

the farmington enterprise & observer

YOUR HOMETOWN NEWSPAPER

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today's hot line

Vol. 82, No. 53 40 pages, 4 sections

what's inside

Who's On Stage?

Neil Simon's sparkling comedy, "Star Spangled Girl," is the final play in the current Farmington Players bill. We have the information on who's in the cast and how to obtain tickets on

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Baker Knows Culprits

Campus unrest is really mob violence, says Rep. Raymond L. Baker (R-Farmington) who has an idea who the real culprits are. In a plea to constituents, Baker asks for an end to glorifying violence.

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An Eagle Family

From time to time a Boy Scout in Farmington rises to the rank of Eagle Scout. It has happened again, only this time to a third generation scout and a second generation Eagle.

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We're All Fools

We are all fools today, and Roving Editor W.W. Edgar knows why. The Stroller enters Farmington to discuss the follies and history of April 1.

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Last Salary

Schoolcraft College President Eric Bradner will get \$30,000 for his last year on the job -- the same rate that will be offered his successor. See Regional Affairs.

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Whither Buses?

Now that Northville Coach Line has discontinued business, who will provide service on that Seven Mile Road run? Who's thinking about it?

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GOODIES—A happy five-year-old, Bruce Magnuson, checks his supply of chocolate eggs after taking part in the Farmington Jaycees annual Easter egg hunt in Farmington City Park. (Evert photo)



LOOT — This little boy in Independence Commons had a full load of Easter eggs in his basket by the time the kindly Easter bunny, played by Judy Amori, got through. (Evert photo)



FUN — The most popular person in Independence Commons in Farmington on Easter Sunday was Judy Amori, who played Easter bunny and handed out chocolate eggs to 100 subdivision families. (Evert photo)

Tax Reduction?

Why Schools Cannot Appease Taxpayers

By EMORY DANIELS

A taxpayers revolt movement has shifted in recent weeks and focused its attention on local school districts with demands that operational millage levies be reduced. The argument is that schools are getting more money by maintaining millage levies at current levels because of rising state equalized valuation (SEV) of properties.

LOCALLY, Farmington Township trustees were the first to suggest the Farmington Board of Education lighten the tax burden of homeowners by reducing the school millage rate.

Next, a taxpayers association started by the Franklin Ravines subdivision association made the same request. The Council of Subdivision Associations in Farmington

Township has repeated the request.

And last month, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners (formerly supervisors) asked all school districts in the county to consider lowering millage levies in light of the rising SEV.

Thus, the heat generated from higher tax bills is being taken off city, township and county officials and is now being felt by school trustees. School trustees have had one meeting with the Farmington Township Board and have met with taxpayers. Other meetings are scheduled as the school district presents its side of the coin.

The Farmington Enterprise & Observer, in analyzing what is happening financially to Farmington Schools, has examined pages of statistics and reports garnered from the Farmington School District, State Department of Public Instruction, Citizen Research Council of Michigan, and the State Chamber of Commerce.

ALL REPORTS examined indicate that the school millage levy in Farmington cannot be reduced appreciably, if at all, without passage by the State Legislature of educational reform bills of reduction of total programs.

This conclusion was reached because of the following fundamental conditions:

1. The Farmington Area has grown tremendously in the last five years, a growth the school district had to respond to in kind.

2. A period of inflation has seen cost-of-living increasing about 5% a year and the gross national product about 9% a year.

3. The impact of negotiating rights for teachers has seen teacher salaries rising an average of 9% a year statewide once negotiations began.

4. A state aid formula returns less to a school district as that district's tax base increases.

Let's take them one at a time.

THE FARMINGTON area population has increased 47% since 1960, half of that growth in the last five years.

This is significant because about one-third of this growth involved pre-school age children. Since 1965, Farmington's

school enrollment has increased by 21% to 16,360 for this school year. Of the 618 school districts in Michigan, 97% have fewer students than Farmington public schools.

What has this growth in the student body meant to the school district? How many more teachers and classrooms had to be added to accommodate this growth?

During the past five years, enrollment has grown by 21%, the district has added 21% or 183 teachers and 6.7% or 34 new classrooms.

