

# Farmington Observer

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It's a three-man effort as Brian Connell, Jeff Gabel and Kent Sebastian collect sap for their syrup-making project. (Staff photos by Harry Maute)

## Continued declines predicted Task force eyes middle school

Declining enrollment and the resulting loss in state aid has led to the investigation of middle schools for Farmington students by the Task Force on School Organizational Structure (SOS).

The group decided this week to investigate two school districts presently using middle schools (grades six to eight) rather than junior highs (grades seven through nine).

In the Farmington school district, students presently attend elementary schools (kindergarten through six), junior highs (seven through nine), and high schools (10-12). Some experts believe implementing middle schools would be less expensive and result in a better use of space.

Brighton's two middle schools will be the subjects of the first task force visit, scheduled for late April.

During this week's meeting, the task force considered enrollment projections and implications; characteristics of Farmington's staff; and the alternatives in school organization mandated by declining enrollment.

"It's unlikely you will have a reversal in declining enrollment," said Dr. Fred Ignatovich, Michigan State University education professor and consulting chairman to the SOS task force.

Farmington is basically a relocation

rather than a growth area, Ignatovich concluded from his studies, which is one reason why he expects student population decline to continue.

"FOR ENROLLMENT FIGURES to change, what would have to happen is a substantial change in the community in terms of industrial and residential building," he said. "It's possible, but it's unlikely."

Ignatovich presented gloomy projections of continued decline, varying from 300-600 students lost per year. Private school enrollment is increasing, he added.

"The results reaffirm that the charge of this task force is still very serious," he said. "People were looking for a reversal, but it didn't happen."

He believes preparing for the most pessimistic figures, in terms of student loss, is preferable to planning for any unexpected increases.

"A reversal would mean you'd have to deal with a problem that is familiar," he said. "Some people project a slight increase in five years, but that won't lead to a population boom but rather to a steadier birth rate."

The other seven members of the task force are chairman Earl Baumrunk, director of vocational and career education; resident representatives Betty Nicolay and Jack Inch; administration representatives Al Langan and Donald Keen; Farmington Education Association representative Douglas Cooper; and Parent-Teacher Association representative Suzanne von Ende.

Using statistics collected by the Oakland County intermediate school district, Ignatovich computed present staff characteristics, an important factor in considering a change in school structure, he said.

His results, considering age and experience, reveal that 32 per cent of the staff of 830 are relatively young with six to 10 years of teaching experience. The greatest percentage of the elementary staff is 45-49 with 11-15 years of experience.

The implications of the statistics show that few Farmington teachers can be expected to retire and few teachers will be hired in the coming years.

"WHATEVER CHANGES take place, they won't be with new blood," he said. "Any adjustments will have to be made with existing staff, not recruitments."

Ignatovich presented the task force with six possible sites to visit to get an impression of a middle school in operation. The task force decided to

visit Brighton Public Schools first, since Brighton has two middle schools, grades six through eight, each using different philosophies.

"Brighton Middle School is a middle school in transition," Ignatovich said, "while the other is very small and housed in a wing of the senior high."

Ignatovich reported that the principals use different approaches along with different structures.

Berkley will be the second district visited, since the consensus of the task force was to visit a district that recently had converted to middle schools because of declining enrollment.

"Berkley is in its second year of operation, having converted from a seven through nine to a six through eight approach," he said.

Resident representative Betty Nicolay was especially interested in Berkley's results with ninth graders placed in a senior high situation. PTA representative Suzanne von Ende said Berkley would be a good choice since financial implications had determined the conversion.

Task force members will also be studying texts about the middle school and other educational alternatives until their next monthly meeting.



Teacher Mrs. Sally Wilson wields a mean drill to the delight of her sixth grade students; but drilling for sap doesn't hurt the tree, she says.

## Police intensify hunt for Tim King's slayer

By MARY CONNELLY-SZCZESNY, JOE MARTHUCI and BARBARA UNDERWOOD

Parents increased efforts to protect their children and police doubled their manpower in the hours after the body of 11-year-old Timothy King of Farmington was discovered on Gill Road in Livonia late Tuesday.

The body of the Adams School sixth grader—still clothed in the red nylon jacket emblazoned with Birmingham Hockey Association patches he was last seen in—was found at 11 p.m. in a ditch alongside Gill Road, 359 feet south of Eight Mile Road in Livonia.

Tim's skateboard was beside his still-warm body when police arrived. Livonia fire fighters tried in vain to resuscitate the child.

Based on a preliminary autopsy report released Wednesday afternoon, police said Tim had been sexually assaulted. They set the time of his death between 6 and 8 p.m. Tuesday, and said the cause of death was suffocation. Some marks on his body indicated that his hands and feet had been bound, according to Livonia police chief Robert Turner.

The autopsy also revealed Tim had eaten corn and fowl about two hours before his death.

His body was found cleansed and fully clothed. Tim had been murdered elsewhere and left on Gill Road, police said.

Tim's parents, Barry and Marion King, issued a statement through the Birmingham Police Department Wednesday afternoon.

The couple said they "wanted to express their great gratitude to the Birmingham Police Department, all investigative forces and all others who put forth such a tremendous effort in the search for Tim."

"Our neighbors and friends have surrounded us with love," they said, "and made this time of waiting bearable."

"We are truly thankful for the prayers and concerns of everyone, and the sensitivity accorded us by the media."

