

Monday, March 1, 1982

Farmington Community Center

Juggling changes and finances is business-as-usual

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

Harley Thornton, now retired from his job as naturalist for the state, is in the process of mapping out nature trails on Farmington Community Center grounds.

Ridgeway, a group of budding and professional writers who meet weekly in the center, is in the process of writing a history of the historic landmark, to be read by children.

Volunteers for the center are currently restoring the old log cabin on the grounds and surrounding it with a herb garden.

The projects are all part of business-as-usual for the center's director, its board and guild of volunteers who are constantly updating, changing, and revising the uses for the Georgian Manor house and its five acres of land on Farmington Road, north of 10 Mile Road.

"Probably the biggest shift we've made lately is scheduling more night classes than day classes," said Betty Paine, the center's executive director.

She didn't hazard a guess as to what was making the evening classes so popular during the last couple of terms. She knew only that they were, and that the center was there to fill the needs of the community.

more

"So more of our instructors will be coming out more nights now," she said.

Betty Paine
executive director

CURRENTLY IN the midst of a fund drive to knock out a \$84,000 deficit, Mrs. Paine keeps juggling the never-ending benefits to keep the center open "while one hand is always on the pulse of the community to make sure we're offering what the residents want," she said.

"We met some Detroit Symphony Orchestra members at our Intermezzo concerts who think they can turn our amphitheater into a sort of Meadowbrook-west," she said. "We'd love to see more activity on our

grounds so of course we're delighted to have these people work with us.

"But that's pretty much how the center has operated from the outset. People come to know we're here and then offer their help."

Mrs. Paine told the story about residents requesting classes in photography, then getting Monte Nagler, a local man with a nationally known reputation in the field to teach in the center.

"He's been a big asset to us. He has filled up classes and he's given his time to do a benefit for us. But I have to wonder how many of his students realize that the fee they pay for his class is not a contribution to the center," she said.

CLASSES OFFERED in the center must be supplemented with rentals and benefits to make up about 75 percent of the operating cost.

"Without the support from the community in our fund drive we're standing still," Mrs. Paine said.

Yet, the center is now attracting residents from 50 neighboring communities, a number even Mrs. Paine finds hard to believe.

"Our roster shows we've had visitors, for one thing or another, from as far away as Flint, Ann Arbor and Windsor. I find that astounding, but I'm quite sure that has to do with our heritage craft classes. We have such an unusual number of outstanding crafters coming to teach for us," she said.

What she finds delightful, she said, is being on the tour route. "It's very com-

mon to find someone in the center at any time of the day showing the house and grounds to their out-of-town relatives or guests."

An estimated 50,000 persons participate in some center-related activity every year now. The Farmington Community Center is one of only three such centers in the metropolitan area that operate solely on community support. It receives no city or United Foundation funds.

"A contribution to the center this year to meet the \$50,000 goal will not only keep us afloat and get us out of debt, but move us forward so we can stop spinning our wheels," Mrs. Paine said.

CONTRIBUTIONS are to be made payable to Farmington Community Center and sent to the center at 24705 Farmington Road, Farmington Hills, 48018. A receipt for income tax purposes will be returned on request.

The next benefit for the center, arranged for by the center's volunteer guild, is an art auction coordinated by Oxford Art Galleries of Detroit.

The event begins with a wine, champagne, punch and hors d'oeuvres preview at 7 p.m. Saturday, March 6. The auctioneer's prices will begin at \$5 and although some works of art will demand that bidding begins at \$2,000, hostesses for the evening say that many of the pieces are in the \$20-\$5 range.

A donation of \$1 is asked at the door.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

'Aspen Heights,' a signed serigraph by Colorado artist Jim Boutwell, will be marked NFS, or Not For Sale, when Farmington Community Center stages its next fund raiser, an art auction set for next Saturday. Boutwell's work, all known for their silhouettes and striking designs, will be one of the prizes during the evening.



BILL BRISLER/staff photographer

Farmington Hills resident David Pitt starts a margarina on his way to a customer from Green Plant Designs.

Green Plant Designs

Firm grows as plants thrive

By Sherry Kahan
staff writer

Green is the color of Gayle Sarkisian's work.

She and her husband Nick run a Livonia business that brings them as close to rainforest environment as you can find in these northern climes.

Called Green Plant Designs, the firm earns its greenbacks by renting plants to area businesses. Last year the work brought in about half a million.

Who would spend about \$5 a month to rent a Boston fern or a Ficus tree? General Motors would, and so would Children's Hospital, and the David Stott building, all in Detroit. The Holiday Inn Holidayone near Metro Airport has 1,600 of their massangeana, marginata and other leafy things.

The company has 15 employees on 43 routes tending plants each week from Ann Arbor to Mt. Clemens and the communities in between.

"Plants bring outdoor naturalism inside," said Mrs. Sarkisian. "Plants relieve tension and add atmosphere as well as oxygen. They are an inexpensive way to spruce up or decorate an office. Instead of buying new furniture, get plants."

"PLANTS ADD something to everyone's life," agreed employee Cheryl Bromley of Westland as she mixed plant chemicals with water before going on her morning run. She also takes along solutions for the problems of insects, fungus and mites, bottles of leaf cleaners and a combination of fertilizer and iron.

Her average stop is about 15 minutes, she said, but when she gets to a place like the annex lobby of the General Motors building she sometimes spend two or three hours with the plants under her jurisdiction.

Rose Mary Reiz, who attended Thureston High School and now lives in Garden City, claimed, "It is harder work than it seems." To qualify for the job, she had four to six weeks of on-the-job training.

"We had to learn the name and type of plants," she said. "We found out about plant diseases and ways to prevent them. We studied lighting. Every plant has different lighting requirements."

