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Flooding: Where to go from here?

■ Flooding of basements remains on the minds of many residents and Farmington Hills officials, who are plotting what direction to take to address problems in the city. Employees are visiting homes that suffered damage from torrential rains in early August.



BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

What is to blame for all the recent flooding in Farmington Hills?

That is a question Farmington Hills officials hope to have answered soon. They have begun visiting property owners who experienced flooding from storms that swept through the area Aug. 6 and 9.

Several areas of Farmington Hills were hard hit by torrential rains, resulting most commonly in basement flooding. Some subdivisions particularly hit included Kendallwood 1, Lincolnshire and the Independence Green Apartments, according to a map presented to the Farmington Hills City Council at a study session Monday.

The Orchard Place condominium complex has also had some ongoing flooding problems that have caused \$250,000 damage, according to Jon E. Velick, community association manager for the Kramer-Triad Management Group, which manages the condominium complex.

Some areas to be investigated during the property visits include individual plumbing, grading, sump installation, relative elevation compared to sewers and other area homes; detailed accounts of the event and history, among other things.

On Aug. 21, some residents filed what they hope will become a class action lawsuit against the city for damages to homes caused by flooding.

There were about 125 reported flood-

ing instances during the most recent storms, with a vast majority of those involving basement flooding, according to Tom Binsell, Farmington Hills' director of Public Services.

"This is the largest list that I've ever seen before," Binsell said.

Letters are a starting point to get to the bottom of the problems. "A letter was sent out (Aug. 14) to each and every property owner that we know of with water in buildings," Binsell said. "We want to get a look at the situation and make a determination about what happened and why it happened."

The city has hired a consultant and is making appointments with property owners. The process of interviewing property owners should take about a month.

The city's waste hauler also is helping out by reporting when they see residents putting out items with obvious water damage, such as carpets and cardboard boxes, Binsell said.

The city also will explore whether the problem is with the shared sewer system, which has been overloaded in the past. If that's the case, then the problem needs to be resolved at the county level.

But that's not enough for homeowners who say they are fed up with frequent "100-year storms" that only seem to get worse and worse.

"Unless you've actually had sewage in your basement, you don't know how angry you can get," longtime resident

Please see FLOOD, A10



Vacancy: The Uptown Farmington Plaza has an empty storefront that used to be Cattleman's.

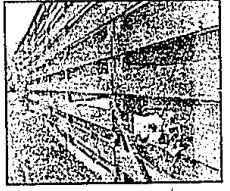
Cracking down Blight irks city officials

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

A crackdown on potential blight in the city of Farmington soon will be under way.

First under the microscope will be businesses in the eastern portion of the city, in the vicinity of Grand River-Orchard Lake, said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauboff. A particular sore spot with officials is the condition of some storefronts and grounds on the east side of Mooney Street - where overgrown weeds aren't the only aesthetic shortcoming.

On Monday, Nancy Fasciani of Farmington Hills walked through a weed-covered parking lot on the way to Frank's Nursery and Crafts. She also walked past an ugly green trash bin, which had wood and other debris sticking out



Eyesore: This business at Lilac Street and Grand River has a broken fence.

of the top. "I think it's great that the city is paying attention to this end of

Please see BLIGHT, A10

Golf classic swings a par for families

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

The best way to raise money for a worthy cause is to offer people 18 holes of golf, good company, good food, and a chance to go home with some in-demand prizes and sports memorabilia. The Farmington Hills Police Benevolent Association has made the formula work in its best interest with an annual

POLICE

golf outing and auction. "With the fourth one, it's much easier now," said Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer. "We're in a pretty good position. We've had good support from the community. This is something

people can relate to."

This year's golf classic will be opened with a tee-off by 47th District Court Judge Fred Harris at 12:15 p.m. Friday, Sept. 11, at the 24-hole Links of Novi Golf Club.

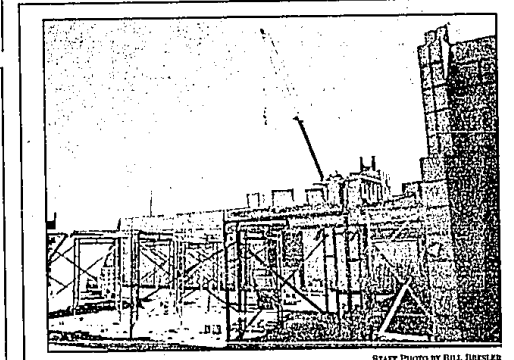
What brings more than 200 golfers together - not to mention volunteers and organizers - are the deaths of Sgt. Bertie Cook, who died of cancer in

1994, and Officer Gary Bradley, who also died of cancer about 11 months later.

