

Letters to Santa

All boys and girls, naughty or nice, know Santa Claus will soon be checking his Christmas list — and checking it twice. That means Farmington and Farmington Hills youngsters need to get their letters to the Jolly Old Elf written and headed to the North Pole.

Once again this year, the Farmington Observer is asking youngsters to send us their letter to Santa along with their school photo to appear in the Sunday, Dec. 23, edition. To make sure we have time to forward the letters to the North Pole, get the letters to us no later than Monday, Dec. 17.

Send your letters to Santa, care of the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335.

Hillside Blues



STAFF PHOTOS BY BILL DRISLER

Thumbs up: Janice Colliton, assistant superintendent and former Hillside Elementary principal (left), gives students the high sign as she and student council president Andrea Kendall display a sign that will be posted along Eleven Mile Road. The Blue Ribbon School 2001 award is a national honor. Students, staffers and families gathered Friday afternoon for a celebration of their achievement. Above, Hillside's Choir sings "Lean On Me" for the awards assembly.



Hillside celebrates new honor

BY JONI HUBRED
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All the pieces of the puzzle fell together Friday afternoon, as students, staff and parents celebrated Hillside Elementary School's designation as a National Blue Ribbon School.

Hillside achieved statewide Blue Ribbon status last year. This year's award puts it among 284 of the nation's best schools.

Student David Choy defined "national" for those students who weren't quite sure what it meant: "National means a whole country, including all of the states."

While Farmington Public Schools officials were introduced, the program was all Hillside's Huskies, with music provided by the school choir, under the direction of Mr. Leo, grade level skits, plaque and flag presentations.

Since it wasn't possible to haul the decorative rock placed in front of the school inside for a special blue ribbon cutting ceremony, a papier-mâché replica took its place. Student Nayoung Chung, joined by Hillside staffer Raida Sheena and parent Mrs. Rana Souboni, dispatched the tissue paper with a cardboard scissors.

Their teamwork symbolized a theme carried through during the hour-long program. Former principal Jan Colliton, now assistant superintendent, said the award "stands for 11 long years of people working hard together. It is an honor, a real honor, to see the Blue Ribbon spirit lives on."

"We're very proud," said current principal Kathy Obriak.

The Blue Ribbon designation, on both the state and national levels, is based on an evaluation of the school's standards, curriculum, environment and partnerships, as well as student assessment and performance. Hillside was also given special recognition for its inclusive special

education program.

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Please see HILLSIDE, A3

San Marino plans unveiled

Farmington Hills Planning Commissioners got a look at expansion plans for the city's golf course Thursday. Residents will have a chance to comment on Dec. 3.

BY KEVIN BROWN
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The 11 Pines-San Marino golf course expansion project drew good reviews Thursday from planning commissioners and the public.

"All we're doing is tweaking it because you've done a good job," said Planning Commissioner Robert Bruckner, after a three-hour presentation which included questions from commissioners.

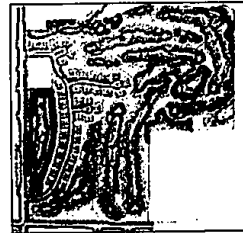
The 50 residents who looked on in the council chambers at Farmington Hills City Hall were not asked to comment on the plan. Questions and comments will be taken at a public hearing on the Eleven Mile-Halsted area project at 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 12.

Project manager Albert Ludwig paraded before commissioners a team of designers responsible for project elements — the golf course expansion, new club house, 80 condo units and 170 Hills parks and recreation offices and garage.

City Manager Steve Brock said 114 residents three times passed parks and recreation millages that included a golf course expansion. The city spent \$4.2 million for the 11 Pines property southwest of San Marino and \$1.1 million for an additional parcel, added to the 90-acre development. The city projects spending \$10 million to develop the project, to be paid for through bond sales, a land sale to the condo developer and golf course proceeds.

Commissioners Paula Hayes and Khalil Atwa asked Chuck Olsen, parks and recreation facility designer, if footings for the building might disturb the

Please see SAN MARINO, A2



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DRISLER

Fore!: Plans were unveiled Thursday for San Marino.

THE WEEK AHEAD

Planning Commission: The Farmington Hills Planning Commission will meet at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 6 at City Hall to conduct a regular meeting and study session. On the regular agenda are reviews of site plans for a day care center at 24423 Orchard Lake Road and a car dealership at 38700 Grand River. At their study session, members will discuss wetland mitigation for the Farmington Corporate Campus and zoning text amendments.

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Crash kills Illinois man

A 76-year-old man from Highland Park, Ill., was killed Thursday evening in an accident on 12 Mile Road, just east of Orchard Lake.

Police said the driver was pulling onto 12 Mile Road from northbound Stansbury, when his car was struck by an east-bound sport utility vehicle, driven by a 30-year-old Southfield woman. Both drivers were alone in their vehicles.

According to Sgt. Patrick Comini, the victim was taken to Betsford Hospital by Community EMS, where he was pronounced dead. Police say alcohol is not believed to be a factor.

While an investigation into the crash continues, Police Chief Bill Dwyer said the SUV driver would probably not be charged with any infraction. A traffic reconstructionist from within the department is evaluating the scene.

Comini said the name of the victim may be released early next week.

Survey says: Time gives students a different perspective about Farmington Schools' quality

BY JONI HUBRED
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The results of the first-ever Farmington Public Schools Senior Exit Survey are in, giving officials and administrators a look at how this spring's graduates feel about their school experience.

Barbara Cherem, Director of Assessment, Evaluation and Special Projects, said the survey was done because the district had gotten a poor response from surveys sent to graduates a year after they left the district.

Only 127 graduates from the Class of 2000 returned surveys; 527 came back from 2001 graduates.

"We had the largest response from North, and a good representation from both Farmington and Harrison," Cherem said.

Board members saw the overall survey results at their Nov. 20 meeting. A break-out of responses from each high school is distributed to principals.

"They can go through that with their department chairs and NCA (North Central Accreditation) team," Cherem said. "There's different people with different interests. The climate of the school is a major issue the administration would be interested in."

Students were asked questions that related to general school climate and academic quality. In addition, Cherem said, the survey included questions about preparation for being a responsible citizen and participation in the arts, which were identified as indicators of student success at a community meeting held last year.

Though the participation levels were vastly different, comparisons were made between the Class of 2000 and Class of 2001. Overall, students who had been out of the district for a year rated Farmington Schools higher. In overall academic preparation, use of technology and teachers showing an interest or helping with problems, positive responses

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Senior Exit Survey

Overall Academic Preparation Excellent/Above Average-63.8%

Preparing for Life After High School Excellent/Above Average-45.5%