

# Farmington Observer

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## IN THE PAPER TODAY

**Toy story:** Some Farmington Hills elementary school students put some new toys and games to the test as part of a national marketing survey./A3

**Stumping:** Detroit Edison representatives came before Farmington Hills City Council to talk about improvements and tree cutting./A10

## MALLS & MAINSTREETS

**Retailers ready:** The holiday shopping season will get an early start this year because a late Thanksgiving leaves five fewer shopping days before Christmas./A8

## SPORTS

**Shooting star:** Farmington High guard Amanda Porter lifts her team to victory, but college scouts don't seem to be noticing./C1

**On the gridiron:** Harrison and North Farmington football teams were in action Friday night./C1

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# Schools take test to task



BY TODD WICKS  
STAFF WRITER

Some features of a new proficiency test have Farmington schools teachers, parents and school board members debating its merits. The results of the first-ever High School Proficiency Test (HSPT) were released last month, but despite area students placing relatively

well, some controversy remains. "We recognize that it was a very difficult test, and we acknowledge that our scores are not what we want them to be," said Cathy Webb, school board treasurer.

Of all area students, 63 percent scored proficient in math, 57.7 percent in reading, 44.5 percent in science, and 53.3 percent in writing.

These scores were sixth, sixth, fourth and fourth, respectively, in the county.

The HSPT adds a twist to the MEAP test it replaced in high schools: Besides the standard multiple-choice questions, students are often challenged to explain their answers and provide writing samples to be judged as part of their reading and writing scores.

Some school officials blame the unfamiliarity of this style for the lower scores, but board watcher and Farmington Hills parent Patti Alapach doesn't agree.

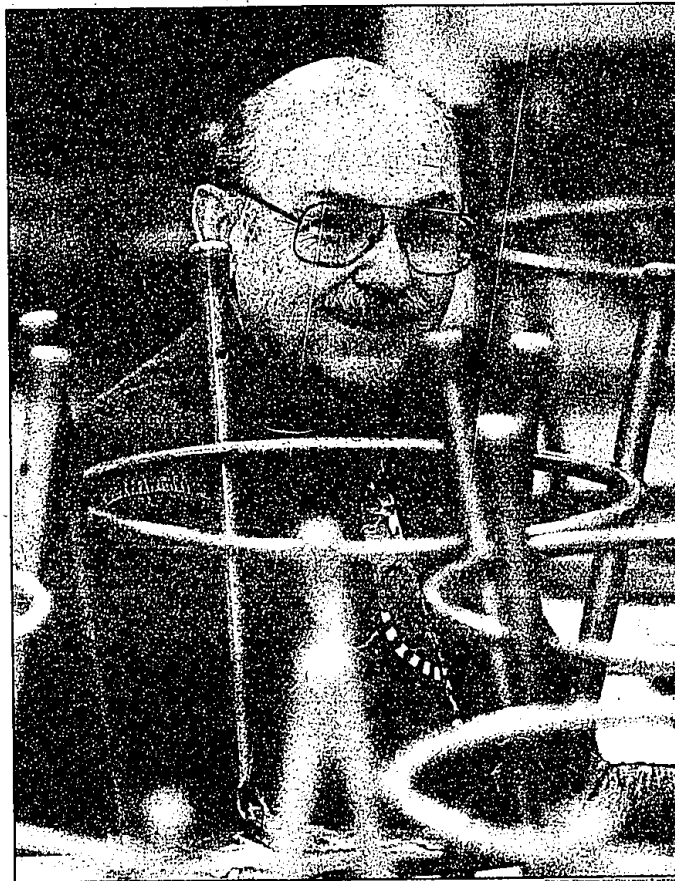
"A test is a test," she said. "Either

the child knows what's going on or doesn't know. . . I am very proud of the board for how they're reacting to the results. I think their concern is as any other parents' would have been: appalled. . . You can't bash the system or the board on this one."

A commonly-heard complaint was the unavailability of individual results, for the school's use and for students' personal use.

"The state does not give data back to a district so we can see where students are missing it, (to find out) what part of the curriculum we are

See DEBATE, A2



Accolade accepted: Harrison High teacher Bill Harmon found out he had been selected as the state's top art educator by surprise at a teacher's conference.

## Teacher puts art into his work

BY TODD WICKS  
STAFF WRITER

Bill Harmon didn't know he'd been named Michigan Art Educator of the Year until he was introduced as such before his speech to a large group of teachers.

"That was the first time it had been announced," he said. "What did I do? I choked, because it already put more demands on my presentation."

Until this fall, Harmon had been the only art instructor at Harrison High School for the past seven years. In the district since 1986, he teaches everything from drawing and painting to ceramics and jewelry.

The artist/teacher was humble about the honor, given annually by the Michigan Art Education Association.

"You have mixed reactions," he said. "You're proud, but kind of embarrassed. You look out at all these (teachers) who you know in your heart deserve this also. There are many, many good people out there that just didn't get nominated."

