County Sheriff’s Office.

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Sex trafficker who chained woman by neck gets life in prison

Tresa Baldas
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

When it comes to sex traffickers, Ryon Travis was among the worst of the worst, the feds say.

He photographed himself sexually assaulting a child, beat a woman and chained her to a pole by her neck, forced her and others into prostitution and held women captive in his house, referring to them as his wives.

His victims are all free now. But he is not — and never will be.

Travis, 39, was sentenced to life in prison Tuesday, six months after a federal jury convicted him of child pornography and sex trafficking. The federal criminal justice system has no parole.

‘The public needs to be protected’

U.S. District Judge Bernard Friedman handed down the punishment, concluding life behind bars was the appropriate punishment for a man who sexually abused a child, chained up a woman in his living room when she tried to escape, and forced her and other women into prostitution — all so he could make money.

“It is my hope that this sentence brings some measure of peace to the survivors, knowing that he will remain behind bars,” said Homeland Security Investigations Special Agent in Charge Angie Salazar.

The harm he inflicted on a child was especially egregious, prosecutors argued.

“Child sexual abuse leaves an indelible mark on victims. The documentation of the abuse makes this crime even more egregious,” U.S. Attorney Dawn Ison said following the sentencing. “The public needs to be protected from Ryon Travis, and this lengthy sentence helps to do just that.”

Travis landed on the federal government’s radar in 2016 in what started as an identity theft investigation by West Bloomfield police. Travis was under investigation in that suburb for fraud and identity theft when officers executed a search warrant at his Detroit home and found three women. Travis referred to them as his wives, records show.

Pornography of children younger than 12

Five days later, West Bloomfield police returned to Travis’ home and made an alarming discovery: a woman chained by her neck to a pole. Asked about the chained woman, Travis told police he was “about to get freaky with her,” court records show.

During the search, police also seized two cellphones that belonged to Travis. They found pornographic images of children younger than 12, including multiple images of

See **SEX TRAFFICKER**, Page 12A



Ford Piquette Avenue Plant Museum docent Jerry Porter, of Dearborn Heights, gives a tour to Bates Academy sixth graders in Detroit on Monday. Porter describes the workings of a 1909 Ford Model T Touring. PHOTOS BY MANDI WRIGHT/DETROIT FREE PRESS

Priceless collection of classic cars ‘kind of undiscovered’

Phoebe Wall Howard
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Few people know much about the three-story brick building just two blocks north of Interstate 94 at exit 215C, at Beaubien Street and Piquette Avenue in Detroit, or the priceless collection of classic vehicles inside. It is one of the oldest automotive heritage sites in the world, tucked away in a part of the city that has seen new life in recent years.

The unassuming Ford Piquette Avenue plant, built in the style of New England textile mills and considered state of the art in 1904, is where it all began. The birthplace of the gasoline-powered Model T has, over the past six years, dramatically expanded a public exhibit with the help of private collectors.

Families that once flocked to Cobo Hall and later the TCF Center to attend the annual Detroit auto show in January have a place to go, if they know, for adventure and discovery. These aren’t brand new trucks and cars of tomorrow. They are the trucks and cars that in-

spired everything we know today. They’re shiny and each carries with it a unique story.

Not only is the original factory now a museum open to visitors year round, but visitors see and experience the 1926 crate elevator that carried the vehicles one at a time between floors. Aside from a stairwell, the old elevator is the thing that now carries visitors.

‘Undiscovered’

This year, the Piquette museum has been folded into the Cultural Passport education program by the Detroit Public Schools system for the first time, as well as schools and universities from across the state, country and world.

“We’re kind of undiscovered,” Jill Woodward, president of the museum, told the Free Press. “At first, we were more of a preservation effort. The museum you see today came together around 2017, when we received our collection of cars from the estate of Larry Por-

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Bates Academy sixth grader Karter Kenney, 11, enjoys a moment behind the wheel of a 1915 Ford Model T Touring during a field trip tour of the museum.

STATE OF THE STATE

Whitmer’s address to tackle priorities

Tax relief plan and gun safety measures in the mix

Clara Hendrickson
Detroit Free Press
USA TODAY NETWORK

Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer said among the policy priorities she plans to outline in her State of the State address Wednesday are tax relief for seniors and low-income working families and gun safety measures.

Whitmer previewed those themes during a roundtable discussion in Brighton to hear from residents on what they’d like her to address in her second and final term as governor.

In her speech, Whitmer said she plans to focus on three different examples of Michigan residents: the worker trying to make ends meet, new graduates entering the workforce and “our littlest Michiganders.”

She said that during her speech she’ll acknowledge challenges she faced in her first term. “I’m hoping the next four years doesn’t give us as many,” she said knocking her fist on the table. “Hopefully no more global pandemic or threats.

That would be great. But regardless, we’ll be ready.”

Here are three things to listen for as Whitmer lays out policy goals in her 7 p.m. Wednesday speech.

Tax relief for low-income earners and seniors

Eliminating the so-called pension tax for seniors is a long-stated goal of Whitmer’s and one that she campaigned on when she first ran for governor in 2018. Along with providing tax relief for seniors, Whitmer said she will focus in her State of the State address on expanding a tax credit for low-income earners in Michigan.

“Two weeks ago, my partners in the Legislature and I announced bills to roll back the retirement tax and to expand the Working Families Tax Credit,” she said.

The state credit provides relief based on a share of the federal Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which Whitmer is referring to as the Working Families Tax Credit. Many states have some kind of state EITC but at 6% of the federal credit, Michigan has one of the least generous programs in the country.

