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Keeping kids in school gets economic boost

By MARY GNIEWEK

Farmington High has \$115,000 in federal money this year to develop a model system for drawing dropouts back to the classrooms.

In the second year of a five-year joint grant with Oakland University, administrators have developed a pilot program that places return dropouts in a normal school setting.

Other districts, such as Livonia, have programs that place returning dropouts in a special school.

"We're trying to get kids back in school and keep them there, or find other alternatives for them," said Richard Ruitler, administrative coordinator.

"We don't spend enough time with them to look at beauty school, auto mechanics, night school or tell them what else is available."

IN OCTOBER, a program will begin at Power Junior High for students identified as potential dropouts.

"Hopefully, we'll intervene before they get to the dropout stage," Ruitler said.

The grant also establishes a teacher in-service program that will focus on how to work with and accept students who don't fit into the mainstream. Several lectures have been scheduled through the end of the year and will be open to the community.

Over the summer, an attempt was made by the school to contact 90 recent Farmington High dropouts. Those 90 included transfers to other schools and students who moved out of the district. Of those, 15 decided to come back, one of whom opted for night school.

Before the opening of school, the return dropouts were interviewed and scheduled by a coordinator. If they had difficulty with a certain instructor in the past, they got a different teacher.

If they wanted to work, they were put on a co-op program.

Some were sent to the vocational education center Farmington shares with other Oakland County school districts in Walled Lake. There, they can become licensed in one of eight careers, such as cosmetology, food service, or auto mechanics.

A VOLUNTEER CORP was drafted. Each student was matched with an adult from the community. A center is used in the school for student counseling and tutoring.

"Some students needed a non-judgmental adult they could feel comfortable talking with," Ruitler said. "The whole idea is to build enough support so that a student feels there are people he or she can rely on."

When the model program is complete, it will be written up for other school systems in the country to examine.

High school dropout rates are rising. In Farmington, the most recent figures show 151 dropouts in 1975-76, 144 in 1976-77, and 183 in 1977-78. They drop out for reasons of employment, marriage or too much absenteeism that leaves them hopelessly behind.

In Farmington, the dropout rate is between 3 and 3.5 percent. Statewide, it

is almost 7 percent. One school administrator thinks the rate is really much higher.

"I think the state uses the wrong formula," said Terry Thomas, director of pupil personnel for Oakland County. "They figure the percentage from one September to the next."

"To really get a handle on it, they should record all incoming ninth graders. Then count the number four years later."

"Figure how many dropped and divide that number. I think it's about 28 percent over four years."

Most dropouts leave school in tenth grade when they are 16, the legal age at which they can drop. Their reasons are many.

"Maybe they get in with a crowd of kids who are not interested in school," Ruitler said. "Or they could be attracted to a job. Some of them had gotten into drug abuse. They might think that no one cares about them."

"Kids not willing or able to find success at school find other ways that will

make them feel successful."

It's hard to stereotype the dropout student, Ruitler said they come from all socioeconomic backgrounds, are equally divided between male and female, and are average or above average in intelligence.

"We're meeting Oct. 10 with parents of the return dropouts. They're supportive of our efforts and would like to see their children stay in school," Ruitler said.

The next in a series of free community lectures on the subject will be held tomorrow, Tuesday, at 4:30 p.m. at William Grace elementary school media center.

The topic will be "Agency responses to disruptive and troubled youth." Mrs. Mary Anne Melican, director of social services, St. Vincent Sarah Fisher Home, will be a speaker.

Also speaking will be James Patton of the Farmington Advisory Council, Sgt. Richard Murphy of the Farmington Hills police and Jack McElroy of Boys Republic.

...but it's tough for the dropouts

By MARY GNIEWEK

What causes kids to drop out of school?

(A) Family background; (B) Teachers; (C) Poor grades; (D) Peer pressure.

Maybe the answer is a combination of all of the above in some cases, but for a trio at Farmington High, the answer is: (E) Skipped so many classes and got so far behind that it was futile to stay.

"I just didn't want to bother with school. I used to come in, skip a few classes, party and then go home," said Jackie, 16.

"You can skip but they ain't gonna kick you out. But it ain't worth staying because you're so far behind, it's just not worth it."

Jackie is one of 14 students taking part in a new program at Farmington High this year. Its intent: To bring dropouts back to school and keep them there, or find other alternatives for them.

Ninety students dropped out of Farmington High last year. That includes transfers to other schools, moves out of the district, and students who switched to night school.

Attempts were made to contact all 90. Of 76 called during the summer, 14 (mostly 10th-graders) were lured back. This time, Jackie thinks she's going to make it. So do Steve and Tracy, two other 16-year-olds who dropped out last year but came back.

Funded by a joint federal grant with Oakland University, a network of teachers, administrators and volunteer parents has been established to give these students extra attention and support — things sometimes overlooked in

a school with 1,325 students.

JACKIE ADMITS there were several attempts by teachers and administrators last year to find out what her problem was and keep her in school. But Steve and Tracy said their habitual skipping was scarcely noticed.

