

Farmingington Observer

Volume 92 Number 62

Monday, May 18, 1981

Farmingington, Michigan

36 Pages

Twenty-five cents

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Tax proposal awaits voter decision

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Voters will have two choices in Tuesday's Proposal A state referendum — yes or no — but there are three sides to the argument.

Opposed on the left are many local school officials, arguing that public education will be harmed by revenue cuts and that future revenues will fail to keep up with inflation.

Supporting it in the middle are the Michigan's top elected officials — Gov. Milliken and the Democratic and Republican leadership in the Legislature. They say Proposal A will give nearly all homeowners property tax cuts totaling \$1.4 billion, reduce state spending a tolerable \$250 million and tap the pockets of tourists through a sales tax boost.

Opposed on the right are business groups which say the property tax cuts are too small and do nothing for business and renters. Many are waiting for 1982 and a third Tisch property tax cut plan.

ON THE OUTSIDE looking in are voters who are just plain bewildered by innuendoes that there are hidden value-added taxes and conspiracies in the complexities which will send taxes sky-high. Those bewildered voters will be able to cast their votes from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Milliken and the legislative "quadrant" put together the package in closed negotiations early in March. With only a few amendments, the Michigan Legislature placed it on the ballot.

Most of the changes could have been made by the legislature alone. Only the sales tax increase requires voter approval. But because lawmakers felt the public wouldn't buy the sales tax increase unless a property tax cut were guaranteed, they tied everything in one big package.

If adopted, Proposal A would amend the Michigan Constitution and be part of the basic law of the state. It could be changed only by another vote of the people.

Here is what some state and local groups say on each of the three sides.

CIVIC SEARCHLIGHT and the Oakland County Voters League endorse Proposal A as "a responsible solution to the pressing problem of property tax relief."

"The plan would cut the overall level of tax revenue in Michigan — a sorely needed measure in a state suffering its worst economic woes since the Great Depression. Proposal A would enact those cutbacks in a responsible manner and at a reasonable level to preserve as much as possible of the governmental services provided Michigan citizens."

"The plan would preserve the capacity of local governmental units and voters to choose the level of taxation they were willing to accept."

Citizens for a Tax Cut Now, the political arm of state government leaders, says, "Virtually every homeowner and farmer in Michigan will receive a net tax cut under Proposal A."

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Aiming for the top

Mary Kay Marshall, a 15-year-old ninth-grader at Farmington High School, has her sights set on a spot with the U.S. Olympic gymnastic team. For her story and more pictures, please turn to Page 5B.

Hardware firm opens computerized center

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Chairman of the board of the ACO hardware chain Ted Traskos has come a long way since he and his brother Joseph started the Traskos Bros. Hardware Depot in Dearborn in 1946.

Late in February, Traskos moved

into the corporate headquarters of ACO Inc.'s modernistic distribution center that doubles as corporate headquarters for the 36-store located at 23333 Commerce Dr., Farmington Hills.

Built in a little more than a year's time, the mammoth 146,000-square-foot low-lying building opened in February. The structure was designed by Smith, Hinchman & Grylls Assoc. and built by R.E. Dailey & Co.

The ACO facility features 10 compact, computerized carousels storing thousands of small hardware items. Each unit has a capacity of storing 360 different types of merchandise, giving employees quick access to 3,600 prod-

ucts with the touch of a button.

"The old days of chasing people after stock are long gone," says William Aiken, president of the company.

Swing-reach robot loaders which pick and store larger merchandise glide down narrow six-foot aisles. Each battery-operated unit travels down the rows with only three inches of clearance on either side of the aisle. No steering is necessary because the swing loaders are controlled by an electronic guidance system.

Company officials say the new equipment should be worth the investment because the hardware business depends on rapid turnover of merchandise with a minimum inventory which is taxable.

"That's the key," says Aiken, "if you are able to turn your inventory efficiently, you can increase cash flow and thereby increase return on investment."

There's much more room in the warehouse than is presently needed to serve ACO's present chain of 36 stores but with projections for a minimum of three new stores each year the space may be needed in the future and the warehouse was designed to accommodate stock for up to 80 stores.

THE COST of construction was \$3 million and that's a lot of out and bolts. The firm received no tax abatement incentives from the city of Farm-

ington Hills, said Traskos, but did finance the project with \$8 million worth of tax-free revenue bonds secured through the Farmington Hills Economic Development Corporation. ACO's former headquarters was Redford Township.

Board Chairman Traskos said he and top officers of the company investigated 41 different sites in suburban Detroit before settling on the 24-acre lot in the Farmington Hills Freeway Industrial Park. The site overlooks I-275 and is moments away from I-696.

"IT CAME DOWN to this site because of the freeway system and the fact that this is a central location for our existing employees," Traskos said. "And, it's a central location in the radius of our stores."

Traskos is proud that his building, which is primarily used as a storage warehouse, doesn't look like a boxy warehouse.

The roof design is distinctive, featuring a curved, airy see-through plastic facing called a clerestory that provides light and ventilation to the warehouse and offices.

