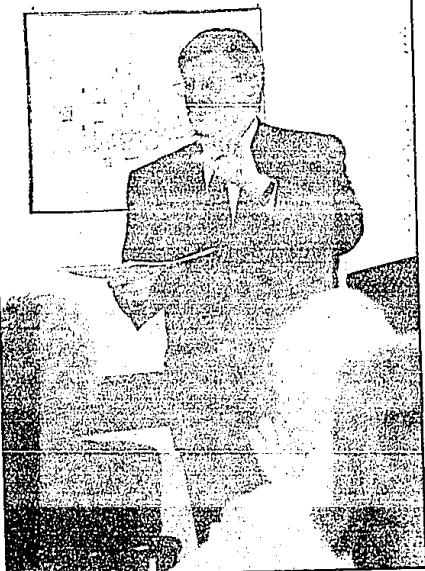




STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESLER

Our way: Philip Power, owner and chairman of the board of Hometown Communications Network, parent company of the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers, talks to the Farmington Exchange Club about community journalism Wednesday.



## Journalism O&E owner talks community news

By TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
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Big city journalists can jump into — and out of — a community to cover a major story, or to get local reaction to national stories such as the high school shootings in Littleton, Colo.

But their counterparts at community newspapers such as the Farmington Observer don't have that luxury, the newspaper's owner, Philip Power, said during Wednesday's weekly meeting of the Farmington Exchange Club at Brass Pointe restaurant.

It means local journalists, who often live in the places they cover the news, must maintain an excellent rapport with sources and be highly responsible, caring and accurate in their reporting.

"Because you're going to get

jumped on if you don't," said Power, whose ancestors helped settle the Farmington area. He is chairman of the board of Hometown Communications Network, Inc. which owns the Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers, a chain of 16 twice-weekly editions.

Power explained that the Observer and similar newspapers are doing community journalism every day, with reporters covering governmental study sessions and poring over police reports in person rather than finding out about a hot news story from an angry resident or a faxed press release.

"It's part of a face-to-face relationship of journalists working within a hometown," Power continued.

To illustrate, Power incorporated into his speech several

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examples supplied by Farmington Observer Editor Joanne Maliszewski and staff members. Those examples reinforced how the newspaper is "always there," in touch with local issues and people.

In comments provided by staff photographer Bill Bresler, colleagues from major dailies, after finding out he works for the Observer, typically ask for story background. "Because we carry the history of the news,"

Power said there also is a significant difference between print and electronic media. "When we do make a mistake, we do so in print," he explained. "And, what's and about print is, it is durable and people can brandish the newspaper in your face."

"You can't brandish a TV program, except for the Jenny Jones trial."

Listening to Power in an informal, light-hearted setting were

about 40 Exchange Club members and guests. Those included "Junior Exchangites," students from North Farmington High School's National Honor Society.

"I think the essence of it (the talk) is, you'll get more from a hometown paper than from people who don't care at a bigger newspaper," Exchange Club member Brian Nocella, a Farmington chiropractor, said after the luncheon. "I thought he was very directive, very powerful and cares for the community."

According to Exchange Club member and Farmington Hills dentist Ronda Van Horn, she "likes the idea of a hometown newspaper" such as the Observer because it helps keep her in contact with the community. Van Horn added that she enjoyed Power's favorable comparison of

community newspapers to bigger papers.

Nocella said the Exchange Club is the longest-running service organization in the Farmington-Farmington Hills area.

Members meet from all walks of life not only to have fun, but to also swap ideas how to improve quality of life. Preventing child abuse is one of the national organization's main goals.

Before Power's speech, a slate of officers were elected as follows: Frank Leuboff, president;

Jim McLaughlin, president-elect; John Anbut, vice president; John Richardson, secretary and Chuck Rosch, treasurer. Elected to two-year terms as directors were Glen Grace, Frank Grady and Paula Boegner. Earning one-year terms were Van Horn, Mark Ziegler and Bob Rebtay.

## School district plans a reunion for market research

By HEATHER NEEDHAM  
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Public Schools wants to do some market research on recent graduates — and give them some free food.

The district is planning a reunion of 1998 high school graduates 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, May 26, at the Farmington Training Center. There, students will get a chance to meet old friends and reminisce about school experiences.

District officials, in turn, will get a chance to sit down with them and ask them questions about the quality of their high school education.

Getting student comments will be helpful, said Susan Zurvalec, assistant superintendent of staff and community relations.

"We're interested in getting (former students') opinions as part of our ongoing efforts to get feedback," Zurvalec said.

"We want to hear about how school prepared them for what they're doing now."

The district also wants to know what students think the district could have done differently, hear their advice to present students and find out what the district did well.

"We hope to get a cross-section of students," she said, including college students and working students receiving technical training.

Plans are under way to send surveys with similar questions to students who graduated three and six years ago, Zurvalec said. They will be sent out by the end of the school year, she said.

Invitations will soon be sent to the students' last known addresses.

The idea was first put forth by school board member Patricia Brouillette, who learned about it while attending a convention with another board member, Linda Enborg.

With the survey, "we thought we could learn the most from our real customers — who are our graduate students," Brouillette said.

"We really hope that we'll have strong participation from graduates who've gone in a lot of different directions," she added.

Invitations to the reunion will be sent to the district's 705 former high school students. Of that number, 241 are from Farmington

■ The district is planning a reunion of 1998 high school graduates 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, May 26.

High, 238 from Harrison High, 280 from North Farmington and 38 attended Farmington Alternative Academy and high school completion classes.

Students wanting more information about the surveys or reunion can call the district's community relations office at (248)489-3399.

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