"Like all of us," Tim's parents said, "we wished the search had come to a successful conclusion."

About 200 detectives from Wayne and Oakland counties joined the case Wednesday and began to search for Tim's abductor, who police theorize is a professional or businessman.

Tim disappeared from his Birmingham neighborhood about 8:30 p.m. Monday while walking to the Hunter Maple Pharmacy, 655 E. Maple. The store is about four blocks from the King home at 1509 Yorkshire in the northeast section of Birmingham.

A SENSE OF gloom hung over Timothy's neighborhood Wednesday. Grief-stricken neighbors were hard pressed to put their emotions into words.

"I'm just sick," said one woman who asked that her name not be used. "I didn't sleep all night. I heard the news on a late bulletin."

Helen Mitchell, 1724 Yorkshire, said she was "very stunned." Her son, Larry, said, "It's pretty shocking. But I think many people expected something like this to happen."

"Sadness and compassion and a sense of love for our neighborhood and the people of our town," were the emotions expressed by Joan Greir, 1548 Yorkshire, "I just feel a great desire to do something to help our children save."

ANOTHER RESIDENT who requested anonymity said she felt "very sad and has much sympathy for Timothy's parents. It's a terrible tragedy. I can hardly talk about it."

Mrs. Glen Smith, 1685 Yorkshire, added, "We all feel very sad and very sorry for the mother. She's a very nice gal."

"I talked to one neighbor who has three girls. She said they were nearly in shock and didn't feel like going to school today."

A couple blocks away, at 1525 Yosemite, Esther Morgan said, "I feel so damn sick it's not funny. Sick to my very soul."

BIRMINGHAM SCHOOLS announced Wednesday that flags at all buildings will be flown at half staff until after funeral services are held Friday for Timothy.

Donald Peckenpaugh, Birmingham school superintendent, also said a social worker and psychologist will help any Adams School youngsters who may be frightened because of Tim's murder.

"I have no reason to believe they will be needed, but I took that precaution," Peckenpaugh said.

Bus drivers and mechanics working for the school system organized a bake sale Wednesday to begin a memorial fund for Tim. The bake sale will be held at 10 a.m. April 2 at the Birmingham Ice Sports Arena, 2300 E. Lincoln.

"Children are our business around here," explained Virginia Lamb, secretary at the bus garage. "This has happened twice now to children very, very close to us."

She said she was referring to the murder of Kristine Mihelich of Berkley, whose body was found Jan. 21 in Franklin. The 10-year-old disappeared Jan. 2 after buying a magazine at a party store.

TIM'S PARENTS, and his two brothers and sister, remained secluded Wednesday.

## Sugar maples yield nature's nectar

By LYNN ORR

What could be more natural for an elementary school surrounded by maple sugar trees than a syrup-making project in the spring?

Forest Elementary School teachers once again are taking advantage of the natural learning center in their backyard of Rolling Oaks subdivision to make maple syrup.

Although the high point of the project may be a pancake breakfast or syrup-topped ice cream, nature, chemistry and math all have a role to play in the learning process.

Mrs. Sally Wilson's sixth-grade students are in charge of tapping trees, collecting sap and boiling the sap into maple syrup.

"First we drill the holes into the trees, then we tap them by putting a spile on and attach the buckets," explains Ron Fisher. Along with the rest of the class, Ron has learned more about nature by identifying a sugar maple by the bark and how and why the sap runs.

"THE SAP RUNS better when it's a little cold, about 40 degrees," says Ron. But Mrs. Wilson explains that this year the sap quit running when it hit the low 40s.

"Because of the winter, it's frosted so far down that it takes a warmer temperature to get it going," she says, adding that usually the sap runs through 30-degree temperatures.

While the students run amid the trees, checking the amount of sap in coffee cans and milk gallon containers attached to the trees, it is obvious that the spring project is a favorite.

Usually six students go out each day to check the buckets and collect the sap. If a lower-level class wants to get in on the act, the sixth graders become guides, instructing the "little kids" about sap-collecting.

Once the sap is collected, it is put into one large kettle boiling on the school's stove under the watchful eyes of Mrs. Wilson and the custodian.

"Last year I let it go too far, and the kids learned about maple sugar candy," she says ruefully. This year everyone's watching the boiling process to get as much syrup as possible, hopefully enough for a pancake breakfast.

"One big kettle boils down to about a saucenap of syrup," says Mrs. Wilson, but quantity depends on quality of the sap.

"AT THE BEGINNING and end,

Whether the origin is legend or fact, the students are convinced it's a good story, and most of them like "our maple syrup" better than the mostly artificial syrups in stores.

The one thing that bothers them about the project is the recurring vandalism. Last year, unknown vandals shot holes into the cans with beebees guns, and the students lost a good portion of the sap. This year they've had some trouble with vandals removing the spiles and throwing them on the ground.

"The trail has been vandalized, and some of the trees cut for new construction behind us have been dragged into the area," says Mrs. Wilson regretfully. New construction if the subdivision has substantially reduced the nature area around the school, and the kids just hope they can keep what's left.

By the way, if you're wondering how sap collectors avoid coming home empty-handed like berry pickers who gobble the goodies immediately, the secret is that before sap is boiled down, it not only looks like water, it has much the same taste.

But the chemical transformation is a marvel—for the eyes as well as the tongue.

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