

# Farmington Observer

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## Council clobbers fair fun

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

In a 6-0 vote, the Farmington Hills City Council last week elected to deny a permit for Mercy High School's May Fun Fair.

Council members said they based their vote on residents' complaints about parking, vandalism and other problems at the fair site, the intersection of 11 Mile and Middlebelt roads.

The fair committee and Mercy administration hoped the fair and accompanying raffle would raise \$60,000 — money already spent in this year's budget that will represent a deficit if unrecovered.

Since its inception in 1971, the event has been the school's primary fundraiser. Projected earnings from the 1982 fair would have offset tuition by \$80-70 per student. Tuition this year is \$1,875.

Fair committee member Walter Gruber pled in vain with council members after outlining proposed changes based on suggestions made by the police department after last year's fair.

"We've been responsive to criticisms voiced last May and are requesting a permit for what we hope is the 1982 Mercy Fair," Gruber said.

"To curb congestion at the Eleven Mile and Middlebelt Road intersection, we've added 125 parking spaces by moving the fair location to the south edge of the building, cutting the size of the tent in half and the rides by 25 percent."

Additional sanitary facilities, security, cleanup personnel and public phones also are proposed, he said.

Gruber failed to appease Police Chief John Nichols, however. Nichols told the council, "We feel the focal point still will be at the intersection of Eleven Mile and Middlebelt, making the adjacent subdivisions targets for youths to park illegally and commit other odds and ends."

"The committee has made a good-faith effort, but the control of pedestrian remains as the main problem," he said.

"I DON'T THINK any of us want to be the ones saying no, you can't have the fair, but we get calls from residents, and they have to be our primary concern," said council member Joan Soronen.

Mayor pro tem William Lange said he'd vote in favor of the permit if the fair was held at a more suitable location.

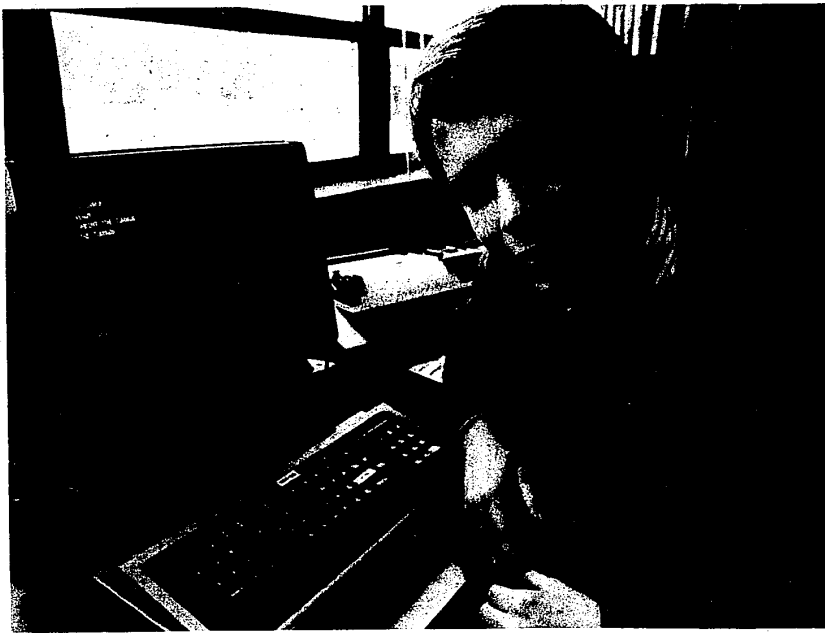
"Gee whiz, there's super compassion on behalf of the council for you," Mayor Jack Burwell told Gruber. "Hopefully you can find an alternative location that's less densely populated."

Mercy Principal Sr. Nancy Thompson said the alternate site suggested by Nichols — the land behind Mercy Center — is infeasible.

"That location is an impossibility because Mercy Center's parking lot is used consistently. The equipment would sink into the ground if we put it anywhere on campus behind the buildings," she said.

"We don't know where we're going from here. (The council's decision) is an extreme disappointment. It puts us in a real bind financially."

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DICK KELLEY/staff photographer

John Travers, a junior at Brother Rice High School in Bloomfield Township, is president of Weathertron, which provides 24-hour weather information to 13 radio stations across the country. Travers, 17,

became interested in meteorology after several tornadoes hit near his hometown of Kansas City, Mo.

