

Mercy students star in Sound of Music, 1B



School district names teachers of year, 3A

# Farmington Observer

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## farmington FOCUS

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**S**TATE Rep. Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, invited Christopher Kenny and fellow fourth graders at Kenbrook Elementary to visit her in Lansing. At the time, Dolan was seeking office and Christopher was helping stuff campaign envelopes. Almost 18 months later, Kenbrook fourth graders toured the Capitol, but the House wasn't in session and Dolan wasn't there. But a promise is a promise. So Dolan made a trip to the school to answer questions the fourth graders had as a follow-up to their tour.

**LIMIT** cigarette sales, resident Margaret DuPont told the Farmington Hills City Council Monday.

She suggested that the city enact an ordinance regulating the sale of cigarettes to minors through vending machines. "Look at this as part of your work against substance abuse in the city," she said.

Mayor Jean Fox asked the city administration to study the request.

### QUOTE of the week

It's almost un-American to talk about not playing basketball, but we have to face up to it.

—Richard Corey, opposing a proposed zoning amendment that would permit basketball backboards in front and minimum side yards. Story, 1A.

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**Reminder**

Your Observer Carrier will be stopping by this week to collect for the month. Please have the money ready and be sure to get your receipt. It's worth a \$2.00 discount on the next classified advertisement you place in your hometown newspaper.

## Assessments spark record appeals

By Susan Buck staff writer

Angry is the best word to describe the feelings of Farmington Hills property owners who are showing up in record numbers this year to appeal their property tax assessments.

Assessments on 26,000 property parcels were mailed March 2. Property assessments on residential property increased an average 9 percent this year.

The assessor's board of review began hearing appeals March 8. By Monday, 312 appeals, in 10-minute time blocks, had been heard, but a record 1,200 were expected — in person, by mail or, in one case, audiotape.

"It's the first time in my life, in my career, we've ever run out of days," said Dean Babb, city assessor. "By law," he said, "you have to be completed with your review by the first Monday in April, so you only

have a set number of days and times that you can schedule. We opened up 15 days of appointments, more than I have ever had. The law says I have to have three. The board is doing its work sessions on the weekends."

The board will meet daily until March 30, leaving him just 1 1/2 days to prepare his data report for the county by the April 2 deadline, Babb said.

Councilman Aldo Vagnozzi told city manager William Costick Mon-

day he hopes everyone who wants a personal review will receive one. "I don't think a written communication is the same thing," Vagnozzi said.

"I will make certain that expression of opinion is again conveyed to the board," responded Costick. "I think we're at a manageable situation."

**RESIDENTS SHOULD** learn by the third week in April if their appeal has been approved or denied.

March 14 was the deadline to seek a personal appeal. A day before, all dates were full and some taxpayers were put on a waiting list. "We're going to make sure everybody who is on our call-back list gets an opportunity," Babb said. "We don't deny the right of appeal."

"I can tell you, with the few tax assessors who I have talked to, that people are fed up with property tax."

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RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington Hills firefighter Al Ellis looks through debris in the laundry room, where the fire started Monday morning.

## Fast-thinking housekeeper rescues baby from blaze

A housekeeper carried a baby she was watching to safety after a fire broke out in the laundry room of a house on the 33700 block of Walnut Lane, near Farmington Road and 13 Mile, Monday morning. Equipment failure in the dryer probably started the fire, which

caused about \$100,000 in damage to the two-story house, said Deputy Fire Chief Peter Baldwin of the Farmington Hills Fire Department.

After putting a load of laundry in the dryer about 10:45 a.m., the housekeeper went upstairs, but she soon smelled smoke. Opening the

laundry room door, she discovered the fire.

She then ran upstairs to get the baby, then to a neighbor's house to call for help, according to Farmington Hills police and fire reports.

The family could not be reached for comment.

## Edison short-circuits seniors' bill-paying plan

By Tim Smith staff writer

Fixed-income senior citizens count on being able to make short walks to Efros Drugs' three metro area stores to pay their utility bills at minimal postage cost, a co-owner for the chain said Tuesday.

But inconvenience is all that those customers soon can count on, if Detroit Edison forces the family-run

chain to stop the courtesy it began 30 years ago, said David Efros.

The small chain he helps operate out of Southfield, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield forwards a total of about 650 Edison bills each month, despite being told a year ago by the utility company to stop the practice, Efros said.

"Once again, senior citizens are getting the short end of the stick and it's time somebody said something

about that," Efros said.

"They (seniors) are on a fixed income. It seems like in every area they get pushed aside and forgotten about."

**ACCORDING TO** Efros, an Edison representative recently advised him that the utility company would file a lawsuit if the drug store chain continued collecting and forwarding the bills — a practice begun by his father, Jerry.

## Hills studies plan to ease backboard ban

By Bob Sklar staff writer

They're popular throughout Farmington Hills. But they're illegal, even though the zoning ordinance banning them has never been enforced.

The city council took a key step toward liberalizing use of garage- or pole-mounted basketball backboards and hoops Monday when it introduced a zoning amendment allowing one per front or minimum side yard per house.

Enactment will be considered Monday, March 26.

Poles must be within the third of the yard nearest the house. They've always been permitted in rear yards, some side yards and on garages, said Lee Blizman, the city's chief zoning code enforcement officer.

Mayor Jean Fox opposed introduction. Councilman Jon Grant was absent.

"Farmington Hills' time could be better spent worrying about things other than basketball hoops," councilman Larry Lichtman said in moving for introduction.

Seconding the motion, councilman Ben Marks said, "What might be good looking to you may not be to

**'For those who have unsightly basketball hoops in their driveway, they probably need their trim painted, garage door straightened and bushes trimmed.'**

— Terry Sever, councilman

somebody else. I don't want to dictate how somebody can use their house."

"It's important kids do have a place to play," he added, noting many subdivisions have no sidewalks. He said the chance of injury from chasing a ball into the street is no greater than riding a bike in the street.

"Show me basketball courts and tricycles — and that's a good neighborhood," said Horton Drive resident Keith Gallagher. He said he'd rather

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## Officials support plans for Haggerty

By Joanne Mollazawski staff writer

Farmington Hills is among six communities supporting state and federal transportation officials' decision to move ahead with plans for the Haggerty Road Connector, despite roadblocks from the Environmental Protection Agency.

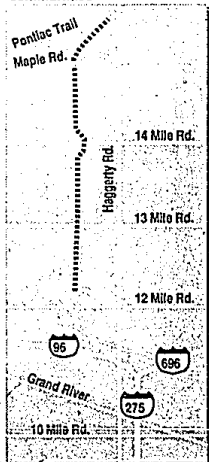
The EPA is mandating that all communities affected by the proposed boulevard adopt wetlands protection ordinances or it won't approve the \$79-million project.

The six- to eight-lane boulevard would be built a half-mile west of existing Haggerty Road, from 12 Mile to Pontiac Trail.

"The way we look at the project is that it will directly impact the wetlands in the surrounding communi-

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Haggerty Road Connector: alternative #4a - Route favored by most corridor communities



tions, such as financial institutions, Bufallini explained.

"We stimulated I don't know how many bill collection facilities," Bufallini said. "We're not singling out Efros."

**THOSE LOCATIONS** handling more than 1,000 bills per month remain authorized pay stations, total-

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