“It’s a way to help pull families out of poverty,” Whitmer said of the credit. “A million kids live in these households that will be impacted by this policy.”

Former Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed Michigan’s Earned Income Tax Credit into law, which set the state credit at 20% of the federal credit, but Republicans lowered that rate to 6% as part of a major tax

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METRO

Auto museum

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ter, some of the rarest cars that can be seen together in one place.”
Walking through the original factory, where cars are now on display, is an unusual experience.

‘A global pilgrimage’

Seeing a re-creation of the tiny office of Henry Ford leaves people speechless, Woodward said.
After a news interview on-site, Ford CEO Jim Farley told an aide that he planned to take some time alone to walk through and take in the collection by himself. The museum had just opened, and it was not yet filled with visitors. “It’s really a global pilgrimage for automotive history buffs,” she said.

The most recent visitor list showed nearly one in five people coming from 45 different countries other than the U.S., including France, Germany, Britain, Russia and Madagascar. They come for group tours and private tours and just to wander through.

This year, an estimated 3,000 sixth graders from more than 60 different schools around the city will make their way through the car displays on weekdays, Woodward said.

Children ask everything from when Henry Ford was born (1863) and when he died (1947) to why some Model T cars have kerosene lamps as headlights.

“Others headlights were powered by (acetylene) gas created by water dripping on crystals,” Woodward said. “This is one of the only places in the world you can see all the letter cars.”

Few people know much about the Models A, B, C, F, K, N, R or S. They are among 60 very rare vehicles, including cars made in Milwaukee Junction during evolution of the auto industry by Dodge, Regal, Brush, Hupp, Cadillac, Studebaker, Detroit Electric and others.

Avoiding horse poop

Original prices are listed, and vision for the vehicles. Vintage pickup trucks are there, along with a fire engine and the first snowmobile. Schoolchildren learn why the steering wheel is put in a certain location, Woodward



Ford Piquette Avenue Museum docent Jerry Porter, of Dearborn Heights, left, snaps a photo of a Bates Academy sixth grade tour group with a 1915 Model T Touring in Detroit on Monday. PHOTOS BY MANDI WRIGHT/DETROIT FREE PRESS

said.
“It was a decision made by Henry Ford right here in this building,” she said. “It had to do with how roads were developed. He didn’t want passengers getting out into middle of the road in traffic. Some old advertising from 1909 shows a lady in her fancy clothing getting out on the side of the car on the sidewalk versus on a street with horse manure. Kids love that, the idea of horse manure on streets.”

Woodward added, “When we say were no roads, it doesn’t really translate until we show them a video of the Model T driving on log road or mud roads. It looks like off-roading.”

Children learn all sorts of automotive history details. They ask why tires were white initially and learn it’s because the color of rubber is white when it comes out of a tree, Woodward said. Later, tiremakers added soot to change the chemistry and extend the life of the rubber, she said.

Children ask why there were no glass windows on early vehicles. Auto safety glass was not yet invented, Woodward said. Henry Ford made it standard practice in 1919, she said.

“My grandfather worked for Ford Motor Company, like many grandfathers,” Woodward said. “He was a self-taught engineer and came

over on the boat from Holland. He worked on some of the early air conditioners for Ford cars and worked on bullet cars at the Indianapolis 500. Dad worked for Chrysler. My uncle and cousins worked for General Motors.”

“You can’t turn around, being a Detroit, without having somebody deeply impacted by the auto industry,” she said.

Different way to celebrate the new year

For Matt Anderson, transportation curator at The Henry Ford museum in Dearborn, seeing the Detroit auto show move from winter to summer has been hard.

“It’s been kind of a personal loss for me,” he told the Free Press. “I feel kind of empty now. We always looked forward to January because it was a big cultural thing. We loved just being able to walk around a big space and see all those vehicles with the miserable gray cold weather outside. It was just a part of the rhythm of the city.”

Car museums can provide something special at this time of year, too, Anderson said.

“That Piquette museum, when you go there, that’s a real location. It’s a historic site rather than a museum. You go there and you’re walk-



Bates Academy sixth grader Karrington Mitchell, 12, is surprised at the sound of the horn on a 1914 Ford Model T Touring as she and her classmates tour the museum.

ing in Henry Ford’s footsteps. They’ve done such great work, re-creating Henry’s office and the secret room where Model T was developed. That may be the most sacred ground walked on. He sat and talked about what this new car was going to be. No one knew if the car would be a success, much less change the world.”

While many people want to go to the Highland Park Model T plant, not much is left of that, Anderson said. “I say, ‘Do you know the Model T was not born in Highland Park? It was born at Piquette. And you can go into the actual building, which looks more and more as it did in Henry Ford’s day.’”

Wedding white on weekends

On weekends, the Piquette has become a popular spot for weddings, too.

In October, the Crescent Sail Yacht Club held its Commodores Ball and dinner at the Piquette Plant. Attendees dressed in ballgowns and tuxedos wandered through the exhibits with awe, many visiting the plant for the first time and talking about how they never knew it was there. The unusual setting created buzz in the sailing community for weeks.

Tickets may be purchased online or at the door from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Wednesday through Sunday. Guided tours are scheduled at 10 a.m., noon and 2 p.m. People may walk through on their own, too. Cost is listed as \$17 for adults, \$13 for veterans and seniors, \$10 for students and visitors age 5-17.

Contact Phoebe Wall Howard: 313-618-1034 or phoward@freepress.com. Follow her on Twitter @phobesaid.

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