

Farmington Observer

Successor to the Farmington Enterprise

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comment

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Sign of spring

Dandelions are welcome

Down through the years it has been the custom to herald the approach of Spring by the sight of the first robin.

When the red-breasted bird makes his appearance folks know that it is time to place the snow shovels and the blowers in storage and look forward to the coming of warm weather at last.

But not so with The Stroller. Spring to him is not here officially until he sights the golden-headed dandelion in the yard.

This was taught to him in his youth when the Pennsylvania Dutch folks really celebrated the coming of the golden-headed plants that made a rare picture of the banks along the country roads and in many of the lawns in our little town.

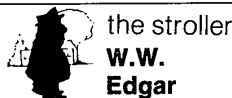
WHILE IT never was declared an official holiday there was always some sort of celebration. To mark the day everyone in our town wore a dandelion in a coat lapel or as a corsage. The coming of the dandelion was that important.

So, you can imagine how The Stroller felt the other morning when he opened the back door and there, in a crack in the sidewalk, was a lone little dandelion in the brightest yellow. It was as if it had been sent to our home as an advance man to tell us that Spring was here and that our lawn soon would take on a golden hue.

It isn't only the sign that Spring is here for sure that has drawn The Stroller's interest again as he looked at the little plant in the back yard.

It carried him back to the days of his youth when he got his baptism as a businessman. In those days the dandelion wasn't frowned upon as it is in these modern times. The golden-headed plants were used as a specialty at the dining table.

MANY WERE the housewives who spent hours each day strolling along the highway picking dandelions. They even went so far as to walk along the railroad tracks in search of what was considered a delicacy.



the stroller
W.W.
Edgar

Once they selected a sufficient amount they would hasten home, scrub the plants, and then serve them with a hot German dressing. It was a dish fit for anyone's table. And at our little home, the dandelion and its sauce along with fluffy mashed potatoes often served as our big Sunday meal.

It was because of this demand for the dandelion as food that The Stroller set himself up in business so to speak. He went to the roadsides each day and spent his time picking the golden heads. When he had his burlap bag filled he hurried home. There he did the plants in what was called a "messee."

THIS WAS the title given them at the country store. Then he set out through the neighborhood selling his "messee" at 15 cents each. Many were the days when his route netted him a tidy sum. And aside from the satisfaction of selling all of his "messee" for the day, it taught him the value of money.

So, this combination of learning the rudimentary facts of business life and enjoying the golden-headed plants as a treat at the dining table always caused The Stroller to place the dandelion on a pedestal in his home.

So, the next time you hear some one damn the golden-headed plant in his lawn, just remind them that the dandelion is one of the rare plants that served a double purpose — food and business. They dandelion should not be maligned.

For art, athletics

How to raise school money

It started four years ago following one of those home meetings that have introduced so many good ideas into American life. The idea was broached by the superintendent of the public schools of Syracuse, N.Y. Sidney Johnson suggested that a group be formed to find private financial support for arts and athletics programs that were being severely hurt by budget cuts. The program would include parochial as well as public school students.

I recently visited that city of about 180,000 in central New York State and learned how the program is doing. I feel it is an idea around which residents of other districts might be interested in building a home meeting.

The marriage of these two unlikely bedfellows took place under the name Foundation to Advance Arts and Athletics in Syracuse (FAAAS). Its first job was to build its financial base.

Money was found through donations from companies, individual memberships, and fund-raisers. A Readathon held the first year went over big, putting about \$6,000 into FAAAS coffers. A clean-up effort didn't do as well.

In fact, money collected at first did not quite live up to the hopes of sponsors. The program kicked off nicely, nonetheless, and has continued to provide summer and winter arts and athletic events.

Its budget is only \$40,000 to \$50,000 yearly. So FAAAS relies greatly on the hard work of hundreds of volunteers, and the successful integration into the plan of a number of the city's cultural organizations.

The public library has offered space for art classes. So has the handsome Everson Museum of Art, which has the additional attraction of artistic surroundings.

The Opera Club, two theater groups and the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra have also had a role in the success of FAAAS.

ADOPT A SCHOOL was one of the ideas of the innovators. Early on they decided it was cheaper to bring the performers to the school than bus the students to the performance.

The result was that the amateur Opera Club turned up in an elementary school in a poorer neighborhood to let the kids hear some heavy duty singing. It rehearsed an opera while they watched and listened. It also provided teachers with background workbooks for the children before they heard a note. Later it used a few of the students in its productions.

The club worked one morning a week for six weeks on the project for which it was paid \$1,000 by FAAAS. The same sum was given to the theater groups.

Syracuse Stage, a professional group, also devised a workbook for the students in the school it adopted. The kids read parts and performed for the company, and this was reinforced by classroom teachers. The end result, for example, was a performance by the youngsters in 1981 of parts of "Side By Side By Sundheim."

Members of the symphony orchestra also carry their violins and French horns into some of the schools for music programs. Conductor Christopher Keene does a Leonard Bernstein to tell about the music and the instruments.

Summer arts activities include a yearly presentation of a Broadway musical by students of the city's four high schools and two parochial schools.

"It's probably the only time in our city that the senior high students get together on a project," said Mimi Burdick, executive director of FAAAS and its only paid employee. "Usually in sports they are so competitive. It's a great experience for about 100 students. They act, play the music and work backstage."

SUMMER ALSO sees sponsorships of six weeks of intensive art classes for grades one through 12 at eight different locations around the city. The best of their work is later exhibited. The first year of the program about 1,000 students applied for 400 slots.

However, a musical instruction program for grades one through eight had to be dropped because of insufficient funds.

Summer sports activities include junior-high lacrosse, a sport more popular there than here. "It's popular because there is high-school lacrosse program the kids want to join," noted Burdick. "The high-school coaches like having a feeder system."

FAAAS also sponsors summer gymnastics and a dance/circus program.

The main thrust of the school year athletic program is directed at the junior-high students because high-school sports are better funded. The muscle stretching activities are wrestling and boys' and girls' soccer.

Business organizations pitch in for FAAAS by giving it discounts for equipment and materials, by buying tickets for FAAAS programs and sponsoring some events. The Syracuse Chamber of Commerce and the Board of Realtors underwrote the basketball tournaments of 1981 and 1982 involving area high schools.

Sounds good, doesn't it? But it takes real dedication from hundreds of volunteers. Burdick calls it "a beautiful idea, but difficult to keep going."

But there is no doubt in her mind that it is worth the effort.

Residents around here might come to the same conclusion. But because of today's anguishing economic period it might take a different form. Maybe it would work with less money and more volunteers. However, the idea is sound and worth considering.

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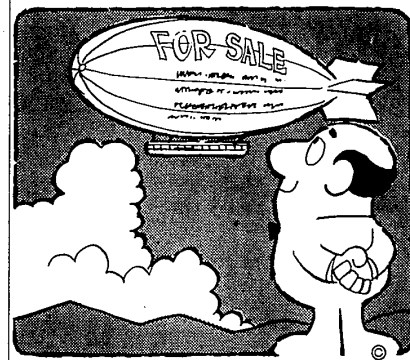
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