

# Farmington Observer

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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS



**What do you want to ask John Engler?**

We were scheduled to interview Gov. John Engler May 1, but were pushed back because of his travel schedule. So, those of you who submitted questions for the interview won't find the answers in today's issue, as promised.

But, we have a new appointment in Lansing May 9, and we're still going to ask the governor your questions.

Thank you to the dozens who have already responded. Those of you who missed the deadline can still participate by submitting a question for the governor by 5 p.m., May 8. Be sure your name and city of residence are included. We will not ask anonymous questions. We'll take your questions by:

- Fax - (810) 644-3214
- Phone - (810) 901-2568
- E-mail - [obrienm@oconline.com](mailto:obrienm@oconline.com)
- Mail - Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, 48009

Look for the governor's responses May 11.

## IN THE PAPER TODAY

**COUNTY**  
Stepping forward: Leadership Oakland is calling for anyone interested in learning what it takes to be a leader to investigate opportunities to join the next class. /A6

## TASTE

Cinco de Mayo: Celebrate Mexico's independence from the French at local restaurants, or plan your own flavorful fiesta. /B1

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**Big improvement:** Mike Kane stands in front of the Enterprise Rent-A-Car building on Grand River, where it's a good fit with the neighborhood in an area he sees as underserved. Enterprise has plans for another site in Farmington Hills.

## Building on history

Olde Town's future: Facing obstacles with spirit



*Editor's note: This is the third and final installment in our series of stories on the southeast corner of Farmington Hills — Olde Town.*

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

The future of Olde Town, more than any other part of the city perhaps, depends on its treatment of the past.

Public and private money have been used in this decade more than ever to revitalize the business district, renovate older housing and build new houses.

Perhaps Green Smith, owner of the historic Botsford Inn on Grand River, can appreciate the changes more than most.

"I've always liked the Botsford Inn," says Smith, who bought it from John Anhalt in 1993. "I like American history."

Smith has been in the hotel and restaurant business for 25 years and had worked at the historic Mayflower Hotel in Plymouth before buying the Inn.

But there were obstacles. The Inn had been up for sale for seven years.

"Do you know what that does to a business?" he says. "And you had a junky, boarded up car dealership across the street. There were no street lights — on Grand River!"

And when he did research, Smith found that the Botsford Inn, which had been valued at one time at \$3.6 million, was worth \$750,000, half of the price he paid.

"I have no regrets about buying the business," he says. "But my lawyer and others warned me not to buy it. You should never buy a business because you love it. But I did."

Smith worked for a year at the Inn before buying it, and became aware of the affection residents had for the landmark.

He bought it and began work on restoring it while

Please see OLDE TOWN, A4

## Kmart, condo center slated

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

A planned shopping center and residential development in one of Farmington Hills' busiest areas could add tax base and infrastructure improvements.

The proposal would include a super Kmart and several upscale retail stores in a commercial center on 43 acres as well as approximately 172 single-family attached condominiums with garages or approximately 400 apartment units on the other 33 acres between Orchard Lake, 14 Mile and Northwestern Highway.

The development would combine other property with property already owned by the company making the proposal, Malan Realty Investors, Inc. The company owns and manages the Kmart shopping center on Orchard Lake, which would be part of the new development.

"We think it is a good proposal; consistent with the concept for the area," said Malan attorney Larry Lichtman, the former mayor of Farmington Hills.

Malan applied for a planned unit development on April 16 that will be presented to the Farmington Hills Planning Commission at its May 22 meeting.

The plan is in keeping with the 1996 city land-use Master Plan for the area. But the developer is making its case to residents in the area ahead of time.

"We've met with the city administration," Lichtman said. "We've scheduled other meetings with resident groups. Our feeling is that it's

Please see KMART, A2

## Schools hope for earful Wednesday

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public School officials want to leave Wednesday's public hearing with an earful of opinions rather than the sound of silence.

