

Students learn hardships of handicapped



Wendy Palm steadies herself as she wheels up the ramp leading to the Architecture Building at LIT. "There were a lot of things I hadn't thought

about," she said after her experiment. "I'd make more than one access to the building and design things low enough so people can reach them."

MINDY BAUNDERS/staff photographer

Gaining a perspective on buildings

By Carol Azizian
staff writer

KARL VOLLMAR dribbled water all over his shirt after trying to reach the drinking fountain from a wheelchair. Wendy Palm broke her fingernails and injured her knuckles while maneuvering through narrow doorways.

Vollmar and Palm aren't handicapped. They're architecture students who wanted to put themselves in the shoes of physically impaired persons.

The pair, along with nearly 100 other sophomores from Lawrence Institute of Technology, Southfield, strapped themselves in wheelchairs this week to negotiate an obstacle course set up in the college's architecture building.

"We want students to experience first hand the frustrations and problems the handicapped have to deal with so they will better understand Michigan's barrier-free access code," said James Abernethy, associate professor of architecture.

For years, the ins and outs of designing barrier-free buildings were discussed in course lectures, Abernethy pointed out. But, book learning can't replace experience, he said.

"I came to the realization that many students had no idea what it was like to be handicapped. Now, when they hear somebody talk about how much force it takes to open a door, they'll know what it means."

THE FIRST LESSON was a lecture by Stan Hancock, president of the Rehabilitation Resource Center of Michigan. The center loaned wheelchairs for LIT's experiment.

Next, students were required to accomplish several feats in a wheelchair: buy food or drinks from a vending machine, enter a classroom, find a desk and write comments; use a drinking fountain; go to the restroom; open a window; negotiate an outdoor ramp; go down the wheelchair lift; and use a computer in the computer room.

The experiment continues through April. During LIT's open house on May 5-6, members of the public will be invited to test the obstacle course themselves.



Tom Phillips Jr. tries unsuccessfully to reach the top shelf of a sandwich vending machine. He also got wet while trying to get water from a drinking fountain and had trouble squeezing through some doors.

The course is set up in the architecture building, which was constructed before Michigan's barrier-free code was established.

"They (the students) had to take risks," Abernethy said. "The phrase — no pain, no gain — had a lot of truth in this exercise."

Besides experiencing difficulty with the drinking fountain, Vollmar had trouble maneuvering in the bathroom because there were no rails. He also found the outdoor ramps "a little steep."

But he did learn a valuable lesson. "I appreciate where they're (handicapped persons) coming from a little better," he said.

"Before, I would have done the mini-

mum designs to (meet) the code. Now, I'll make sure there's enough room for them to get around."

Palm quickly became frustrated, trying to reach things from a wheelchair.

"The towel dispensers in the bathroom were too high," she said. "The doorways were too narrow."

"I broke all my nails and wrecked my knuckles trying to get through the doors."

Palm was familiar with the hardships of handicapped persons from her work experiences in a nursing home. But she didn't realize all the trials and tribulations of moving through a commercial building with few provisions for the physically impaired.

memory lane

Memories, memories . . . have we got the memories. And we'd like to share them with you. Using local newspaper files, we're dishing up generous slices of life in the Farmington area from 40, 30, 20 and 10 years ago.

MARCH 30, 1944 —

"**MIGHTY SHARP** is the Warner Dairy office looking these days, with its new coat of paint," noted an Around the Block item. "Can't think of anything that does more to brighten up an office than a clean face, so to speak."

"**HAVE YOU TAKEN** time out to observe Young America during the past months?" asked an editorial. "If not you've really missed something."

"At the Civic Theatre this week a collection is being taken each day for the benefit of the American Red Cross. Saturday afternoon was no exception, and if you could have seen the young audience dig down and bring up their pennies to put in the collection boxes, you would have felt that the youngsters somehow knew more about what's going on than a good many adults do."

"Likewise, if you watched them at play, you know that the boys and girls in your block are alert to the time of day. There was the instance of the little girl who couldn't get on their make-believe train, because she was going on vacation. No sir — in order to ride on that train you had to be on your way to a war job, or you had to be a soldier or a sailor — or a WAC, and then there was the little boy who was not one of the gang because he continued to throw away the paper his lunch was wrapped in. As soon as he saved the paper, like the rest of the kids, he was taken right in."