"I never had a problem leaving school," said Steve, a tall dark-haired youth who was on the football team last year.

"Even if someone sees you leaving, you can talk your way out of it," Jackie, an articulate blond dressed in a Bad Company T-shirt and jeans, agreed.

"I used to skip four times a day. It's really hard to get busted. Sometimes, the teacher might say something to you about it. When I got caught, I'd talk my way out of it so they wouldn't call my parents."

"You can't blame the teachers," she continued. "Some are nice, others are rude and inconsiderate. But it's not one-sided."

"If a kid doesn't want to be here, it's like an alcoholic. You can't help someone who doesn't want help." Jackie, Steve and Tracy said there was never a scarcity of friends to skip with.

"We'd go to McDonald's or cruise — smoke a couple of joints sometimes, not always," Steve said.

Sometimes they would go to Farmington city park, go shopping, visit friends or just drive around.

"Maybe I was rebelling," said Jackie. "I told myself I didn't like school because I had to be there. I wanted to

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Hawaiian Paradise

Traveling through Hawaii is just about everyone's dream vacation. For Doug and Mary Harmala, a biking tour led to adventure, beauty and new-found friends. Doug (right) helps Hawaiian resident Bob

Hanus harvest a 100-pound bunch of bananas. To read of their adventures and how the couple came to know the Hanusas, turn to the Suburban Life section.

Coaching contract formula garners mixed reactions

By MARY GNIEWEK

Some Farmington athletic coaches aren't happy with a section of the new teachers' contract, which changed the formula used to compute their pay.

An outline of the two-year agreement was released to the Farmington

Observer last week — after the district's 770 teachers overwhelmingly accepted the pact. The school board is expected to approve the contract tomorrow night.

Under the formula, high school swimming and basketball coaches

won't get a raise this year. In fact, they would have taken a pay cut if the union and school district hadn't agreed to freeze their pay at last year's rate.

Junior high assistant coaches in all sports will get bigger paychecks this year.

Part of the reason for the switch in formula is to avoid lawsuits from coaches who may feel shortchanged, according to Farmington Education Association president Tom Chrzanowski.

Coaching and other special jobs were assigned a number of points in the contract. The points are converted into a percentage (roughly one third the number of points) of the teachers salary to figure pay.

For instance, a coach with 24 points will earn 8 percent of his regular salary for coaching. Pay is based on an 11-step seniority scale: from \$11,643 to \$25,029.

"The point system better reflects equal pay for equal work," Chrzanowski said.

POINTS ARE GIVEN for hours required, the number of students in-

(Continued on page 2A)

Duquete robbed 4th time in 3 years

An early morning robbery netted thieves the contents of a display window in front of Duquete Jewelers in Farmington Plaza Shopping Center.

The theft of five yellow-gold wedding ring sets and three solid gold watches in the window marks the fourth time in three years the jeweler has been robbed. The contents of the window are estimated to be worth slightly less than \$10,000.

That means the store owned by Allen and Dan Duquete won't be able to collect on their \$10,000 deductible insurance policy, they said.

"It's discouraging," said Allen Duquete. "It's a hazard in the profession. You can't let your guard down for a second."

The owner blames himself for the theft, saying it was the first time in six months the jewelry was left in the display window overnight. The night be-

fore the robbery, he forgot to take in the display.

While Farmington Police look for the thieves, Duquete remains determined to remain in business.

"I like the business so much I can't imagine what it's like to be in another profession," he said.

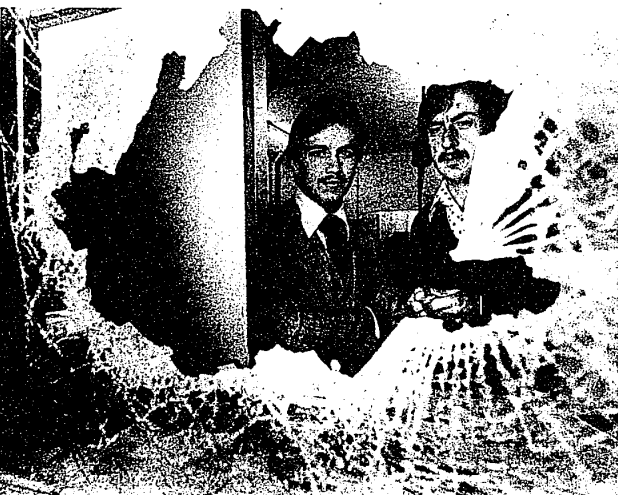
The thieves were helped by the window's insulation in taking the merchandise, Duquete said. The insulation prevented the impact of the object used to break the glass from setting off the alarm.

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BASEBALL MEMORABILIA

Baseball, the American tradition, has won the attention of a Farmington Hills city employee who has an intriguing collection. To see what he has, turn to Page 4A.



Looking at the remains from yet another theft in their store are (from left) owners Allen and Dan Duquete. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)