"Our initial thoughts were to take care of their families," Dwyer said.

That prompted the creation of the association, a 601(c)(3) organization, which allows tax-deductible donations. To raise money for Cook's and

Please see GOLF, A6



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRASLER

The work continues: At Dunckel Middle School a crane was needed to lift building materials into what was a courtyard. Such signs of construction will be evident to students when they start school Monday.

Classes, crews meet head on

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Students and teachers at six Farmington district schools won't necessarily have to wear hard hats when classes begin Monday.

"We will have classes (on time) and it will be a safe environment," said the district's bond issue consultant Don Cowan.

But reminders of continuing bond issue-funded construction will be obvious at Farmington and North high schools, at O.E. Dunckel Mid-

dle School, and at Gill, Kenbrook and Longacre elementary schools for the first weeks and perhaps months of the 1998-99 school year.

The fact that work is progressing at the sites is partly due to an excellent summer weather window enabled construction crews to work long stretches without significant interruption.

It also has to do with pinpoint

Please see BOND, A3

Customer service job 1 for new city manager

See related story, Page A4

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

Newly appointed City Manager Steve Brock has an overriding priority as he takes over the helm of Farmington Hills.

"It's customer service," said Brock, who was appointed by the city council in August to replace Dan Hobbs, who accepted a job in California. "That includes treating employees with respect and dignity."

"We will treat people well. We will listen to them. And as with the flooding problems, whatever we can do, we are going to do."

Though Farmington Hills has become a large city, Brock is certain its residents still want that small town feel, and the knowledge that they control.

Speaking of flooding, Brock said city officials and employees are learning about the storm water systems - county, city and those in individual homes.

"We need continuing education for homeowners on where their water goes," Brock said. "And with the city, we need to look at the whole system. We spend money every year on storm drainage. We need residents involved in keeping water that shouldn't be there out of there."

Brock sees his appointment as city manager as a continuation of what he has been doing for years. In 1989, Brock arrived in Farmington Hills as assistant to former City Manager William Costick. In 1993, he was promoted to assistant city manager, which led him to the manager's job just a few weeks ago. Prior to arriving in Farmington Hills, Brock was manager of



City Manager Steve Brock

Northville Township. "I live in Farmington Hills and I wouldn't have it any other way," he said.

He also plans to make the transition from Hobbs' administration to his a smooth one. The city council Monday approved the appointment of Dana Whinnery, human resources director, as assistant city manager, and Teri Arbenowski, economic development coordinator, as assistant to the city manager.

"I don't think the organization will hiccup through the transition. It's important people know they can communicate with the city organization."

Also on Brock's agenda is a continuation of working with the city of Farmington, the Farmington Public Schools and the state.

Brock believes the city is on a good track with a number of issues, including the parks and recreation half mill, renewed for the third time. "That will be a big part of where we go and what

Please see BROCK, A4

THE PAPER TODAY

OPINION

Goodbye: We say goodbye to Farmington Public Schools trustee Joe Svoke and urge the board to find a replacement who, like Svoke, will ask tough questions./A12

COMMUNITY LIFE

Heritage: The Farmington Hills Historical Commission, Farmington Historical Commission and Farmington Historical Society are hosting the annual Heritage Home Tour, Sept. 19-20. Tickets are now available./B1

UP-COMING

Pigskin preview: Look for your hometown teams in the High School Football Preview in Sunday's Farmington Observer. The special section includes a team roster, schedule for the season and story and pictures on local prep teams. This is a must see for local football fans

INDEX

Classified Index	G5
Real Estate	G1
Crossword	G7
Jobs	H6
Home & Service	J3
Automotive	J6
Opinion	A12-13
Sports	C1
Calendar	C6
Entertainment	E1
Real Estate	F1

Electrocution ruled out in man's death

BY HEATHER NEEDHAM
STAFF WRITER

A Farmington Hills man died Friday, Aug. 21, after his arm got entangled in live wires while performing contractual work on a Farmington Hills home.

But Craig Kobak, 29, a former Garden City resident, died of natural causes, according to the Oakland County Medical examiner.

"The cause of death was hypertrophic cardiomyopathy," said Bob Gerds, an administrator with the Oakland County Medical Examiner's office in Pontiac.

"This is a heart affliction he had since birth," he added. One of the few cures for the heart disease is transplant. The disease is characterized by a deterioration of heart muscle.

"In layperson's terms, he had a bad heart," Gerds said.

Upon speaking with Kobak's co-workers, they learned that Kobak had collapsed on the job before the day he died.

"It's kind of sad because he was so

Please see DEATH, A2