"We could learn a lot of lessons from the younger citizens of the community if we would just take the time to observe them."

CLASSIFIED AD: "WANTED — Ironings to do. Call 690-W." Another Classified: "FOR SALE — Cabinet model radio, \$16.00. 31610 Shaw."

APRIL 1, 1954 —

VOTERS IN THE Farmington Township School District approved a \$1.5 million school build program in a special election held March 29. The proposal passed, 483 votes to 307. School officials said they were considering the purchase of several sites for the new schools."

WORK HAS BEGUN on the construction of five new model houses in the new Bel-Aire subdivision located east of Power Road and south of 10 Mile Road in Farmington. Basements have been started in all five houses. It is expected that they will be completed this spring. Some 350 homes will fill the subdivision.

HEAVY RAINS MARCH 30 caused minor flooding in many areas of the township and the city. On

Grand River in the southeastern part of the township, cars slowed as they traveled through the 18 inches of water that covered the road. City and township officials reported numerous calls from residents with flooded yards and basements.

CLASSIFIED AD: "HORSE MANURE — four yards, \$8, delivered \$10. 25811 Power." Another classified: "USED ABC wringer washer, good condition, \$35. Farm. 1767-W."

APRIL 2, 1964 —

JOHN O'GREEN of John O'Green Ford Inc. was the first civic member to be signed up in the local YMCA branch in 1963 and became the first to renew his civic membership and become a Century Club member in 1964. A Century Club membership cost the donor \$100.

ROBERT B. ROMER officially took over his duties as tax assessor for Farmington Township on April 1. His appointment had been announced earlier by township supervisor Curt Hall. Romer replaced William Gallagher, who resigned to enter private business.

HARRY SMITH, 99, died of burn injuries he suffered when the old frame house in which he lived alone caught fire on the night of March 30. The home, located at the corner of Shiawassee Road and Haynes Street in Farmington Township, was damaged heavily, according to fire department officials, who could not determine the cause of the fire.

THE ANNUAL EASTER egg hunt, scheduled for Easter Sunday (March 28), was called off because of a heavy snowfall, but a large number of youngsters showed up at the city park anyway. The hunt was sponsored by the Farmington Jaycees.

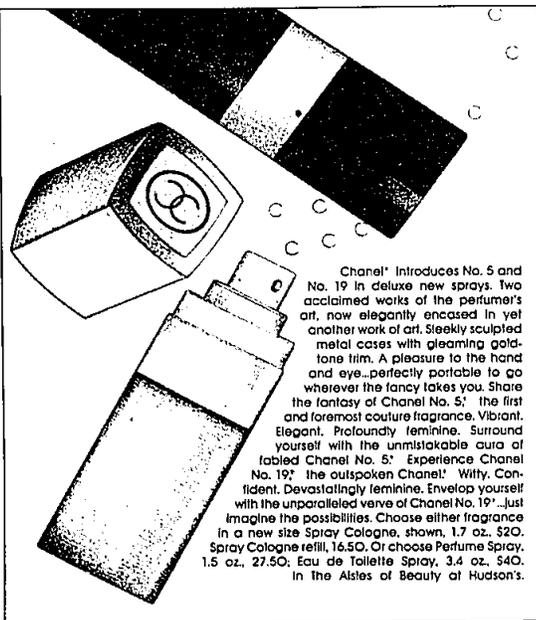
MARCH 28, 1974 —

PARENTS OF CHILDREN who attend Gill Elementary School and Power Junior High School in the southern part of the Farmington District have formed a group called The Committee for the Forgotten Kids of Gill and Power. The parents have been trying to get the district to build an improved walkway to the schools.

GIRLS HAD A chance to play basketball in the Farmington Police League for the first time ever this year. Some 135 girls were added to the 125 boys in the program, which concluded recently. Jim Holton, Jeff Herrman, Dan Milhizer and Rick Milhizer volunteered to assist Patrolman Norman Rose in running the program.

FARMINGTON'S FLANDERS Elementary School celebrated the city's Sesquicentennial by hosting an old-fashioned ice cream social at the school on March 27. Flanders students and some of their parents came to school dressed in costumes of a bygone era.

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