Since 1965, the district has added two elementary schools and one high school, and next fall another elementary and high school will open.

The extra classrooms mean purchase of furniture and added maintenance costs. More teachers mean more salaries to pay.

analysis

Just the natural response to population growth alone means extra expense. But other factors, probably equally as natural, have also contributed.

WHICH BRINGS us to the most difficult factor involved to analyze—the economy.

The inflationary spiral has not only drained taxpayers' pockets but has also taken a violent smack at school budgets.

Obviously, the spiral has dumped more money in school coffers as the value of property in Oakland County has been rising at about 15% a year.

Of course, schools have had to dish out more to purchase supplies, buy services and pay employees. And the scale shows that the district is coming out at the short end.

The school district's property tax base, expressed by total SEV, has increased by 105% between 1965-70. Thus, the tax resources of the district have doubled in five years.

The district's ability to collect, expressed by operational millage levies, has increased by 38% for the same period from 21.5 mills (\$21.50 per \$1,000 SEV) to 29.85.

Of these mills, 13 in 1965 and 21.5 in 1970 were later approved with the rest being allocated by Oakland County.

Another way of looking at this phenomenon is that in the past five years, the homeown-

ers' willingness to pay more school taxes has increased by 65% (judging from voted millage) while the district's ability to collect has increased 102% (based on SEV increases).

What has this growth in the SEV, assessments are originally made by the local city or township government and are then "equalized" by the county on behalf of the state.

But the school district, like city and township governments, is the beneficiary. The increases in SEV allow a governing body to collect more revenue without increasing the millage rate.

THE RESULT for Farmington schools has been that in five years total revenue, including state and federal aid, has increased by 100%.

But look at the school budget in 1965-66 and this year shows expenditures have increased 110%, which means the district is spending 10% more than it is collecting.

This is possible only because of a \$1 million surplus on hand at the end of the 1965-66 fiscal year (FY), more than that later.

The doubling of SEV in the last five years, however, has not given the district any large sum of extra money to spend. This can be seen by examining what the district is paying for its instructional program, the core of education, which accounts for 75% of the operating budget.

INSTRUCTIONAL expenses have risen substantially for three reasons:

Expansion of faculty to meet higher enrollments, increased teacher salaries due to negotiations, and higher cost of purchasing audio-visual and other instructional materials.

Since 1965, total instructional costs have increased 112% (from \$1.8 million to \$10.2 million). Of this increase, 55% goes for teacher salaries.

In fact, since last year alone, teacher salaries have increased 20.7%. About half of this increase is caused by negotiated pay hikes. The other half is caused by pay hikes because of seniority or extra hours of college credit earned by faculty members.

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Democrats Plan Mourning Day

Farmington Democrats are calling for a national day of mourning to protest the loss of our constitutional liberties and to reaffirm basic guarantees.

The call for the day of mourning came in a resolution adopted by the Farmington Democratic Club.

THE RESOLUTION charged the Nixon Administration with attempting to "destroy" our traditional freedom of speech, press and assembly.

The resolution says "The Nixon Administration, led by the vice president and attorney general, has entered into a calculated and systematic attack upon the voices of dissent in the land."

To support their charge, the club points to the "Chicago Seven" trial, which it says is the first use of a new law which attempts to stifle free speech and "the denunciation of peace marchers as 'un-American,' 'traitors' and 'left-communists' by members of the administration and their families."

IN ADDITION, the resolution says Vice President Spiro Agnew has openly invited violence toward dissenters and threatened newspapers and television networks.

"The Nixon Administration is attempting in the guise of patriotism and loyalty to subvert the spirit of the Constitution," the resolution charges.

It added that the Nixon Administration is an American in using the courts and legal system as a means of intimidation and suppression.

The club urged a letter-writing campaign to newspapers and public officials "to voice indignation and outrage over the suppressive tactics of the government."

The national day of mourning, the resolution says, would reaffirm the basic principle that the Constitution was created and exists for the protection of the weak, the oppressed, those with different ideas and even those we may despise and fear.

The club says it will appoint a committee to make plans for its day of mourning.