"We really need to know this because many plants go where the light is not ideal. It is up to us to prevent problems."

WHEN A PLANT dies, Green Plant Designs substitutes another at no cost.

Ms. Reiz said her plant exchange rate is low now, but that wasn't always so.

"I've learned to spot problems in advance," she said.

When plants are returned, "we almost always do an autopsy," said Ms. Reiz. "Everyone discusses it and decides what happened. You can learn from your mistakes."

"Most people leave the plant placement to us. Once I wanted to bring in a new plant in exchange for one that had only three leaves left. But the man there liked it."

"Most people are nice. Everybody likes plants. The hardest thing for me is to get away from people who want advice and ask 'how about my wandering Jew?' But it's impossible to tell without seeing it. It's amazing how much people know about plants. There's one executive who drops everything to tell me about his African violets."

THIS THRIVING business is an outgrowth of a series of plant parties arranged by Mrs. Sarkisian and her friend Chris Merucci in the 1970s. But Mrs. Sarkisian grew tired of hauling plants in and out of different homes. When her mother told her about a place in Cincinnati that rented plants, she seized upon the idea.

The Farmington Hills plant entrepreneur visited the Ohio business and also took courses at the Agricultural Research Center in Apopka, Fla.

"I made frequent trips to Florida to bring back plants," she said. "But now I have growers under contract."

Green Plants Design started with five or six employees in a small building on Eight Mile in Farmington Hills. Now it has a staff of 30 and its own jungle on Industrial Road in Livonia.

It also has a computer for billing and to keep track of inventory. The owner call it "a godsend."

"IT IS VERY hard to start a business," she noted. "You have to eat, drink and sleep it. You have to be dedicated and persevering. You need a supportive spouse and family to do it."

Recently her supportive spouse, who worked elsewhere, had a heart attack and open heart surgery. "He lost his job because of health problems and joined this company last fall," said Mrs. Sarkisian.

She involves the rest of the family in the enterprise when she can. Two of her children, Christopher, 16, and Nicole, 15, have watered or tended plants around during summer vacation. Sharon, who is 12, probably will sign on in the near future.

For this business owner, half the battle is dealing with "a pleasant product." "There is not much that is negative connected with this business," she added. "I like it. I can't imagine what I'd do with my time if I didn't do this. It is very satisfying to see something develop and grow."

She didn't say whether she was referring to her plants or her business.

Sweet Adelines seek roster of 100

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

When Isabelle Peters takes her chair in the cheering section during the Sweet Adelines International competition this fall, she will be rooting for two choruses — and with some mixed emotion.

A member of Metro D Sweet Adelines chapter, which moved with the singers out to the suburbs to form Farmington Hills Sweet Adelines, Mrs. Peters will be cheering for her own chorus members on one hand. But on the other, she'll be rooting for the chorus her daughter directs coming to the competition from New Jersey.

"I won't be on stage this time around," the Farmington resident said, "but I'm pulling as hard as I can for the Farmington Hills singers to get their roster up to 100."

"I've been singing barbershop long enough to know that the big choruses always seem to have the edge in competition."

The local chorus, with 85 singers, took the regional championship in the spring of 1981, topping the 19 choruses which sing within the region that includes most of Michigan and a part of Ontario.

That win makes them eligible to compete internationally in Minneapolis, Minn., the first weekend in October.

"The goal is to get the membership up now, with plenty of time for rehearsals to be ready for those three days of competition," said Betty O'Connor, speaking for the local chapter.

FARMINGTON HILLS Sweet Adelines encourage prospective members to sit in on rehearsal any Tuesday in March. The group rehearses, under the



Isabelle Peters

direction of Jim Pollard, beginning at 7:30 p.m. in St. Paul Latvian Lutheran Church hall, 30623 12 Mile Road.

Prospective members must be at least 16 years old. She must attend at least five rehearsals, one chapter business meeting and one orientation meeting before the standard application for membership is extended.

She will also have to meet the audition requirements, and these will be spelled out for the newcomers during the March open rehearsals.

Pollard guided the local chapter into capturing the second spot in regional competition the first year he was its director. Then followed that up with capturing the blue ribbon the next year.

That top prize is the first that the local chapter has won since its founding in 1972.

"Pollard has been good for us," Mrs. Peters said. "He comes from a whole family of barbershoppers and was once in the men's Wayne chorus, but this is his first time out as a director."

MRS. PETERS was introduced to barbershop singing by her daughter, who grew up in Farmington, and is now Renee Craig.

"I used to baby sit for her when she was singing. But when she got me in-

terested in barbershopping, she may have gained a singer, but she lost a baby sitter," she said.

Mrs. Craig carried her love of barbershopping with her when she moved to New Jersey, and her winning chorus will be direct competition with her mother's during the international meet this fall.

Sweet Adelines, Inc. is an international non-profit organization comprised of more than 35,000 women who compete with one another from 27 regions throughout the world.

"The theme song, 'Harmonize the World,' rings true," Ms. O'Connor said. "There are chapters in England, Canada, Holland, Japan, Scotland, Sweden and the U.S."

"Its purpose is to teach and sing four-part harmony, barbershop style. Through the music, the singers promote and encourage the appreciation of this kind of music."

The organization was born in Tulsa, Okla., in 1947. The first non-English speaking chapter was formed in the town of Soderstje, Sweden. That was followed by chapters formed in Holland, Scotland, Japan, and most recently, a chapter whose members speak Hawaiian.

Mrs. O'Connor will take inquiries by calling her at 661-6628.



Gayle Sarkisian learned the names of foliage like this by playing botanical bingo at plant parties.