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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

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IN THE PAPER TODAY

Moonlight delights: Downtown Farmington Business Association's Moonlight Madness sale hit a musical note with some merchants. /A3

On a mission: Some folks from Nardin Park Church in Farmington Hills spruced up a few homes for some seniors. /A14

OPINION

Write away: Farmington schools officials are voicing concern over the new High School Proficiency Test, which requires students to answer essay questions. We think students need to write more. /A16

SPORTS

Golf champion: Alan Menzies, a former Farmington Hills resident, is the 1996 winner of the Observer & Eccentric men's golf tournament. /C1

Court battle: City rivals Farmington Harrison and Farmington High were on opposing sides in girls basketball Tuesday. /C1

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Schools roll back tax rate by 1 mill

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

Homestead property owners in the Farmington Public School District will receive a one-mill rollback in fiscal year 1996-97.

Because the amount per pupil from homesteads cannot increase, as property taxes rise, the millage levied on homesteads will decrease. Last year's rate, 13.9 mills, will decrease to 12.9 mills this year.

A mill is \$1 of tax for every \$1,000 of state equalized valuation, which is half of the market value.

A person with a \$120,000 home would have a SEV of \$60,000, and thus save \$60 with a mill rollback.

"What we spend per pupil comes from tax dollars and state aid," said Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent of finance. "Every year that number goes up by an amount which the state legislates... We're already getting more tax dollars, so we have to lower the millage rate."

"(The rollback) will be an annual occurrence." Last year, the allowance per pupil was \$8,720, \$6,653 of which came from the state and non-homesteads. The amount from homesteads was \$2,067, and must remain at that level. For the 96-97 fiscal year, the state will spend \$8,875 per student, \$6,808 of which will come from the state and non-homesteads.

Under Proposal A, the amount that homestead taxes can increase is capped at 5 percent or less. Cannon estimates that property values in the Farmington area have been going up somewhere between two and three percent.

"On an individual basis, it's hard to toll," she said. "Some people's taxable value may have gone up more than others. For most people, this should be a savings."

Cannon presented the rollback to the school board at a special study session last week. The board is expected to approve the proposal at its regular meeting Oct. 15.

City assessors will be notified of the change, and the tax bills that go out in December will be adjusted.

"It's just a part of the law," said August Blomquist, school board watcher and Farmington resident. "Schools will still get the same amount of money. It's not anything special that anybody has done."

But don't get him wrong. "Hey, I'm always in favor of taxes rolling back," he said, "provided it gives them the same amount for services."

Senator puts road show in gear



State Sen. Willis Bullard, who represents Farmington Hills and Farmington, is wasting no time in getting to the issue that matters most to motorists — roads.

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Michigan's newest state senator is wasting no time hitting the road. The longtime state legislator who left the House to succeed David Honigman in the 16th District after a special June election held his eighth town hall meeting and first in Farmington Hills Monday night

in the city council chambers.

Willis Bullard, R-Milford, asked Brent Bair, managing director of the Road Commission for Oakland County, to help him discuss the area and state roads, one of the hottest topics in state and local politics.

Bair answered a lot of questions before they were asked. And most of the answers were not good news.

Bair said Michigan has done a good job of controlling the growth of state government, but along with local government, has not made roads a funding priority.

Michigan has consistently ranked at or near the top 10 states in health, education and welfare, but has consistently spent less on roads.

In 1984, the state ranked fifth in health spending and was 12th in education funding in 1984 and 1992 and is 17th in welfare spending.

But roads are another matter. The state has not ranked higher than 42nd in per capita road expendi-

tures since 1964 and was 49th in 1992 and dead last in expenditures per 1,000 miles of travel.

The state also ranks toward the bottom in fuel tax, at 16 cents a gallon for gas and diesel, as compared to Connecticut, which charges 38 and 18 cents respectively. Michigan has not raised fuel taxes in almost 13 years.

And although Oakland County has benefited in many ways from development, road funds haven't kept pace.

"It's more expensive to buy land

See BULLARD, A10



Ice exercise: Instructor Tracie Nussbaum guides Sarah Lash along at the Farmington Hills Ice Arena. Figure skating and hockey are keeping the arena operating around the clock.

