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IN THE PAPER TODAY

New era



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRADLER

Lights! Friday marked the beginning of a new era in Farmington with lighted football fields. For a story and more information, please turn to page A3.

Gas leak prompts early evacuation

■ Just after 4 a.m. Tuesday, residents in the Grand River-Farmington area were evacuated because of a gas leak leak. The problem was resolved and no one was injured.

BY TIM SMITH
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Standing in front of the Grand River movie theater that his family owned from 1940 until yesterday, Greg Hohler reflected for a moment about how terrible Tuesday morning's gas leak in downtown Farmington might have been.

"I said, 'Thank God the place didn't blow up, I have to close tomorrow,'" said Hohler.

He was referring to Wednesday's real estate closing of the Civic Theatre, officially marking the end of one era and the beginning of another. As of yesterday, the city of Farmington owns the theater, which will be operated by Wixom-based M.K.A., Inc.

"It would mess up my day, that's for sure," said Hohler, who is celebrating finalization of the \$316,500 deal by taking a lengthy vacation, "something I haven't been able to do for 10 years."

As it turned out, the gas leak, detect-

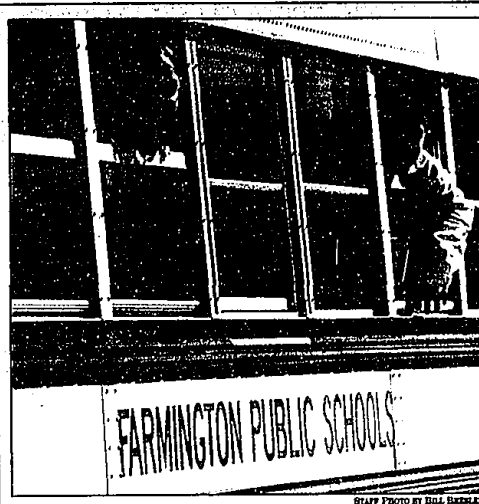
■ Residents who live in apartments above businesses in the Grand River-Farmington area and in nearby homes were evacuated and stood outside about a block away.

ed shortly after 4 a.m. Tuesday, was quickly fixed without injury or hospitalization, said Cmdr. Maria Putt of the Farmington Public Safety Department.

Residents who live in apartments above businesses in the Grand River-Farmington area and in nearby homes were evacuated and stood outside about a block away.

But Putt, among police and fire offi-

Please see QAS, A5



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRADLER

Hello again! Leah Brown and Charles Valrie search for friends before their bus leaves for the trip home.

Welcome back

Far from perfect, but open

BY TIM SMITH
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■ See Sunday's paper for more coverage of the opening of Farmington schools

The opening of the 1999-2000 school year in Farmington Public Schools was far from perfect, what with construction continuing at a number of buildings. But, at least they were open. "We have some very respectable buildings now," said former district administrator Don Cowan, who now works as an independent education-

al consultant. "But we're still trying to get the P.A. systems working. One building where non-working public address systems were wreaking havoc was Farmington High School. Cowan said the end of classes was

Please see OPEN, A5

COMMUNITY LIFE

The truth: Judith Barr has taken the skeletons out of her closet and talks frankly about life with an abusive father./B1

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY BILL BRADLER

A NEW BEGINNING

Curtain goes up on the new players

STORY BY E. GREGORY HOHLER

Editor's note: We couldn't let the change in ownership of the Civic Theatre, a longtime fixture of downtown Farmington pass without some fanfare. Rich in history, not only of Farmington, but the changes in the world that affected the local community, the theater's history represents the changing seasons of our time. And who better to put its history in words than owner E. Gregory Hohler. Today and Thursday, read how the Civic came to be and why now the Hohler family is letting go of the theater that has come to represent our local community.

The Farmington Civic Theatre will soon celebrate its 59th anniversary, and change ownership from the Hohler family to the city of Farmington. This anniversary and the impending change of ownership has inspired the writing of the Civic's nearly six decades of history and the story of how the Civic came into existence.

New era

Attendance continued to rise in the 1960's and allowed the implementation of much-needed capital improvements including new front doors, tiling of the restrooms, a changeable letter sign under the marquee, total refurbishing of the seats, sidewall drapery and the addition of magnetic stereophonic sound and new carpeting.

The 1960's resurgence of movie audience attendance resulted in the building of many new, single auditorium theaters in the suburbs, the first new construction since the

40's. The renewal of the movie industry in general led to the advent of movie multiplexes. In 1972, the Civic's attendance was hit hard by the construction of a fourplex in Farmington Hills just the other side of the Holiday Inn on 10 Mile.

