

IN THE PAPER TODAY

ENTERTAINMENT

On location: Film-maker Jim Jabara leaves the wild and documentaries behind to tell a fictionalized story about a little boy with cerebral palsy in his new made-in-Michigan film./B1

AT HOME

Nature at hand: Gail Dudzinski looks at the peonies from her aunt's garden that now are among the beautiful blooms in Dudzinski's back yard./C1

HOMETOWN LIFE

Historically speaking: This house, which was once owned by the voice of the Lone Ranger Earle Graser, has been listed in the National Register of Historic Places./C5

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Hills forecasts small tax hike

BY PAUL R. PACE
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All good things must come to an end. After six years of Farmington Hills city officials taking pride in having property taxes locked into the same rate year after year, there will be a slight tax increase for the next fiscal year.

But the hike will be about the same cost of a soda, burger and fries for a resident with a home valued at \$200,000.

Such a resident should only pay an extra \$6.71 a year, said city manager

Steve Brock.

The city's millage rate for property owners for the last six years was 10.165 mills. It will increase to 10.221 mills starting July 1. A mill is \$1 for every \$1,000 of home's state equalized value, usually half its market value.

"It's a small but necessary increase that will all go toward paying the debt for the new court building," Brock told the city council at a recent meeting.

The new 47th District Court, scheduled to open in November, is estimated to cost about \$17 million, which includes the bond debt to pay for its

construction.

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett said she and other members of council tried to come up with ways not to raise the property tax rate during recent budget hearing sessions.

"The only way to pay (for the court-house) was to raise our taxes," she said.

Despite the expected decrease in state shared revenues and increases in employee health insurance costs, council members praised the administration for keeping the budget in line with only a sliver of tax increase.

"I don't know how you do it," said

councilman Jerry Ellis.

Councilman Barry Brickner also praised the administration.

"The budget is very tight, rates are going up, but Steve Brock can still balance that budget," he said. "I appreciate the work Steve does."

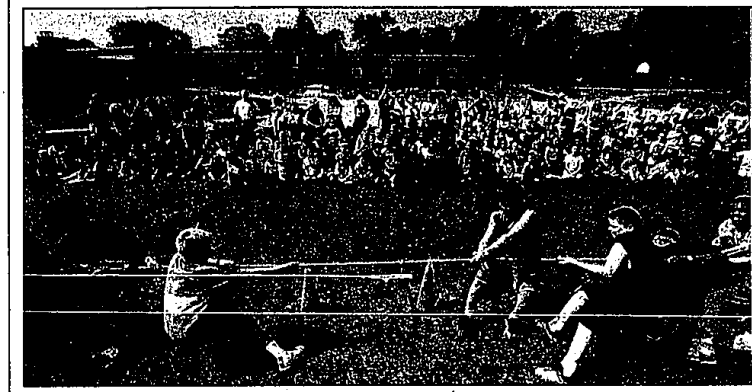
Mayor Nancy Bates said, "When you create a community, everyone gives a little bit to help. It's an outstanding budget."

Budget highlights

Among 2002-03 budget highlights is the addition of one new employee, an

Please see TAXES, A4

A taste of summer



Showdown: William Grace Elementary fifth graders (above, left) from Kathy Maczko and Tracey Hawkins classes had their big tug of war showdown during field day activities at the end of the school year. Hawkins' class won the contest. Tyler Olejniczak (right) enjoys a slice of watermelon while taking a break from William Grace Elementary's field day activities.

HR chief leaves Farmington for the Pointes

BY SUE BUCK
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Larry Lobert, executive director for human resources for Farmington Schools officially leaves this week for the Grosse Pointe Public School District, where he will be director of human resources.



"It's the lead position in the department," Lobert said.

All five Grosse Pointes are included in the district, along with a portion of Harper Woods.

Grosse Pointe has 9,000 students compared to Farmington's 12,000 and 1,100 employees compared to the 1,600 employees who are on Farmington's payroll.

