

Farmington Observer

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TODAY

Optimist honors: The Farmington area club honors a Farmington Hills police officer. /A3

Moving on: A familiar face at the Farmington Public Safety Department is retiring. /A2

Legacy left: A new restaurant, Mexican Garden II, will replace the now-closed Legacy Dinner Club on Grand River. /A14

COUNTY

9-1-1 assist: A countywide committee is studying the need for revisions, and possibly a rate hike, to bolster Oakland's 9-1-1 system. /B9

COMMUNITY LIFE

As life ends: Take a peek inside Farmington Hills' new Hospice Home, which will be open for patients next month. /B1

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Computers to curb staff growth



BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

After a delay to answer questions about the fairness of its bidding process, the City of Farmington Hills took the plunge for a new citywide

computer system Monday.

The council voted 6-0, with Councilman Jerry Ellis absent, to award a contract for \$1.3 million to Green Services, Inc. of Okemos for installation of a computer network including hardware and software.

Plans to buy a new computer system were sparked by a management audit that found the city's technology capabilities lacking. The system aims to link the city's various departments and databases, while eliminating paperwork and pressures to add staff.

The process hit a snag when two of the companies that bid unsuccessfully on the project complained at the April 28 council meeting that the process was "flawed" or even

worse.

Assistant City Manager Dave Call and City Attorney John Donohue reviewed the entire process. And council members reviewed documentation of the complicated bidding process that included about 350 separate components.

"This is a very important project," said City Manager Dan Hobbs, prefacing the council's debate and action to award the bid. "It will have a pro-

Please see COMPUTERS, A12

A visit from 'Wonderland'



STAFF PHOTOS BY EMERSON LEMLEY



Stage presence: Mercy High School's actor's workshop performance of "Alice in Wonderland" visited students at Our Lady of Sorrows Monday. Above, Allison Jones, portraying the "White Queen," and the other performers remain in character after the play to interact with audience. Far left, Jana Strom plays the "Mad Hatter." Close left, Kristeen Legg as "Alice" is confused. Visitors can see the production at 7 p.m. Tuesday, May 27, at Mercy High School. Call 476-8020 for ticket information.

Kids in crisis at heart of Hills' 'Fete au Jardin'

BY MARY BOBBIQUE
STAFF WRITER

Three local celebrities have made the annual "Le Fete au Jardin" Garden Party benefit for the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center, a cause dear to their hearts.

Merchant of Vino owner Eddie Jonna, WOMC-FM radio personality Dick Puritan, and WJBK-TV Fox 2 newscaster Rich Fisher met last Wednesday in the TV2 Southfield studios to film public service announcements promoting the June 1 gala.

This will be the 10th annual garden party benefit for the Farmington Hills center for children in crisis. Their goal is \$200,000; last year, \$178,000 was raised. With fine wine, food from some of the best Michigan chefs, and an auction, the proceeds from the Sunday afternoon event represents 20 percent of the center's \$1 million fund-raising budget.

"It all began 10 years ago," said Jonna, chairman of the Garden Party. "The girls from the Sarah Fisher center would walk past my store on Northwestern Highway for exercise. One Christmas we had a large order. I didn't know who to turn to. I called the Sarah Fisher home and asked if anyone there would like to work for two days with my wife, Juliette, and daughter, Monica."

"We began to feel the emotions and the personal problems these children had gone through. We had the idea to do something for the children."

Founded in 1929 by an order of Catholic nuns, the Daughters of Charity, the center offers safe housing for 60 severely abused or neglected children, ages 4 to 17, who live in residential cottages on the grounds. Other programs include foster care, adoption, a transition program for high-risk infants and their young parents, and Seton Preschool and Infant Child Care. Services are provided to more than 800 families annually in southeastern Michigan.

"I thought of a little wine tasting party for maybe 100 people in '87," Jonna recalled. "I made some calls to my friends with restaurants. I ordered one tent. That first year, we ended up with three tents."

The first year, the event was held at Mercy Center in Farmington Hills. Since then, the garden party has been staged on the spacious grounds of the St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher center on West 12 Mile Road at Inkster.

"We get about 1,500 (patrons) each year now," said Jonna. "This year, we've got some great items for the auction, including a suite for the Red Wings, incredible wines, and a complete set of bonnie babies."

From a little wine tasting, the garden party has blossomed into a major social event with food from 60 caterers, live entertainment by flutist Alexander Zonik & Friends and the Trinidad Tripoli Steel Band, the auction hosted by Jonna, Puritan and Fisher, antique

See PARTY, A12

Retiring principal won't leave completely

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

This September will be the first in nearly 45 years that Barbara Novatis won't be going back to school.

Novatis, the principal of William Grace Elementary for the last 3 1/2 years, informed the district office of her decision to retire two weeks ago. Since then, she has received numerous calls of support as word has spread through area schools.

"There are bitter-sweet emotions there," said Novatis. "I'll have to go out of town for a few days (in

September) so I don't get that feeling of 'Oh, I should be at school.' It's very unsettling for someone who's been in this line of work for a number of years."

Novatis' roots in Farmington are deep. She grew up attending school in the district, and before her time at William Grace, served as principal at Wood Creek Elementary for eight years and a teacher at Forest Elementary for 16.

In recent months, attention has

been focused on Novatis for a different reason: In late fall 1996, she learned that she had breast cancer, and left her job in December to undergo surgery.

"I'm doing fairly well health wise, having a strong recovery, just looking forward to getting back into the mainstream again," said Novatis.

Speeding that recovery is the love and support shown Novatis by the parents, students and faculty of the Farmington school district. In April,

more than 133 local people contributed and over 100 walked in her name at the Race for the Cure fund-raising event held at the Detroit Zoo. Novatis' supporters alone raised over \$3,255 for cancer research, the highest total in the race.

"It never would have occurred to anyone to do otherwise," said Superintendent Bob Maxfield. "The participation was indicative of the love and respect in which she's held."

Barb Novatis is the consummate elementary principal.

Please see NOVATIS, A2

Fowl rescue

Farmington Hills police Officers Kevin Cronin and Mark Haro thought they might be saving an injured man and wound up saving some ducklings at about 7:30 p.m. on May 14.

Cronin and Haro were driving on Orchard Lake near Bristol when they saw a man, laying face down on the street with a group of people around him, as if he had suffered a heart attack or other medical emergency.

"We turned around because we thought it might be a medical," Cronin said. "He was looking into a grate and said he was all right."

The man, Ed Krass, had been told about the ducklings by a neighbor.

FARMINGTON FOCUS

"One of my neighbors asked who to call," Krass said. "We went down there. We could see them in the sewer."

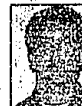
That's when Cronin and Haro arrived.

Cronin saw two ducklings stranded in the sewer.

"I just took off my gun belt and crawled in to get them," he said.

As the officer and fowl emerged just a little bit fouler than they had been before going into the sewer grate, the parents of the young birds arrived on the scene.

"We just pointed them (ducklings) toward their parents and they followed them right away," Cronin said.



Officer Cronin

Officer Haro