The Farmington Four ravaged attendance at the Farmington Civic. It was at this time that I entered into the business on a full-time basis, as I returned to Farmington following a four-year term of duty in the U.S. Air Force. At this point dad and I were faced with a 650-seat theater that on most nights had attendance of less than 40 people. Even the prime weekend nights had attendance of under 100 people per show. Something dramatic had to be done to change this tide.

Making changes

The decision was made to take the risk of reducing the admission

Please see BEGINNING, A6

One to go: Kerby's replaces Ram's Horn

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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A familiar restaurant is leaving the Orchard Lake Road strip, but its replacement is hardly a stranger. Kerby's Koney Island is expected to open Oct. 1 in the spot formerly occupied by Ram's Horn Restaurant at 28990 Orchard Lake, north of 12 Mile.

A banner on the shuttered restaurant's facade trumpets Kerby's arrival. Ram's Horn employees found out the restaurant was closing after work Aug. 8. A former waitress said she worked there nine years and found out after a friend phoned her at Central Michigan University where she's going to school.

"It was just like home to me," said Debby Schultz. "We're all very, very sad."

Workers there have already found jobs at other Ram's Horn restaurants, Schultz said.

Until two years ago, a Kerby's franchise used to operate on the northwest corner of Orchard Lake and 12 Mile.

The eatery's lease was not renewed in order to make room for Einstein's Bagels.

Kerby's has 20 restaurants in the Detroit area, including one on Hagerly Road in Farmington Hills. Other locations include Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, Newburgh Plaza in Livonia and Great Lakes Crossings in Auburn Hills.

"We thought it was a good area for a koney island," said Tim Kerros, Kerby's part owner. "There are buildings up and down there on Orchard Lake and the neighborhood is well-populated."

The family-owned business spans generations. Kerby's prides itself on chili, whose recipe has been in the family for 70 years, and hot dogs made in Michigan.

Aside from hot dogs, the restaurant menu includes sandwiches, soups, burgers and salads.

Kerby's owners plan to renovate the interior of the building before Oct. 1.

The Ram's Horn owner, a West

Please see CLOSED, A5

Trustee is remembered

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
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It didn't matter what the medium - books, tapes, Internet access - Gisel McCabe was consistent in her belief in and love of intellectual freedom.

"Among my many memories of Gisel was her abiding concern for intellectual freedom. She always brought the board back to that concept," said Farmington Community Library Director Beverly Pappi.

Friends and colleagues remembered Mrs. McCabe Tuesday following her death at home Aug. 30. Mrs. McCabe was a longtime library trustee, attorney and wife of David, owner of the McCabe Funeral Home in Farmington Hills and Canton Township. "She was a sharp woman," Pappi continued. "She had a keen intellect, a fine sense of humor and an abiding love of libraries."

Library Board President Bob Plummer, who served with Mrs. McCabe since her appointment in March, 1988, said he admired her practicality. "I always enjoyed Gisel. She didn't bring the typical lawyer's view to the board. She brought a practical approach," Plummer added.

He recalled the stories Mrs. McCabe told of her childhood in East Prussia, where she was born, and of having to flee to northern Germany when the Nazis invaded during World War II.

"I really enjoyed chatting with her," Plummer added. "She was such a very pleasant person."

A graduate of the Detroit College of Law, Mrs. McCabe was highlighted in a Detroit News article many years ago for her ability to balance raising a family and a maintaining a career.

As a teen, Mrs. McCabe had decided

Please see TRUSTEE, A4

Detectors alert couple to house fire

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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A Farmington Hills homeowner is thanking his good fortune, not to mention his four blaring smoke detectors, after an early morning blaze Tuesday.

At 6:15 a.m., Farmington Hills firefighters were called to 25537 Weasox Street in the Lincolnshire subdivision where flames were coming from the basement.

Alfred Pawluskiak and his wife Barbara awoke to the cacophony of all four smoke detectors.

The couple managed to get down a flight of stairs from an upper level bedroom and out of the home safely after which Alfred phoned 911 on his cellular phone.

"If it weren't for these smoke alarms, I don't think we'd have made it," said Alfred, who had smoke detectors in all three levels of his home.

"When I woke up, this place was place full of smoke."

The Pawluskiaks could see flames shooting through a kitchen vent as they escaped. Fire investigators believe a short in an electrical box in the basement started the

Please see FIRE, A4