## Sonny's successor?

# Born with a weather vane in hand

By Karen Hermes Smith  
staff writer

When John Travers was in the fifth grade, 13 tornadoes traveling within a 15-mile radius swept through his home town of Kansas City, Mo., leveling buildings and killing people.

From the experience, he gained an interest in meteorology — the study and forecast of weather.

"I was sort of scared into it," said Travers, 17, who is president of the Weathertron weather-forecasting company in Farmington Hills.

As a fifth-grader, Travers visited the National Severe Storm Forecast Center in Kansas City, which is responsible for issuing all tornado and severe thunderstorm watches for the entire country.

There, he conversed with meteorologists, read their books and learned how to interpret all sorts of weather indicators.

TODAY, TRAVERS, a junior at Brother Rice High School in Bloomfield Township, through the Weathertron company, provides 24-hour weather information for 13 radio stations across the country and a handful of Detroit-area companies which do outdoors work. He works with two young meteorologists with college degrees — Chris

Orr, 22, of Farmington Hills and Mike Simonetti, 24, of Roseville.

"I thought I would get bored with it after a while — my mom did too — but it gets more exciting every day," he said in an interview Thursday.

This summer, Travers plans to sell his service, which he describes as "really accurate," to the agricultural and recreational industries. He hopes Cedar Point, the giant amusement park in Cedar Point, Ohio, will be one of his accounts.

CURRENTLY, Travers is organizing a satellite weather service which he hopes to provide to a network of at least 200 radio stations across the country.

He's also trying to set up a telephone service for the Detroit area which he will promote as the very latest and most accurate available.

Travers, who moved from Kansas City to Farmington Hills just six months ago, has little time for anything but his work. "I wanted to run track this spring, but my schedule won't allow it," he said.

After Travers attends classes in the morning and early afternoon, he works the 2:30 to 8 p.m. shift at his office. On the weekends, he's busy with Weathertron from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. He allows

himself time "for a little socializing" weekend nights.

HIS YOUTH has been somewhat of a limiting factor, Travers admits.

"I don't promote my age," he said, adding it's not a big selling point. "I don't try to avoid it, though, if the subject comes up."

Instead, Travers said, he promotes the accuracy and delivery of his company's forecasts, as well as his partners' educational backgrounds.

Travers, who worked alone while living in Kansas City, got his first break from a public radio station. It was one of several he called and offered his free forecasts to.

"They just kinda said call us for a week, and we'll see how it goes," he said. "They ended up really liking it and started putting it on the air."

Before leaving Kansas City, Travers worked for an ABC-TV affiliate there. His responsibilities included getting the weather forecasts on every morning during the summers and both weekend mornings during the school year.

THE TYPE of broadcast Travers' company provides depends on the nature of the radio station receiving it, he said. "If it's a rock station, we give a quick forecast. If it's a country station,

we try to tune it to their style."

But all of their forecasts are constantly updated, explanatory and specific, he said.

"We talk about the weather. We say why we think it's going to rain — rather than just saying it's going to rain."

"We also try to avoid phrases like 'a chance of showers' or 'probability of rain.' When temperatures are given, they're specific, he said, like 38 degrees, rather than in the mid to upper 30s.

Travers and his partners use several indicators to make their forecasts, including weather maps from around the globe, satellite pictures of the Northern Hemisphere, current weather information from 1,000 to 2,000 stations across the country, aviation forecasts from the FAA and weather warnings from other parts of the United States.

TRAVERS PLANS to study meteorology at a university following his graduation from Brother Rice. He's considering attending St. Louis University in St. Louis.

Of Detroit's weather persons, Travers says he's the most accurate. After that, it's meteorologist Mal Sillars of WDIV, Channel 4.

"Sonny Eliot (of WJBK, Channel 2) and Jerry Hoxak (of WXYZ, Channel 7) just read the forecasts," Travers said, while Sillars presents the scientific reasons behind them.

"But then," Travers added, "a lot of people don't want to watch the intricate side of weather."

## Tax battle is looming for cities

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

Residential assessments for Farmington Hills will be the target of a court battle if state and Oakland County assessors are unable to resolve their differences, according to City Assessor Robert Romer.

The Oakland County Equalization Division raised assessments in the city by 5 percent in compliance with the state-required 50-percent fair market value.

