

# Farmington Observer Eccentric

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## Cooperation critical

# Residents key to housing code success

By RON GARBENSKI

The fate of Farmington Hills' new housing code rests in the hands of the residents. That's the word from Richard Miller, building supervisor for Farmington Hills. "The success of the building program depends on the people of Farmington Hills. They must realize that it is for their own good and cooperate with the code," he says.

The new housing ordinance, which takes effect today, will bring existing homes that are in an unsafe condition up to par with what city officials expect to see under this new standard.

"When neighbors see the bad guy in the

neighborhood fixing up his home, then many people will start to fix up their homes, too."

"And that is what we want to see happen. We would rather others fix up their homes voluntarily than for us to get tough and end up in court," Miller explains.

THE CITY has taken a basic housing property maintenance code enforced by many other cities throughout the country, and has made several revisions in it to fit the city's own ordinances.

"We have made several revisions in the basic model code we adopted," Miller continues.

"Our amendments are a few necessities the city felt were needed to fit in with our

other codes and the special problems of our city, particularly in the older neighborhood where something must be done with the buildings in need of repair."

The building department began working on the new ordinance last July. It studied the codes of at least six other cities before deciding to adopt the new housing law.

"We felt if we adopted a nationally recognized code, it would give us better standards to follow," says Dick Young, housing code inspector.

"One of the major provisions of the code is that residents have the right to appeal. They can take their complaint to the Housing Board of Appeals for review as long as they do it within 30 days."

Young will begin inspecting the worst

properties in the city first. He will concentrate on the southeast section of the city where most of the older buildings in need of repair are located.

THERE ARE a lot of small homes in that area and special problems apply because of the financial status of many residents.

"What we are trying to do is improve their living conditions," says Young. "We want to show them, through our expertise and experience, what they will gain and how they will benefit by fixing up their properties."

"It is going to cost money, but it will reduce fire hazards and will make the community a better place to live," he continues. "In order to make this ordinance work, the community must become involved and cooperate with the building and housing departments."

Federal money may be available for area residents to use in fixing up their homes, but that possibility lies in the future, says Young.

"We may be able to apply for federal grants or low interest loans for home repairs sometime in the near future," he says.

"But first we must get the housing program moving before we can even consider qualifying for any loans or grants. And then we must show a need for them."

A provision of the new housing ordinance calls for a penalty of 90 days or jail, a \$500 fine or both if a resident fails to comply with the law within a certain time period.

"With this penalty, we have brought us firmly to the city housing code and every one will be treated fairly under the law no matter where they live," Miller explains.

YOUNG'S DUTIES as minimum housing code inspector are sponsored for two years by a federal grant. The grant requires the city to develop the housing code and see that it is enforced throughout the city.

Under the new law, Young will inspect housing in Farmington Hills and make sure plumbing, heating and other major equipment and facilities are safe.

"This law allows us to get in touch with absentee landlords or owners of vacant and abandoned buildings and tell them to fix up their homes. If at a public hearing, the city council decides the building should be demolished, the owner has 10 days to get the building down."

"If not, then the city will take bids for its removal. Accept the lowest bid and have it demolished. We then will apply the bid for demolition as a tax lien against the owner," says Young.

"What will stress under the new law is due process. We will not make a decision without city council action. They will de-

cide, based on our recommendations whether or not to demolish the buildings," adds Miller.

In the past, the city has enforced the unsafe building ordinance adopted by Farmington Hills when it became a city in 1974.

This code now will be used as a back up provision for the new housing ordinance, which the city council approved last month and scheduled to take effect March 1.

ACCORDING TO the two building officials, this ordinance is more comprehensive than the state code the city enforced before March 1.

"The state law is rather antiquated. The new law is a lot better and gives us more leverage to provide for a good housing picture for construction in the future," adds Miller.

The bulk of the initial program to improve housing conditions will center around the southeast section of the city, but as we gradually make inspections and pull the community up by its best straps, we will get around to inspect every section of the city," says Miller.

With the new guidelines, the building officials say they are anxious to rid the city of all substandard housing.

It may take a while to be effective and show some worthwhile results, but it will be worth the wait," concludes Young.



Once the little gymnast from North Farmington High, now the six-footer from Michigan State, Al Burchi practices floor exercises. (Photo by Laura Fittler)

## Patterson prolonging his 'toughest' decision

By RON GARBENSKI

"This case is the toughest one I have ever faced in my three years as prosecuting attorney," Brooks Patterson said last week.

The Oakland County Prosecutor's office is weighing whether to press criminal charges against the Farmington School District or certain employees for the Jan. 9 electrocution death of Robert Kortjan, an East Junior High School eighth grade student.

The case itself is so complex and the ramifications are so grave for the school district, its teachers, the community and especially the Kortjan family that it will

take a great deal more thought before we can make a decision to prosecute," Patterson said.

The prosecutor's office has been reviewing reports on the electrocution from the Farmington Hills Police Department, the State Police Crime Lab in Plymouth and several other agencies since the last week in January.

PATTERSON SAID that his office possibly would have a decision by the end of February but the seriousness of the case has caused the prosecutor to prolong his decision.

"My staff and I have been going over all the facts and I must admit there is more to this than meets the eye," he continued.

Its impact on the community and the far reaching effects on the Kortjan family are so great that I feel more and more that a decision must be given this case.

Patterson explained that it will be about two more weeks before his department will make a decision on whether to prosecute the district or individual staff members.

The prosecutor's office talked with the last shop teacher last week and will meet with several other key individuals in the case before reaching any conclusion.

Kortjan was electrocuted while attempting to unplug a defective buffer machine from a faulty extension cord during a shop class at East.