"He is art," said Rande Horn, principal at Harrison. "He's taken extra kids in classes, and once they're in there, he makes it important to them. They get to do their own thing, and he honors that."

"There's nothing he wouldn't do for a kid in art."

Although an accomplished jewelry-maker, teaching leaves Harmon little time for his own projects.

"I wouldn't say that I show my work regularly," he said. "Teaching takes a lot of energy, and I often don't have much time or energy left by the time I get home."

He refuses to take all of the

See ART TEACHER, A2

## Neighbors pitch in; animals to remain in Farmington Hills

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

Doris Kangas has been busy for the last few months and wondering if her work to keep several animals on her property would pay off.

At the Zoning Board of Appeals meeting Sept. 24, she received her answer.

"It was inspiring," she said of the meeting where 21 of her neighbors spoke up for her in her attempt to keep a "bioplot," which is what she calls her collection of chickens, ducks, a pig, llama, goats, peacock and other animals. "They've supported me and helped me."

The board voted to allow Kangas to keep the animals provided she met certain conditions. The issue came before the city council at its Aug. 12 meeting when the council voted to include a provision for a variance from its zoning that would permit the animals.

"This (variance) only applies under certain conditions and for this property," said Zoning Supervisor Lee Blizman. "But it's an example of community. You see people accommodating a different view."

Kangas, 68, is a retired English teacher who has loved and owned animals all her life and began adopting abandoned pets and exotic animals alike at her property on Merton north of 11 Mile in Farmington Hills.

Although the city has grand fathered in some properties with animals, Kangas would have been in violation of city code without a variance of a requirement "that cattle, sheep, goats and pigs not be located within 200 feet of the property line, and that buildings to house animals such as fowl and rabbits not be closer than 75 feet to a property line."

Kangas must still move her existing fence back so that it is even with the front edge of her house.

"I saved the animals," she said of the ruling. "And they've given me a year to comply. I didn't get everything, but it's not bad."

# Democrat Dibert counts on GOP crossover votes

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

Steve Dibert knows that his only chance to win a state house seat will be to successfully court Republican voters.

Dibert, 29, and Andrew Raczkowski, 27, are both in their first run for the 37th State House seat held by Jan Dolan, R-Farmington Hills, who is retiring.

In a heavily Republican district,

## STATE HOUSE

Dibert must be able to appeal to GOP voters, something he thinks is more than a long shot.

"First and foremost, I would represent the constituents," said Dibert, who maintains houses for a living. "I've gotten a lot of offers of help from Republicans since the primary."

Dibert has gone door-to-door with his message of moderation rather than extremes.

Getting the district's fair share of tax money from Lansing will be a priority, he says, especially when it comes to roads.

"Roads will probably be the priority," he said. "With the Democratic power base in the tri-county area, we would be able to get our fair share. Right now, out state Michi-

gan, places like Grand Rapids, are getting more than their fair share of our tax dollars."

He says road improvements are a regional issue, that require redistribution of tax money to the area first, before any new tax, even a gas tax, is implemented.

Dibert says education is another top issue, with many districts, like Walled Lake, dealing with a boom-

See DIBERT, A2

## SERVICE WITH A CELEBRITY SMILE

Olympic Gold medalist Sheila Taormina will be one smiling face to meet and greet patrons as the third annual "Celebrity Server Night" to benefit Farmington Families in Action takes place 6-9 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 9, at Big Boy Restaurant, 20788 Farmington Road, north of Eight Mile.

Taormina will be joined by many Farmington area notables including: Hills council members Nancy Bates, Vicki Barnett, Jerry Ellis, Jon Grant, Cheryl Oliverio; and Terry Sever; Farmington council members Mary Bush, Arnie Campbell, Bill Hartsock; and Jim Mitchell; Hills Mayor Aldo Vignone; Farmington Mayor Jo Anne McShane; BWOC Executive Director Cassie Collins; Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer; Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss;

## FARMINGTON FOCUS

1996-97 Miss Farmington Annette Hohl; 1995-96 Miss Farmington Audrey Chernauckas; and Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield.

Servers will wait tables and all tips collected by celebrity servers will be given to FFIA's drug education program. Big Boy will also donate 10 percent of the day's total sales to the organization.

## AN IDEAL ID

Paging Dr. Jekyll: Farmington Area Jaycees are running its third annual haunted house — with this year's theme a

haunted hospital — starting this weekend, Oct. 11-13, in the Kmart parking lot, Orchard Lake Road, between 13 Mile and 14 Mile. The haunted hospital will be receiving "patients" on the weekends of Oct. 17-20, 24-27, 30 and 31.

Admission is \$5 for adults and \$4 for children 12 and under. Those who bring two cans of food will have a \$1 sliced off the entrance fee; a \$2 discount is given if proof is shown of donating blood to the Red Cross in October.

To volunteer to help at the haunted hospital, call 477-5227.

Items for Farmington Focus may be mailed to the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48336; faxed to 810-477-9722; or dropped off at the newspaper office.