

Seniors honor a special friend



Russel Farmer makes sure that everything is just right for the senior citizens at Mercy's Gathering Place. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Russel Farmer is as much a part of the Gathering Place in Mercy Center as coordinator Loretta Conway or any of the 200 or more seniors who frequent the facility.

Farmer, 48, keeps the Farmington Hills senior citizen-center in its usually spottish condition. Heavy boxes are moved into new places only after Farmer is consulted and his assistance secured. Equipment for the center's various programs is set out in the morning ready to be used by the seniors because Farmer remembers the program's schedule.

"We tell what day it is when we walk in, in the morning, by the equipment for the activities that Russel's laid out," said Ms. Conway.

On Wednesday, the seniors decided to say thank you to Farmer in a big way—they named a whole day in his honor and managed to spring a surprise party on him.

THE PARTY also serves to wish Farmer bon voyage. He is scheduled to leave for a week's vacation in Florida and the Bahamas soon.

Joining him on the trip will be six residents and the house manager from the Community Living Home in Southfield. Farmer, who is mentally retarded, has lived in the home for eight years. His house manager, Pat Demers, 25, is full of praise for Farmer.

"He's quiet, nice and dependable. He's willing to help. He's willing to sacrifice things. He'll give up things in the home for others. He's very generous," said Demers.

Demers and the seven men who live in the house recently moved from Farmington Hills to Southfield. The decision to move was met by homeowner protests that the residence would cause property values in the Southfield subdivision to decrease. The case goes back to Oakland County Circuit Court, July 14.

"The indecision surrounding his new home casts a shadow around Farmer's vacation plans. He dislikes the thought of having to move again just after he's managed to unpack all of his belongings and settle into a new home.

But his attitude toward his new neighbors is unmarred by rancor.

"People are people," he shrugged. "His friendliness toward the people he works with has made him a favorite at the Gathering Place."

AN OLD neighbor from Farmington Hills will catch a few words with him over a cup of coffee and a cigarette and complain mildly that the block isn't the way it used to be without Farmer and his housemates.

Bea Honstain, of Farmington Hills, helped Ms. Conway spearhead the drive to surprise Farmer with a party.

"He's a very nice man," she said. "He's very helpful. He's willing to do things," she said.

During the week, he's willing to help his friends and keep up with his hobbies, bowling, pool and golf. But Sundays are reserved for church-going and visiting his 86-year-old mother in Oak Hill Nursing Home.

"No matter what we have planned for Sunday, Russel will go to visit his mother," said Demers.

Last year he had an artist paint a portrait of his mother for her birthday. For the next birthday, he's planning to

give her a portrait of his father who died several years ago.

"I'm the only one left here," he said of his family which has moved to California. "I have to take care of my mother."

After spending his time making sure that everyone else is taken care of, Farmer's going to do something for himself in Florida.

He plans to do some serious work on his suntan.

Grand Valley awards bachelor's degrees

Farmington area residents were among the 1,175 graduates who received baccalaureate degrees from Grand Valley College.

Among the graduates are: Brian Allister Chisholm, who received a bachelor's in computers and management; David Adams Ellsworth, who earned a bachelor's in urban and environmental studies; William Alan Gilmour, who earned a bachelor's degree in health

sciences; Diane Marie Kelly, who earned a bachelor's degree in biology and geology and Steven A. Lerman, who earned with honors a bachelor's of business administration.

Also graduating are: Ruth Ann Nye, who earned high honors for a bachelor's in mathematics; Mary Elizabeth Oss, who received a bachelor's degree in urban and environmental studies and Deborah Marie Perlman, who earned a bachelor's in social work.

Girls take over city

Four Farmington Hills high school students participated in Girls State at Olivet College recently. They were among those who formed 21 cities of 24 citizens each and took part in carrying out the details of local, state and county governments.

They are Lena Widman, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Widman, who was city attorney; Kay Deeg, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ron Deeg, who was elected comptroller; Dawn Johnson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Bruce Johnson, who was elected city attorney, and Ann Wilson, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Dale Wilson, who was elected to the city commission.

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