

# Monday's Commentary

## Festival backers should reconsider events

What a shame it would be to see the Farmington Founders' Festival become just a memory.

But that is a very real possibility if something isn't done to revive the annual summer festival. The reports are grim. The festival committee is in debt from as far back as two years ago. And while businesses and private organizations are willing to take from the festival, few are willing to contribute to keep it healthy.

In short, everyone likes to play, few like to pay. This year's committee has a monumental job ahead of it. Not only must it plan this year's activities, it must look to the future to ascertain the festival's viability.

Farmington and Farmington Hills businesses and residents must make a decision on the festival. Just like everything else, the festival is suffering the pangs of inflation.

It needs increased economic support to keep attracting the tens of thousands of metropolitan Detroit residents who come to Farmington area each July.

The festival has been good to Farmington merchants, yet every year the festival committee goes begging for support garnering very little results.

But there are alternatives to just going out of business if the committee is unable to keep the activities at the same level.

AS ONE FARMINGTON resident recently put it: "The festival is too big. It has lost its hometown flavor. Maybe they should scale it down to what it used to be."

Not a bad idea, considering that increased economic support forthcoming from the business community and private organizations is highly unlikely. Years ago, when the festival began, the Farmington area was far less developed. Downtown Farmington, Grand River and Farmington roads, was the hub of both the city and township.

But growth has changed all that. Now we have a population spread across the entire 36 square miles. Small shopping plazas are popping up all over the place, competing with the downtown area.

It would be a safe bet that residents in the north end of Farmington Hills associate shopping with malls in West Bloomfield, rather than Farmington. This very well could be the time to scale down the Farmington Founders' Festival; instead of trying to spread it across the entire area.

## For upgrading fire department

## Community owes chief a big thanks

Farmington Hills residents owe John Van de Voort.

In truth the debt is too large to repay. But the quiet-spoken fire chief isn't the kind of guy looking for accolades. He knows he has done a fine job and that's good enough for him.

For years to come, Van de Voort will be remembered for building the Farmington Hills Fire Department into a proud and professional organization.

But the Hills department wasn't always looked upon as being professional.

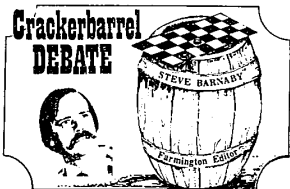
Four years ago when the firefighting veteran came to the Hills, the department was immersed in controversy with then Public Safety Director Ron Holko.

Firefighters, themselves, were divided. Each station was its own department, setting its own standards, which varied considerably.

The intentions of those volunteer firefighters were good, but the results were less than desirable.

They had the spirit, but lacked the true expertise of a professional unit.

Many disgruntled residents, sensing the discord and feeling insecure about the service, were calling for a full-time fire department.



To many that sounded good, but reality dictated that a full-time department would just cost too much money. What to do?

ALONG CAME John Van de Voort into the eye of the storm. Some folks said he was too easygoing to handle the ill will and jealousies which had cropped up between the stations, the city council and the community.

Van de Voort just smiled.

Other folks said he never could wrest the needed

money from a stingy council which didn't have much regard for the volunteers, anyway.

Van de Voort just kept on asking for the needed funds. Many laughed when he said that he could make a professional organization out of the volunteer force.

Van de Voort didn't have time for the cynics. He was just too busy getting the job done.

Today, that job is well on its way and the former Detroit fire official has decided to call it a day in Farmington Hills.

Having molded the department into a part volunteer, part full-time department, the 62-year-old chief can be proud of his accomplishments.

He proved the cynics wrong. He did the job that many folks said couldn't be done and saved a bushel of money in the course.

Unfortunately, there are some cynics who still refuse to give Van de Voort his just due. Because he refused to fall into the mold of a power hungry bureaucrat, they can't understand his motives.

Van de Voort knew his motives. He set out to build a fire department which the community could trust and respect.

Thank you, John Van de Voort. It has been the community's pleasure.



Relaxing after four years of whipping the Farmington Hills Fire Department into shape is Chief John Van de Voort, who recently announced his retirement. (Staff photo)

from our readers

## Full-time firemen defend department

Editor:

As the only eight firefighters employed on a full-time basis by the city of Farmington Hills, we found the letter you received (March 17) from the Farmington Hills firefighter a gross misrepresentation of facts.

This individual has chosen to vent his rage and anger (brought on by his increased tax assessment) toward the fire department.

It is apparent to us that this part-time employee lacks the insight to see exactly what the fire department is at-

tempting to provide to the citizens of Farmington Hills.

