

Farmington Observer

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Old Man Winter just keeps clobbering us



An emergency was declared this week in Farmington by Mayor Alton Bennett because of severe snow conditions. As the sign states, parking was prohibited on subdivision streets to facilitate plowing.

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

For the second time in a week, the Farmington area was pelted with snow yesterday, forcing schools and businesses to close and slowing traffic to almost a halt.

Residential streets still were being cleared of the 10-inch snowcover delivered by Sunday's blizzard when road crews began to brace for an additional deluge of snow, sleet and freezing rain.

By Tuesday afternoon, crews from Farmington and Farmington Hills already had put in close to 600 total hours of overtime at a combined cost to the cities of almost \$6,000.

A snow emergency was declared Monday morning in Farmington by Mayor Alton Bennett when plowing was hampered by parked cars which clogged subdivision streets.

Posted signs instructed residents to refrain from parking cars in streets until plowing was complete or risk having them towed at their own expense.

Farmington Hills' 16-member road crew was assigned 12-hour shifts Sunday afternoon when they began plowing the Hills' 270 miles of roads.

"The men have been working 16-hour shifts, round the clock, going home only to sleep," said acting Public Service Director Bill Costick.

"We've hired four independent graders."

AMONG MONDAY'S closings were area public, Catholic and Lutheran schools; Oakland Community College; William Tyndale College; the 47th District Court; Farmington Public Library; Mercy Center; 10 Mile Community School; the Farmington Community Center; Hillier Day School; and the Bonaventure Skating Rink, which rescheduled for Sunday its snowed-out diabetes skateathon.

Farmington homeowners were requested by City Manager Bob Deadman "to get together and shovel the snow off fire hydrants since it would be several days before city personnel could get to them."

Crews in Farmington Hills began marking snow-covered fire hydrants with wooden sticks Tuesday.

"We'd appreciate it if people left them there," said Thomas Blaseel, city engineer. "And if they're really good, people can go out there and uncover them."

Although police logs were clogged with reports of disabled vehicles blocking city streets and snowmobile-related complaints, "things have been relatively quiet," said John Nichols, Farmington Hills police chief.

"We rescued a few motorists, but that's about it. There hasn't been a lot of crime, obviously. There's too much snow to get very far," he said.

AN INFLUX OF patients received treatment in the emergency room at Bostford General Hospital Sunday night for conditions brought on by the blizzard.

"We had more than the usual number admitted with cardiac conditions, small fractures from falls, and pneumonia and other chest conditions," said Dorine Kramp, department head of Bostford's emergency room.

"Many of them were people in their 80s. The winter is toughest on them."

There was no absenteeism among the hospital's emergency room personnel Sunday night, due in part to assistance from Farmington Hills police who transported many employees to work.

COSTLY SNOW removal is straining the budgets of both Farmington and Farmington Hills.

"We're within budget allocations, but it's getting very tight," said Earl Billings, director of Farmington Public Service.

"If the winter continues like this, we'll be forced to use up all of our funds and begin borrowing from other areas."

Continued severe weather would be "devastating" for the Farmington Hills' budget, said Costick.

Equipment breakdowns and mishaps have complicated snow removal efforts. On Monday one city dump truck got stuck in a ditch and almost overturned at the corner of Springland and Redgeway near the home of amused Hills resident Carolyn Spithack.

"I fought the city last summer about filling that ditch. They said it wasn't their job," she said.

"It was OK with them if it was my cost and I paid the engineer to survey it."

Many other residents called Farmington Hills City Hall this week to complain despite the fact that road crews were plowing round the clock.

Snow causes death in Hills

Shoveling snow in an attempt to free his car from a snowbank, a 70-year-old man suffered a fatal heart attack Sunday afternoon.

Joseph Contos, 70, of 30270 Overdale, Farmington Hills was transported to Providence Hospital by paramedics in the Southfield Life Support Unit at 3:42 p.m. Sunday. He was pronounced dead at 5:16 p.m. Cause of death was listed

as a mild heart attack brought on by shoveling snow.