"Election Reflection" takes place 7 p.m. in the William Costick Center, 11 Mile Road, east of Middebelt. The Rev. Mark Jensen of North Congregational Church and Rhonda Brown, a counselor at Oakland Community College, will moderate the discussion on the district's failed \$110 million bond request.

District officials are conducting the hearing as well as focus groups meetings to understand why voters turned down the bond proposal March 25 and seek suggestions on how to proceed. Another election is not expected until late September, officials said.

"If there are certain hot-button things, we need to know about it," said Bob Maxfield, superintendent. "If there was something about the bond proposal they could not accept, we need to know that too."

Organizers chose a neutral setting and impartial moderators in order to encourage a cross-section of opinions.

Jensen, who also serves as president of the Interagency Council of Farmington/Farmington Hills, and Brown have children in the public schools, but were not involved in the financial strategies committee that recommended the district seek a bond issue.

"They're good people to do that," Maxfield said. "... Their job is not to let one group dominate it but to try to encourage an open dialogue."

A couple of the town hall meetings before the March 25 election degenerated into shouting matches between pro- and anti-bond supporters.

The district mailed 400 letters to people inviting them to attend and announced the hearing in its Update newsletter. Focus groups are planned for Monday and Thursday with people, some of whom who've been identified as voting for the millage renewal but not the bond.

The school board has also planned a workshop 6:30 p.m. Monday, May 12, to discuss those findings.

## New owner to fill closed shop for antiques

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

A new operation is ready to fill the void left by an antique store, which abruptly closed two weeks ago and left several disgruntled customers and dealers behind.

Knightsbridge Antiques of Northville is buying the building at 32315 Grand River and expects to open by June.

Owners Bruce and Linda McKenzie are excited by the prospect of expanding to the spot that was a popular destination for antiques shoppers.

"It was a successful mall; it was just a problem with the management," said Bruce, whose antique mall on Seven Mile Road will remain open. "It's a great place; People love it."

The McKenzies are buying the building from the current owner, who had been renting the facility to the owner of Hickory Hill Antiques,

Please see ANTIQUES, A2

## Art appreciation



Work in progress: Jennifer Burstein, fourth grader, at Forest Elementary (center, with stripes) takes a close look at Farmington Artist Club painter Pat Langner as other classmates gather around to watch the demonstration at the William Costick Center Tuesday. Some 900 students (fourth and fifth graders) went to watch artists in action. For more photos, please turn to Page A3.

## Toy gun is no fun

A couple of Farmington teens toting a toy gun as a joke found police don't have a sense of humor in such matters.

At 6 p.m. Thursday, Farmington police were called to Farmington Road and State Street after a resident spotted a teenage boy carrying what appeared to be a gun in the waistband of his pants.

The officer confronted two teens, ages 15 and 14, and told them to place their hands on the patrol car. He told the pair the matched the description of two teens carrying a handgun.

The 16-year-old admitted he had a toy gun in his waistband as a joke. Police confiscated the toy and took both home to their parents.

## FARMINGTON FOCUS

"(The officer) had information it was a gun ... not a toy gun," said Maria Punt, commander. The plastic gun was placed into police property and will later be destroyed. No charges will be filed.

## No poles here

Farmington Hills Fire Station No. 2 hosted a city council meeting Wednesday night that ended the city's series of on-the-road council meetings.

Deputy Chief Pete Baldwin welcomed the 30-35 visitors to the squad room: "Most of our visitors are usually very small. It's good to have visitors," he said.

Baldwin noted that visitors often are surprised not to find any fire poles, which firefighters once used to slide down from their home quarters to the fire engines.

"Has anyone here slid down a fire pole," asked Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi. When nobody answered, he said, "I did."

A voice from the audience quipped: "We noticed."

Later, Baldwin was asked about CPR classes. "If you can get 10 people together, we'll hold a class," he said. He can be reached at 653-0740.