# Gymnastic ace faces challenge of college sports

By ANN WILLIAMSON

Back when Al Burchi was competing in gymnastics at North Farmington High School, things came easily for him.

He was short, 5 feet 11 inches—perfect for a light, bouncy, fast exercise man. The judges loved him. The coaches loved him. The audience loved him.

Then the bubble burst. Burchi grew up. He still competes in gymnastics at Mich-

igan State University under the watchful eye of coach George Synola, but the 26-year-old junior doesn't draw the attention he once received in high school.

No longer the little guy who drew a lot of sympathy, as he puts it, Burchi now stands six feet tall—hardly a complimentary height for a tumblers—and is still adjusting to the changes those eight inches have made on his performance.

An older teammate of mine when I was at North Farmington used to get mad at me for the things I could do in tumbling because I was small," Burchi reflected. "He used to say I was the little guy doing all the big guy tricks."

But his high school coach, Dennis Fitzgerald, used to always say, "Watch—Burchi's going to come back from summer vacation all legs and be lanky and uncoor-

dated." And he was right, he added with a touch of disappointment.

IT WASN'T JUST the additional height, however, that spoiled Burchi's eyes when he joined the Spartans gymnastics team after graduating in 1973.

All his accomplishments and honors from his days at North Farmington, including three straight years on the varsity squad, a second-place ranking of the state

on floor exercise his junior year and being selected for all-conference honors, most valuable team gymnast and team captain his senior year, meant nothing when he stepped through the doors of MSU in January.

"There was always that belief about college gymnastics in high school that once you went to college, they'd have to give you high scores," Burchi said.

"Maybe it was just recklessness on my part, but I was amazed to see how many good floor exercise performers the team all ready had."

"So now I'm not counted on for the team," he explained. "If I don't do well, there's always somebody ready to take my place."

The change from North Farmington to MSU has changed Burchi both in his views and attitudes about the sport of gymnastics. Although he works out every day at the gym, Burchi only competes three or four times a season, despite the respect-able \$25 average he held last year after three meets.

He becomes discouraged often, wearing at the end of each gymnastics season that it will be his last. But Burchi has now developed the attitude that gymnastics can be beneficial for other reasons than taking scores in the spotlight.

"I ENJOYED BEING the star attraction in high school. I was a super-dedicated gymnast," Burchi said.

He paused then added, "But now that I look at it this way," he said, "At least working out gives me something to do other than watch the Three Stooges every afternoon."

Three days later, Burchi put it all together—an 8.5 score against Big Ten Champion Michigan and an 8.75 mark the following day against third-ranked Southern Illinois University—both his highest scores in his gymnastics career at MSU.

And all Burchi did was smile.

## At Farmington High

# Faculty wants to get third degree

Farmington High School faculty members want parents to give them the third degree.

To do this, the school is sponsoring one-hour parent orientation sessions at 9:30 a.m. every day, this week.

The purpose of our orientation program is to let parents of eighth grade students who will be entering the ninth grade next year, the opportunity to see what senior high school is all about," says Farmington Principal Clayton Graham.

Generally speaking, we want parents to give us the third degree in order to find out what goes on at our school.

"Since it will be a first-time adventure for many parents as well as the children, we want to give them all the facts about high school," he continues.

Teachers and counselors will be available for parents to talk with and they will discuss programs, courses and activities of level incoming high school students. The sessions begin today and continue through Friday. Parents of incoming ninth graders for the 1975-76 school year will meet with teachers in informal sessions to have their questions answered.

SINCE BEGINNING senior high is a difficult transition period for many students, Graham says this program will be geared to helping parents understand what life is like at Farmington High.

"This way they'll be better able to cope

with their children's problems," he explains.

"This will be extremely beneficial for parents who never have had children in high school before," the Farmington principal says.

"We have set up orientation so that they can get all their concerns about courses, activities and even the socialized high school problems answered. We'll try to touch on every aspect of high school life."

At the end of the one-hour long conferences, parents will be given questionnaires and unanswered queries will be responded to at a later date. Parents also will have the opportunity to make comments about the program.

Farmington High School expects to enroll about 900 new sixth graders from its feeder junior high schools next year.

Eighth graders from East Farmington, Powell and Brahan Junior High Schools, Farmington High's feeder schools, will have orientation programs at the school later in the year.

WE HAVE the potential for at least 1,000 parents at the meetings," says Graham. "And we're hoping that everyone of those parents will come out and see what the school has to offer their children."

Two main topics to be discussed at the parents orientation will be career education and how students can benefit from the programs offered at the senior high

Parents wishing to attend any of the orientation sessions should contact the Farmington High principal's office at 634-1516 to make an appointment for the program.

The award is made possible through a grant from the Michigan Council for the Arts.

Mrs. Marlene Belanger, president of the Farmington Community Arts Council, says this first artist-in-residence award is a "pilot program designed to fit with our continuing emphasis on innovative programming."

Arts council members are hopeful that this kind of recognition will act as an incentive to artists and help establish recognized artists as respected members of the community.

"Honorariums," the state-furnished in-kind of the library, was a gift to the City of Farmington Hills from Dr. Allen Zager, executive director of Eastland General Hospital.

Many organizations in the community submitted names of nominees to a committee made up of Gordon Lewis, library

director, Jan Dalton, Farmington Hills councilmember, Pat Houston, and Bruce Robinson.

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## inside

News  
Sports  
Community Life  
Bridge  
Classified

Section A  
679  
Section B  
Section C

### FUN AND GAMES

Find out about the wide variety of programs offered for pre-school and elementary youngsters sponsored by the Farmington Hills Branch Library for March and April on Page 1.