Southfield LSU officials report that Contos collapsed while attempting to free his car from a snowbank on Northwestern Highway, about Inkster Road in Farmington Hills near the Southfield border. However, the Oakland County Medical Examiner report states that Contos collapsed at his Farmington Hills home.

Fast buck fallacy

Police bust makes pyramid crumble

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

The man listening most intently to an investment sales pitch delivered at a home in Farmington last month was a plainclothes sergeant from the criminal investigations section of the Michigan State Police.

On Jan. 12, William Henry Wilson, 49, owner of the home at 22869 Power, told neighbors, relatives, friends and strangers such as Sgt. James Smiley that he had a legal way for them to make 300 percent profit on an initial investment of \$100, according to state police accounts of the meeting.

The investment plan was neither legal nor feasible, says Sgt. Smiley, who returned to the home six days later to arrest Wilson on charges of engaging in a pyramid scheme or chain letter promotion—a crime punishable in Michigan by a maximum seven years in jail and possible \$10,000 fine.

Wilson was arraigned on the charge Jan. 19 before 47th District Judge Michael Hand and released on \$5,000 personal bond. A preliminary examination will be scheduled.

Attorney James Ebel of Farmington declined to comment on the case aside

from noting that his client, Wilson, maintains his innocence.

State police officials say they have evidence of pyramid schemes operating in Farmington, Northville, Canton Township and Inkster. So far, however, only Wilson has been arrested.

"Technically, it's a form of illegal gambling," Smiley said. "And all those people (at the party) could've been charged with frequenting a place of gambling. It wasn't our intent to give all these people criminal records. Our intention was to get the game stopped."

WILSON WAS arrested, Smiley said, because he was hosting the "sales meeting," because his name was on the pyramid-shaped chart and because he was helping "perpetuate" the scheme by recruiting others to join.

State police investigators say the chart is called a pyramid because 16 people are listed on the bottom of the chart, eight names are above that, four in the next two above that and one name at the top. According to the rules of the game, the person on top of the pyramid—\$100 or the last link in the chain—receives \$100.

State police say the it is unknown whether people were moved to the top of the pyramid for payoff. But, Smiley

adds, even if the game went according to plan, more and more people would have to be recruited to keep the scheme going.

People who have invested in similar pyramid schemes have been known to use violence against someone who decides to drop out or fails to find two other investors, said state police Lt. Richard Meloche.

State police are asking people who've been coerced into making payments or approached to invest in such schemes to contact Sgt. Smiley by phoning the criminal investigation section at 525-2560.

PART OF THE difficulty in prosecuting Meloche said, is that the victims of such schemes often are friends, family members and relatives of the

person who starts the pyramid or chain.

State police monitored two meetings—the one at Wilson's home Jan. 12 and another on Jan. 7 at the home of another who investigators refuse to identify. While some people who attended the meeting were skeptical about the proposal, Smiley said most joined after being assured that the investment was legal.

"It's greed," Smiley said. "They thought they'd get something for nothing, \$800 tax-free for every \$100 they invest. They come to these games and they've got dollar signs in their eyes."

While such schemes have occurred "in cycles" for decades, state police investigators say the present poor economy is attracting more people to invest in them.

By Craig Piechura
staff writer

Merchants in downtown Farmington admit their position is self-serving but they're concerned about losing business to a new shopping center if land at Nine Mile and Farmington Road is rezoned to allow commercial development.

Borman Foods Inc., which owns Farmer Jack supermarkets, is hoping to close its relatively small, old store on Farmington Road at State and relocate on the southeast corner of Farmington Road at Nine Mile. It would be in a center with two other major tenants—Perry Drugs and ACO Hardware.

The Farmington Planning Commission has appointed a four-member study committee to investigate the impact and need for rezoning the 8.5-acre parcel from office to commercial use.

The committee comprised of city councilman William Mitchell, and planning commission members Shirley Richardson, Jim Abernethy and William Burke is expected to give its recommendation in March.

