

Arena study skates in with support for idea

By BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

It's more than the recent hot weather outside that has some people in the Farmington area thinking about ice.

A Farmington Hills committee got some answers concerning the possibility of building and operating an ice arena or multi-purpose arena in the city at a meeting Sept. 7.

But despite the report from Jack Vivian, an assistant professor and director of the Sports Facilities Research Laboratory at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, there were plenty of unanswered questions. Vivian presented the 71-page report commissioned by the city in March to the committee.

The report was designed to determine if there would be enough people in the area to support an ice-dry-floor arena, if the current and future demand would make such a venture financially feasible, and to determine what activities would make it successful.

"I was hoping for about a 65-percent response rate," said Vivian, who also scouts for the New York Islanders NHL hockey team. "We got 49.8 percent."

Vivian said that means about half of the 10 percent (2,188 households) responding had an

interest in an indoor arena. That did not mean the other half were against such a proposal, since many were on vacation and some did not return surveys.

But it leaves only a fraction of the Farmington Hills area population as a sample.

"Before you can generalize, you have to interpret the results cautiously," he said. "That's what sampling is all about."

The marketing study took into consideration such factors as the number of registered figure skaters and hockey associations in the area.

Among the conclusions were:
■ The Farmington Hills area has a rapidly growing population; the Hills population grew 28.6 percent between the 1980 and 1990 census, compared with the Oakland County average of 7.1 percent.

■ The median household income of \$145,900 is substantially higher than that for Oakland County (\$95,400) and the surrounding area.

■ The city is easily accessible from the surrounding areas.

■ The current demand for ice time at arenas in the region exceeds the supply.

■ The population would be likely to support youth hockey, adult hockey, figure skating and public skating.

The study suggested that the

city do a cost analysis on a design incorporating proposed and potential uses for a facility and an analysis of rates for ice time.

Some committee members said they were concerned that other proposed arenas could offer too much competition.

"Once you decide to move forward, you will close off some of the others," he said.

But the nagging question for many committee members is whether to try to build an arena with public or private money.

Vivian said the study found that the arenas making money are privately owned or run. A city can offer land and build a building, but a private management operation generally works best.

Committee member Pete Jonna said he was worried that ice sports' popularity runs in cycles. Vivian said that is often the result of not using "feeder programs," such as ice skating classes and public skating sessions. Those can generate money and skating interest that translate to strong support.

He also noted that youth hockey programs in St. Clair Shores and Grosse Pointe have had to turn away hundreds of youngsters interested in youth hockey for lack of facilities.

The committee will meet again on Sept. 28.



SHIRLEY ST. MARY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Gotta dancel: Dance instructor Shirley St. Mary shows off a step on the Community Center bricks.

Dance teacher offers a leg up for 25 years

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

For as long as there's been a Farmington Community Center, students and parents alike have tapped dance instructor Shirley St. Mary's expertise.

The Farmington Hills resident starts her 25th year at the community center this year, teaching the proper moves to a generation of preschool kids. Step by step, her classes have grown.

St. Mary started out with nine kids in 1969 at the center, only to later boast a class size of 350. She loves her students; they feel the same about her classes.

"They just love it," St. Mary said. "They're all dressed in their dance shoes and their little tutus and they say, 'When are we going to get going?'"

St. Mary can relate. She was once like them, teetering and swaying with newly found balance as a dancer when she was 5. She and her brother wore out the family rug in one year.

She performed and perfected several routines through her

teens. She and her big brother would go to the Grande Ballroom in Detroit.

"I'd sit there and not talk to anybody. My brother told me not to," St. Mary said. "I had to bring a note from my mother to say it was OK to be there."

"My brother would dance all the slow dances with the other girls. Then the 'Jitterbug' music would come and he'd use me to show off his dance moves."

Her big moment came at 15, or so she thought. St. Mary received a call from her brother, who was then in the Army.

He told her to catch a train to Blue Creek, where he was stationed. A jitterbug contest was taking place.

St. Mary hopped a train, but was met with disappointment. Other contestants saw the two rehearse and thought they were professionals. They were ineligible.

"I was very disappointed," St. Mary said.

But not disheartened. She started the St. Mary School of Dance in Detroit in 1969. She later taught at the Henderson Dance Academy.

St. Mary also worked with preschool children for Southfield Parks and Recreation.

When the community center opened, St. Mary was asked to teach there. Things have progressed.

"She's a very dedicated lady," said Laura Collins, a volunteer at the community center. "She really loves the kids."

Her expertise lies in jazz, ballroom and tap. No age limit exists for those who love dance.

St. Mary primarily works with preschool children at the Community Center. She also wants to start a chorus line for people in their 30s and 40s to brush up on their steps.

Tap dance, in particular, harks back to a simpler time—days when Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly lit up movie screens.

The form is as popular today. "We don't have the musicals," St. Mary said. "I think they will come back."

"Everything does."
For information on dance classes, call the Farmington Community Center at 477-8404.

Drain work to close part of 12 Mile Road

Construction on the first phase of the Minnow Drain project will begin at 10 p.m. Friday, weather permitting, and will close part of 12 Mile Road.

Dan's Excavating will replace existing culverts crossing the road


just west of Danckel Middle School, between Farmington and Orchard Lake roads. Two-way traffic will be maintained except for the weekend. The new pipe is scheduled to be installed by Monday morning at 6. Traffic will be

detoured and signs posted. Other than the replacement of culverts over the weekend, traffic will be maintained throughout the construction period affecting 12 Mile, scheduled through the end of October.

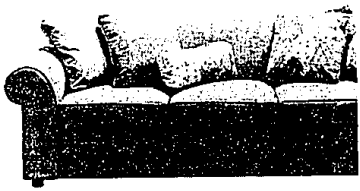
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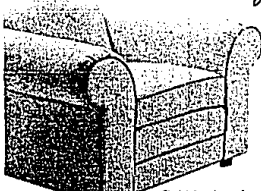


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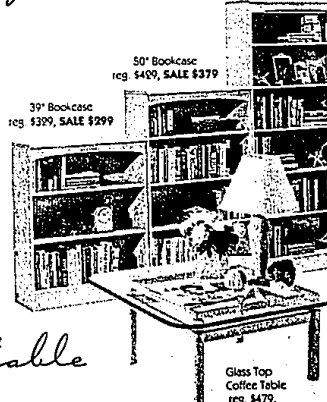
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Fisher Center kids spend summer learning, growing

"It don't matter if you're black or white" are the words on one of the squares of a wallhanging created by the children at the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center.

The project was completed as part of the Summer Enrichment Program at the Center. Beginning in June and running for eight weeks, the summer program included mini-lessons in math, science and computers.

A popular part of the program were the Skill Days during which center staff and volunteers helped children learn the basics of infant

CPR, cooking, bicycle repair, crafts, music and outdoor sports. Educational field trips were also arranged to Cranbrook, the Farmington Fire Station, Virginia Farrell Beauty School and the Observer & Eccentric Newspaper plant.

Another popular group was the Library Club, with members making frequent trips to the Farmington Hills Library and recording the names of all books read during the summer.

A Project Fair was held in the gym in late August. The

wallhanging and all other projects completed by the youngsters were displayed for center staff and residents. The wallhanging will hang permanently in the front hall of the building for all to enjoy.

"The Summer Enrichment Program is a joint effort between our staff, volunteers and the children," said Sister Mary Patricia, executive director. "We each have talents and when pooled together, they create a wonderful natural resource of information and enjoyment for these young people."