But a 10 percent increase would be imposed under the state's method, said Herman Stephens, manager of the County Department of Equalization. The county, in attempting to recognize the current market conditions, has adjusted for creative financing on sales.

It is the county's contention that creative financing, or sales made by land contract, assumptions, blends and buy-downs, inflate property value. Adjusting sales prices to reflect added value attributable to creative financing is a common practice among appraisers.

Such discounting is disallowed by the State Tax Commission, which utilizes a method which this year forces Oakland County assessments to exceed the 50 percent limit mandated by the state constitution, Stephens said.

The state's final word is due in mid-April. If the equalized valuation materializes as Stephens expects, the county will oppose it in the courts.

"If somebody's procedures are putting me over the 50 percent maximum, it forces me to choose between the violation of an administrative rule and a violation of the constitution of the State of Michigan," Stephens said.

"The constitution carries a little more weight."

State Tax Commission methods are in need of updating, he added.

"The State Tax Commission has to come up with a better procedure to take care of financing in a declining market so we won't be over the 50 percent level," Stephens said.

Stephens estimates state equalized valuations would decrease by 10 percent if adjustments were made for creative financing.

IN THE OPINION of Farmington Hills Assistant City Assessor Ted Hindman, "the county is right in giving us a lesser increase. The state looks at it and says it won't give a reduction based on different methods of creative financing. We agree with the county that there should be some type of adjustment."

Although sales were down last year in Farmington Hills, homes sold "at rates in the range of 5 percent higher than last year, rendering them just an image. Recorded sales were reduced by 10-15 percent but the rates were higher than 50 percent of the fair market value," Romer said.

About 1,000 hearings have been scheduled so far by Farmington Hills board of review — sessions now in progress to field assessment complaints, Hindman said.

The figure is unchanged from last year, when assessments increased by 12-14 percent.

"There's no question taxpayers are angry, and they have a right to be — especially in light of the economy," said Stephens.

"People can't see any kind of increase at all — even 5 percent."

The Farmington Hills Board of Review, as of Friday afternoon, was "booked solid through March 26," according to an assessing department spokesperson.

Appointments may be made until 4:30 p.m. Wednesday.

## The beat goes on

# Symphony regroups for the future

By Judith Berne  
staff writer

Plans are in the works to reschedule the West Bloomfield Symphony Orchestra's March 7 concert, cancelled because of a lack of funds.

Public offers of money and in-kind services, including an \$1,000 contribution, have helped spur efforts to keep the symphony going, newly-elected WBSO Board President Harold Patrick said Wednesday.

Five of 12 members of the board resigned last week when their proposal to permanently shut down the orchestra was refused. They included Gordon and Carolyn Muir, who placed a critical role in founding the orchestra in 1975, and Myron Bordinan, board president.

Patrick was named president at a Tuesday night meeting of the remaining board.

A decision was made to reschedule the concert providing orchestra musicians will perform for free and 14 departing Detroit Symphony Orchestra principals can be replaced.

ALTHOUGH The majority of musicians would have performed the March 7 concert free, refusal by the DSO members forced cancellation.

Letters have gone out to the remaining symphony musicians asking them to attend a rehearsal, Patrick said.

Orchestra Conductor Felix Resnick is currently seeking replacement musicians. Resnick, who has a contract with

the symphony, has agreed to delay his salary, Patrick said.

"Many people have called to respond how they can help," Patrick said. The incoming contributions, plus a Saturday fund-raiser at Detroit's Scarab club, should help the symphony clear its debts and fully fund its upcoming June concert.

The symphony office, previously manned by Mrs. Muir as paid executive director, is now being run by volunteer board members.

"If the musicians are going to perform for free, everyone's going to perform for free," Patrick said.

A RANDOM sample of symphonygoers by the West Bloomfield Eccen-

tric reported sadness. None had attended concerts this year.

"I think it's a source of pride that the community had a symphony of that caliber," said Kathy Wiener. "I know they need more support than we've given them."

"I think it's a bonus," said Jill Bergstrom. "It's so nice to have it so close by."

"I feel bad that it's going, but I don't think I could back my money with my mouth," said Linda Epstein.

Jeff Leib applauded efforts to replace DSO musicians with more affordable, quality musicians. "I don't think anybody who supported the West Bloomfield Symphony wanted a world class symphony."

## what's inside

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