The outside is attractively landscaped by Johnson & Roy of Ann Arbor and the interior contains computer terminals, modular cubicles work areas, all lit by indirect lighting. The interior was designed Contract Interiors of Detroit.

Surprise: Used car is hot item

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

A Farmington Hills man has reached a \$1,600 out-of-court settlement with Town & Country Dodge after a used car he bought from the Farmington dealership was impounded as stolen property.

Stephen Bellante purchased the 1974 Ford Mustang last year for \$1,800 for his granddaughter, Gloria Vicini, a 20-year-old Michigan State University student.

Miss Vicini was subsequently told by Wayne County Sheriff's deputies that the Mustang was stolen from Ford Motor Company in Dearborn in 1974.

"She was just a victim of circumstances," said Dan Michaelson, a sheriff's deputy.

"We felt bad about it but we did what we were supposed to do."

Because it was a stolen vehicle, Miss Vicini had to turn the car over to police, even though she had paid almost \$700 repairing the vehicle.

The car was tracked by deputies investigating a 1977 Mustang abandoned in a Wayne County parking lot. The car didn't have a vehicle information number (VIN) on the dashboard, the series of numbers through which vehicle ownership history is traced in Lansing.

The confidential number, a second source of vehicle identification on the Mustang's engine was traced to Miss Vicini.

ONE INVESTIGATOR said the dashboard in Miss Vicini's car had been replaced by the one from a Mustang abandoned in Wayne County.

"There's not much difference in style between a 1974 and a 1977 Mustang," said Michaelson. "Except for the grill and taillights."

Town & Country was also a victim of circumstance.

When the Department of Auto Regulation, an arm of the Secretary of State's office which investigates consumer complaints, checked the story, it found the dealership had purchased the Mustang with title and registration intact from a man now serving in the U.S. Navy.

"The VIN on the dashboard and a federal sticker on the door corresponded with the title number," said Edward Kotulski, a state investigator.

"I couldn't determine that the dealer knew (the Mustang) was stolen."

Leon Mudry, owner of own & Country Dodge, says he will file suit against the person who sold him the car.

"This has never happened to me before and I've been here for 19 years," he said.

But Mrs. Barbara Vicini, Gloria's mother, was unhappy even after the settlement her father reached with the dealer.

"WE HAD another \$670 in repairs that we lost — just thrown away," she said. "I'm so disgusted. You just can't go out and buy another car."

"You go to a dealer because you think a car has been checked over."

"It's a touchy situation," Mudry countered. "Suppose this person had purchased the car from a private individual. I don't think they'd get their money back."

"I did it for good business relations." Falsifying titles and auto thefts are a major crime across the country. The Michigan State Police has a special task force working on the problem.

"There's a lot of money going into stolen cars," Michaelson said. "It's nothing to steal a car and it's easy to change the VIN."

There's not much recourse for the foisted customer.

"Just know who you are purchasing the car from," Kotulski said. "Then you'll have some recourse."



ACO's new headquarters in Farmington Hills not only houses the firms office space but also highly sophisticated computers.

Bus accident policy is drafted

By Marie McGee
staff writer

The Clarenceville Board of Education last week asked the administration to revise portions of the district bus policy which address student accidents.

The changes are the result of a parent protest which erupted after a school bus accident several weeks ago.

The revision calls for notifying parents in the event of any bus accident, regardless of how minor. The new procedure will be reviewed by trustees at the May 28 meeting.

Clarenceville includes parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township.

Review of the procedure and the decision to change the guidelines dealing with bus accidents followed a lengthy

discussion at the board meeting last Tuesday. A group of parents, many of whom had children on a school bus involved in a minor traffic accident on April 13, attended last week's board session.

THE ACCIDENT occurred at the intersection of Polisciana and Grand River roads and resulted in the bus driver receiving a citation for failure to yield the right of way. It occurred, school officials said, when the driver failed to see an oncoming pickup truck, even though she had opened the door and looked.

According to Clarenceville Superintendent David McDowell, the district's current procedures, for the most part, were carried out. That included the bus driver checking each child to determine if any injuries had been incurred

and notifying school officials (at Botsford elementary) of the accident. The children were then transferred to another bus and driven to school. A police officer who was at the scene also checked the children, McDowell said.

The children were re-checked for injuries by Botsford principal Leo LaRue and only one child was found to have a slight head injury, McDowell said.

"I am satisfied that the bus driver did everything reasonably possible following the accident to assure herself that none of the children had been injured and that she put the welfare of the children first and foremost," McDowell reported.

PARENTS OF several of the children involved, however, voiced complaints because they were not notified

of the accident.

Several also questioned on how well the children were checked for injuries.

One parent claimed "there were injuries and the parents were not notified."

Uphold of the discussion was a recommendation by board treasurer Barry Sherman that the procedures be amended to state that in the event of bus accidents, an attempt be made to notify all parents of the children involved.

A check with Livonia Public Schools revealed that no matter how minor the accident, parents are notified.

"We let the parents decide if they want to follow up and take the student for medical attention," said Charles Ritter, transportation director for the Livonia schools.

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