Two studies—one commissioned by the city and one done by the developer—have attempted to judge the impact of a new shopping center on existing businesses and forecast the profitability of the project.

Existing merchants say the study by Driker Associates Inc. of Berkeley, commissioned by the city, supports their claim that increased competition would have an adverse effect of Farmington's downtown businesses.

"THE OUTLOOK for the supermarket in the proposed center appears fa-

vorable," reads the report written by Jack Driker. "The supermarket would be a major business generator for the other stores in the center, and the other stores would therefore, as a whole, probably do well. However, their success will probably be at the expense of their counterpart stores in the CBD (central business district)."

"There will probably be significant, absolute declines in sales volumes of stores in the drug and hardware lines in the CBD over the short term, upon opening of the new center. Over the long run, population growth in the trade area may make up for lost sales, assuming other centers don't meanwhile open."

Merchants expected to be hit hardest include pharmacist Harry Watson, owner of Godmar Rexall Pharmacy; pharmacist William Stanford, owner of Maple Village Pharmacy; and Michael Mastuski, owner of Farmington Hardware.

Mastuski faces competition on two fronts. Damman Hardware is opening in April in the Downtown Farmington Center and ACO is eyeing the Nine Mile and Farmington site for expansion.

The Driker study concludes that for the downtown to co-exist with shopping centers such as Twelve Oaks and the Nine Mile and Farmington strip, comparison and specialty shops should locate downtown. The study concludes that "the market is not sufficient to avoid reduction of sales volumes in existing stores of the drug and hardware groups."

"THERE'S ONLY so many people in the area spending so much money on drugs," says Watson of Godmar Drugs.

Conflict brews over new center

"It'll just cut the pie a little thinner and before long nobody will be making anything."

Merchants tout to the recent departure of TG&Y dime store in the downtown center as evidence that the current economy is taking its toll on Farmington.

Late last month Art and Saja Burke, owners of Welsby Music of Farmington, announced they're closing their store due to declining business after less than a year in business. The previous owner did business for decades in the city.

"People who come in are buying 68-cent items like guitar strings," says co-owner Saja Burke. "We had a special offer where you get three free lessons

when you buy a guitar, thinking that would generate music lesson business. They took the three free lessons and that's all."

Stanford admits the owner of land at Nine and Farmington has a right to petition for rezoning and a right to compete for business but adds that city officials should try to avoid "overkill" by allowing too many business districts to be built too close to each other.

"OF COURSE I am biased," Stanford said. "Anyone in business would be."

City Manager Robert Deadman says the city could support a large food store such as the 41,000-square-foot Farmer Jack proposes. The downtown store has 18,000 square feet.

Federal grant spawns debate

Some Farmington City Council members Monday night criticized plans to continue using federal funds to pay for sidewalk construction on main streets and resurfacing unpaved roads.

The city of Farmington expects to receive \$39,000 in federal community-development block-grant funds in fiscal year 1982-83. Many legislators predict this is the last year for the program, which President Ronald Reagan has vowed to cut.

"Community development funds are designed to assist low- and moderate-income families," said Councilman William Hartsock. "Sidewalks between Gill Road and Halsted (on Grand River Avenue) are not a tangible benefit to low- and moderate-income people."

City Manager Robert Deadman said such uses have been approved in past years and added that the sidewalk-construction program will be paid from block-grant funds approved in last year's \$46,000 federal grant to Farmington.

fit to low- and moderate-income residents because they are used by many senior citizens in town in that economic bracket.

Deadman and Gerald Horner, administrative assistant, proposed spending \$34,000 of the \$39,000 grant to resurface Adams and Grace streets in the city's historical district. The remainder will be spent on removing sidewalk barriers.

BECAUSE Adams Street has many back lots facing it, and Grace Street has side lots facing it, Deadman said "we believe there will be little pressure in the future by the property owners to improve these streets."

The sole member of the public at the public hearing, Nancy Leonard, perennial council-watcher, said she likes the roads the way they are.

"It's a little bit of old Farmington I like," said Mrs. Leonard. "You can hop over the puddles."

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