

Cultural diversity draws attention

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Believe it or not, 63 languages are spoken in the Farmington area. That's something residents in Farmington and Farmington Hills should be proud of, Farmington Hills city councilman John Dudley said.

Recent problems — many blamed on cultural and religious differences involving teens along Orchard Lake Road have brought the issue of cultural and religious diversity and differences into the public spotlight. A new committee — comprised of educators, police, residents and local government officials — have adopted the task of examining and outlining

the area's cultural diversity. As the publicity died down after a rash of teen-lynx-related problems along Orchard Lake Road early in the year, parents, police and merchants banded together to find ways of preventing further clashes between teenagers. "That it occurred to me afterward, that why are we, the city (of Farm-

ington Hills), bearing the brunt of the problem?" Dudley said, adding that any solution to communitywide problems needed involvement from the schools, religious organizations and groups designed to help teens.

"IT WAS at first stimulated by the Orchard Lake situation. But as we discussed things, we began to realize we have a long-term situation — not a problem — here," Dudley continued.

The unnamed committee has met twice and is taking the responsibility of "insuring the diversity here," Dudley said. Though the community representatives first met to address the teen problem, the cultural goals are "aimed at the whole community," she added.

"What we are asking is for them (committee members) to come up with ideas to positively bring it (cul-

tural diversity) to the surface," Dudley continued.

At their meeting last week, committee members discussed ways to break through stereotypes, as well as ways of educating about the many cultures in the Farmington area.

The Farmington Founders Festival was suggested as a means of publishing cultural diversity, much like Detroit's ethnic festivals.

"There is no reason why you can't tie a program concerning different cultures in the community to the (Michigan) sesquicentennial," said Jody Soronen, Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce executive director, Michigan's 150th anniversary is the 1937 Farmington Founders Festival theme.

INCORPORATING A cultural theme into the Farmington-Farmington Hills YMCA's Kids Day was

also suggested. Area clergy were asked to discuss cultural awareness and diversity in their weekly sermons.

A successful program used in Southfield High School called Positive Peer Influence — allowing teens to meet and discuss problems with racial and cultural differences and also problems in school — was again suggested for the Farmington Public Schools.

But school officials maintain they have programs available to help new students, especially of a non-American background, to adjust to the school environment. "We have found it very successful," said North Farmington Principal Don Cowan.

The committee's next meeting is scheduled for noon Wednesday, April 8, at the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center, 32500 Shawwassee, Farmington.

Walled Lake Schools still playing fiscal catchup

By LeAnne Rogers
special writer

Fiscal conditions for the Walled Lake School District are "good but not strong" — basically the same situation as a year ago, Superintendent Lee Bartman said in his recent state of the district report.

The district projects a 3 percent increase in the state equalized value of property (SEV) but Bartman said that would not meet spending increases.

"There were some very lean years for Walled Lake but with the additional operating millage approved by voters in 1983 the district was able to take care of a lot of overlooked items," Bartman said. "The district is still trying to play catchup."

A standing concern of Bartman's has been the condition of district facilities. A non-voted separate bond issue to underwrite extensive work such as roof repairs, new boilers and other facility improvements is underway.

"FACILITIES ARE a big concern. I want to re-emphasize that it is impossible to conduct business without a place to do business," Bartman said. "Without this work I couldn't

promise that the buildings would all open every day."

Another priority for the district is to have librarians at the elementary school level. "Our current staff of library aides has been excellent, but I would hope to have up to three librarians per school," he said. "We need a library professional to assist the teachers."

During the last fiscal year the business office was reorganized. Bartman said the auditors gave the district a very clean report.

"We have a \$5.2 million fund equity which is not exorbitant with our \$38 million budget," Bartman said. "That fund equity would run the district for about 1 1/2 months."

Many cost increases to the district are beyond its control, according to Bartman. He cited a millage rollback resulting from property reassessment in Commerce Township and the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) which the district is fighting.

School," said Bartman. "We are looking at the potential for 10,422 new single family residents."

Working for future attendance projections is a high priority for schools, Bartman said. "Schools need a lot of lead time planning for students," he said. "It is difficult to put up rooms overnight."

Other areas in which the district will continue to work are in-service programs for staff, media center improvements, curriculum improvements and facility renovation. "This is a well structured district with a heritage and the potential to be one of the best in the county," Bartman said. "There are many needs. Nothing is perfect. Our detractors are in the minority."

clarification

A list of Farmington Hills Harrison High School students published in the Feb. 28 Observer should have said they received all A's and B's during the first semester marking period.

All Harrison honor roll students were not on the list. Students receiving all A's were not on the list.

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