Lobert, who has worked six years for the Farmington School District, has been active outside the district in his profession. He is president of Michigan Association of School Personnel Administrators.

David Ruhland, associate director for labor relations for Oakland Schools, will replace Lobert Sept. 1.

"He's a great guy," Lobert said. "He is extremely approachable, open, funny. He has a great knowledge base as an attorney."

Lobert couldn't be happier with the location of his new job because he and his wife, Bonnie, a human resource supervisor for Utica Schools live in Grosse Pointe with their children.

"We worked with a group of principals and worked with Calvin Clark, one of our parents," Lobert said. A fusion of Internet technology, Gallup Corporation hiring tools, complete with network access and scanning streamlined the process. "It brought together as good and efficient a hiring model as there was out there in the private sector."

Applicants can complete an application, an initial measurement screening process using Gallup Corporation tools, and submit paper documents they want to scan and attach to their resume.

"It funnels in candidates, expedites and gives us a competitive edge," Lobert said. "It's a work in progress, we change it all the time."

The model was in full operation by 1997.

Larry Lobert

Grant, 5, and Chloe, 2. Grant will attend a school in their neighborhood.

"We just love Farmington Schools and we were in the process of doing some house hunting," Lobert said. "We were talking about getting in the same neighborhood for our kids. A vacancy came up right in my backyard."

Lobert's office is 12 blocks away from his home.

A new way

Lobert brought hiring process into the modern era. He was preceded by Bob Coleman, a Farmington resident, who Lobert said laid an excellent foundation for his department.

Lobert said when he took over, there was no means commercially available to bring the hiring process onto the Internet.

Talent assessment

Gallup is the leading vendor in talent-based hiring tools, he said. "Everyone comes to us with a set of knowledge and skills," Lobert said. "The part which Gallup looks at is a talent assessment."

It can tell the natural tendencies that makes people great educators. "It tells us what a person is made up of and how they approach other people, some of the key talents they do their

Please see LOBERT, A5

Botsford Hospital takes action to deal with deficit

BY PAUL R. PACE
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Botsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills is working on fixing a \$18.1 million deficit accrued in 2001 and has a plan to be back in the black by 2004.

Peg Reihmer, vice president of planning, marketing and development, said the community hospital, like many across the country, have taken huge financial hits in the past 18 months.

But, she said, the hospital will continue to make patient care its top priority while it fixes the shortfalls with the help of a health care financial consultant.

"I would like to reassure people, we've been here a long time and we intend to stay here," she said. "We're optimistic about the course we're on. We'll be around."

The loss, the worst in the hospital's 37-year history, is attributed to a number of factors, Reihmer said.

An increase in treating patients without health insurance or those who have not paid their bills is one major issue. Others are reductions in Medicaid reimbursement and that, due to a recent reorganization, HMO health care provider Omnicare is no longer

Please see DEFICIT, A4

Road Watch: construction update

Information for Road Watch is supplied by the Road Commission for Oakland County (www.roccocb.org). Information is subject to change.

Farmington

- Road: Farmington Road, south of Nine Mile to Grand River — This section of Farmington is closed to southbound traffic as the RCOC reconstructs and widens the road. During the project, the detour route for southbound traffic is Grand River, Drake and Nine Mile. Motorists traveling northbound on Farmington should expect delays and are encouraged to use the detour route as well. Completion is expected Sept. 30 (section north of Slocum to be done by July 15).

Farmington Hills

- Road: 12 Mile at Orchard Lake Road — The RCOC is widening this intersection (adding a right-turn lane to westbound 12 Mile and extending the right-turn lane on eastbound 12 Mile). Completion is expected July 15.
- Road: 12 Mile Road, Farmington Road to Orchard Lake Road — RCOC is resurfacing this road. Work is expected to begin on June 26 and end June 30.
- Road: Middlebelt Road, Northwestern Highway to 14 Mile Road — RCOC is resurfacing this road. Work is expected to begin June 26 and end June 30.