Business bustles at ice arena

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Hills Ice Arena hasn't the time to celebrate its early success.

The arena, which made money in its first year, even though it only began operating in September of 1995, will be even busier this year. The arena is in Founders Sports Park on Eight Mile.

"After the first year, I'd say we are healthy, wealthy and wise," said Arena Manager Jerry Nelson. "We have more people participating and we've worked out some of the problems we had last year."

Nelson said people have complied with residency requirements for youth hockey programs this year, with more than 70 percent of the players being city residents.

"We've been able to accommodate about 1,000 kids with a waiting list of about 270," said Daryl Rice, Farmington Hills Youth Hockey Association vice president. "We have about 10 residents who didn't get on a team for one reason or another and we're working on that. But for the most part, any resident who wanted to play is playing."

Rice said the association has been besieged in its second year because many kids could not skate at other arenas in past years.

"Fifty percent of our kids never played hockey before," Rice said. "That's a tremendous influx."

Nelson said about 40 percent of the older hockey players, in the Bantam division for 13 to 14-year-olds and the Midgets, 15- to 16-year-olds, are residents. The problem in that age group is that many of the players already play for other teams at other rinks.

See ICE ARENA, A2

Rackowski: Keep GOP program on right of way

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

STATE HOUSE

Although Republican Andrew Rackowski survived a tough field to win his party's nod for state House in the primary, the businessman does not want to take anything for granted.

The 37th House district is currently represented by former Hills Mayor Jan Dolan, who is retiring. Rackowski, 27, narrowly defeated

Cathleen Webb in the primary and faces Democrat Stephen Dibert in November's general election.

"I think one of the most important considerations for voters in this district should be whether they want a Republican or Democrat majority," he said.

Rackowski, like his opponent, is a

small businessman with a printing operation in Eastpointe. But one of his most issues, that's where the similarity ends.

Rackowski is pro-life and Dibert is pro-choice.

The U.S. Army Reserve officer said he supports public education, but supports more tried and true teaching methods, such as using phonics to teach reading. He also supports vouchers that would make

it more affordable for parents to choose a private or other alternative school.

"I think it would enhance healthy competition in education," said the Detroit College of Law student.

Road improvements are important to the state and region's economy, but taxing motorists is not the way to pay for them, he said. Instead, Rackowski favors creating a desig-

See RACKOWSKI, A2

A dentist's generosity

Some youth soccer players are smiling, and so are folks at Farmington Families in Action — all thanks to Farmington Hills dentist Dr. Rhonda Van Horn.

Van Horn and her staff donated time and materials to make custom mouthguards for the Farmington Soccer Club and Farmington schools soccer teams. Instead of charging a fee, Van Horn accepted donations for FFIA's drug and alcohol awareness education effort and raised more than \$700.

Calling Mr. Greenjeans

An exhibit on "Barns of Michigan" is on display in the historical commission showcase at Farmington Hills City Hall through Nov.

FARMINGTON FOCUS

30. Early and recent photographs of many area barns are on display, including those in Farmington.

Spaghetti heading west

Farmington Hills is the latest landing spot for a Pasta-To-Go restaurant, which specializes in — you guessed it — gourmet Italian dinners such as spaghetti, fettuccine Alfredo, chicken cacciatore and pasta primavera. The new restaurant at 29410 Orchard Lake Road is owned by Andy Stefan and son Ron.

Pasta-To-Go restaurants have opened in the Detroit metro area as well as Wisconsin and Texas.

He's a winner

Radio station WKQI-FM needed a name for its mobile unit and Farmington Hills resident Dan Sperling came up with the winning entry, "Q-Cruiser," in a contest sponsored by Q95.5. For the winning name, Sperling will have a party thrown in his drive way with pizza, pop and chips provided by afternoon disc jockey Kevin O'Neil, who will broadcast live from the event.

Items for Farmington Focus may be mailed to the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48335; faxed to 810-477-9722; e-mailed to packy@mail.oeonline.com.