While the administration needs no help in defending its position, we must convey that we, as full-time employees, have nothing but the highest respect for City Manager Larry Savage and Chief John Van de Voort.

Having recently negotiated that "fat" contract, we assure you that these two administrators are efficient and effective in management of the city's revenues.

As for the attacks made on full-time salaries, the author of that letter isn't relying on facts.

The job requirements and responsibilities of a Farmington Hills firefighter don't compare with the requirements and responsibilities of a fire-

fighter working for a completely full-time department.

Therefore, it is unfair and unrealistic to compare wages and contracts. In addition, we fail to see how a mere eight full-time firefighters constitutes a waste of tax dollars. Surely a city with the population and size of Farmington Hills isn't overstuffed nor overburdened.

In closing, we don't wish the public to get the impression that its full-time firefighters are interested in rapping the city's tax dollars. However, we hope that the anonymous fire-fighter realizes that we also received that increased tax assessment and also must deal with rising inflation.

RICHARD MARINUCCI  
Farmington Hills Fire Fighters Association

## Resident praises police

Editor:

Although praises for our Farmington Hills Police Department aren't prevalent, I believe in giving a pat on the back when it is deserved.

I recently was stranded on 12 Mile with my 12-year-old daughter after dark. I happened to be on a stretch of the road where houses are few and far between.

After turning on the hazards in the car, my daughter and I started to walk towards some bright lights. Cars zoomed by quickly.

When an officer quietly pulled alongside us and asked if he could be of service, I could have shouted for joy. He kindly drove us to a service station where I made arrangements for my car to be towed, and then he drove us home.

Giving an assist to a stranded motorist may not seem like much, but I can vouch that it meant a great deal to me.

This is the second time I have had to use the Farmington Hills Police Department and in both cases the officers were considerate, conscientious, kind and efficient.

Again, many thanks for a job well done. It is good to know that some of our tax dollars are indeed put to worthwhile use.

RUTH KLEHM,  
Farmington Hills

## Plate tab deadline is Monday

Deadline for obtaining 1980 Michigan license plate tabs is Monday.

Secretary of State branch offices will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday to handle the last-minute rush. All owners must purchase plate tabs by March 31 to legally operate their vehicles on public highways.

THOMAS JOHNSON,  
Deputy fire chief  
Farmington Hills

## St. Patrick's Day isn't fun for all

Editor:

I don't know what, if anything, can be accomplished by voicing our views on this subject, but perhaps some brief article may show there is another side to the coin in the glorification of St. Patrick's Day every year by the newspapers and television news media.

Living right near Dunleavy's Pub is despair for homeowners. We can depend on the usual melee, where probably otherwise intelligent human beings suddenly turn into an insane bunch of wild animals on stampede, destroying our personal property and completely disrespecting the law.

When teenagers drive across our lawn and tear up our sod it is termed malicious destruction of property and vandalism. When the so-called "adults" come out for their St. Patrick's Day celebration and destroy and mutilate and drive away from the scene, there is no label, just double standards.

We homeowners were elated when "no parking" signs were put up, kidding ourselves that we have some protection. These signs are a big joke, these characters completely ignore them, parking next to and driving over the signs.

Something really stinks at city hall. What an effort and hassle to get the police out to ticket offenders. When we summoned the police out to the police station, the dispatcher at the police station retorted, "Well, it's only one day a year, you know." And then she hung up.

Another neighbor then called the police and inquired of the dispatcher if it

was all right to park where the "no parking" signs were posted and not get a ticket. She replied that she was relieved he wasn't another complainer and told him to go ahead and park there, he wouldn't get a ticket.

It wasn't until one neighbor with a little weight and authority complained that any action was taken. When the chief of police finally did arrive to see what had transpired, he was appalled at the damage that had been done.

I wonder if the men that came outside to relieve themselves between our evergreen remember what they did the next day?

Naturally, many of us were upset over this annual circus. We work hard on our and adjoining city property, even receiving awards from the Farmington Beautification Commission just to keep Farmington beautiful.

The day after St. Patrick's Day, I went down to see the city manager and suggested that he allow us to hire one police officer and pay him out of our own pockets to enforce the law next year on St. Patrick's Day.

We can't seem to come up with any other solutions outside of spending the entire night out there yelling and screaming to no avail. Just what protection do we get for our thousands of tax dollars these days?

Some day we would like to enjoy St. Patrick's Day. But each year it just becomes a bigger headache.

RUTH CLARK,  
Farmington

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## Farmington Observer

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