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Fight reveals morale problem at school

By Steve Barnaby
editor

Farmington teachers who instruct students from Boys Republic are intimidated but reluctant to complain about it, according to at least one teacher at the Shiawassee building facility.

The remark came after a student fistfight last Wednesday morning. It required the aid of Farmington Hills police officers to break up. And although it was the first incident in which the police have been called, other less se-

vere incidents have occurred, according to teachers.

"There just weren't enough hands to take care of this incident," said one teacher who wished to remain anonymous.

The school is staffed by nine teachers, an administrator, a counselor, one psychologist and one placement teacher, according to Farmington Superintendent Lewis Schulman.

THE POLICE report said that at least "40 disorderlies" were involved in the incident, with 10 persons directly involved in the fight.

Order was restored by clearing the hall and placing the students back in classrooms, according to police.

Approximately 75 students attend classes at Shiawassee. Boys Republic is a state-run facility which houses juveniles who have been ordered detained by the courts. Although run by the state, the Farmington School District is responsible for the youths' education.

While the students are housed at the Boys Republic grounds on Nine Mile, they attend classes at Shiawassee, north of Nine Mile, on Shiawassee.

Witnesses said that before police arrived, chairs, tables and plants were thrown around the facility by students. Fistfights also intermittently broke out.

The fights were the result of an argument which had taken place between the youths at Boys Republic the night before, according to teachers.

"I felt we should have been told about what happened at Boys Republic the night before," said one teacher.

Discipline, say teachers, is a problem.

"THE KIDS are already in a detention center. It doesn't do much good when they are already assigned to detention to threaten to put them there," said a teacher.

And lodging complaints with the administration or the teacher bargaining unit seems to get little results, either.

"The (teachers) contract is very general. There is no other situation like this. The language just doesn't apply," said a teacher, who was told to "forget about it" when reporting a threat earlier this year.

That same teacher said that although the administration seemed sympathetic, "they don't see what happens. They don't see kids put fists in your face."

One teacher reported that morale was better than last year because an administrator had been called in to aid the building administrator in "structuring" the system at Shiawassee.

And although police were called to the facility, charges weren't pressed. Boys Republic officials told police they would handle discipline over the incident.

Vigil

Tornado sentinels challenge disaster

By Julie Brown
staff writer

It's been nearly a decade since a tornado hit the Farmington Hills/West Bloomfield area, and those memories may have faded from the minds of some Oakland County residents.

Paul Phelps hopes, however, that the memories haven't faded completely.

"The people in West Bloomfield are really sensitive, they are sensitive to tornadoes because a tornado struck them," said Phelps, division manager for Oakland County's Division of EMS/Disaster Control.

"They are aware of the dangers and destruction that can be caused by a tornado in a matter of seconds."

The 1976 tornado killed one young woman, in addition to destroying some homes and businesses and damaging others. The woman who was killed was riding in a car when the tornado hit.

Tornadoes can hit any time of the

year, but are most likely to strike during the spring and early summer. Weather conditions during that season make tornadoes more likely.

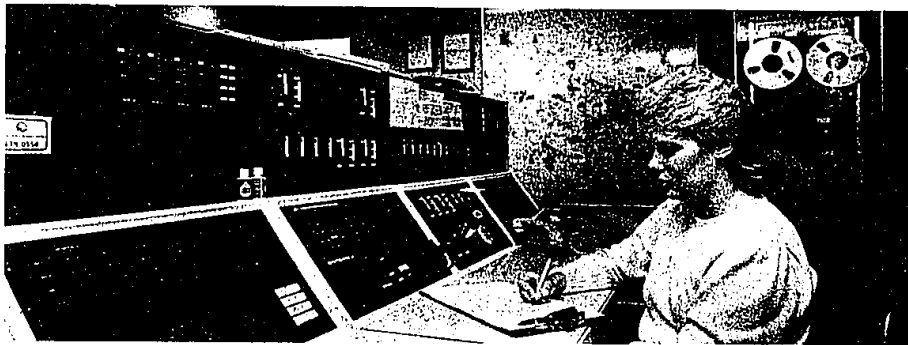
"Tornadoes may develop from severe weather," Phelps said. "When a thunderstorm warning is issued, citizens should start thinking about the possibility of a tornado evolving from that severe thunderstorm."

In the springtime, cold fronts collide with warmer air returning to the area from the Gulf of Mexico.

"THE WORST time is in the spring because both air masses are pretty potent at that time," said Bill Deedler, severe weather meteorologist at the National Weather Service's Detroit Metropolitan Airport facility.

"Actually, we're not in the highest priority of tornadoes," he said.

The worst part of the nation for tornadoes starts in the Texas area, he said, and then proceeds north to the Iowa area.



The main control board of the warning system is operated by Rachel Shymkiw in the basement of the Oakland County jail

"That's usually the worst area. We're on the fringe of it."

The National Weather Service has two designations to warn the public about tornadoes.

A tornado watch alerts the public to the possibility of a tornado, while a tornado warning warns of an existing tornado or one suspected to exist. When a tornado warning is issued, it's important

to seek shelter immediately. (See related story.)

Oakland County's Division of EMS/Disaster Control doesn't issue the tornado watches or warnings. Tornado watches are issued by the National Severe Storm Center in Kansas City, Mo., while warnings are issued by the National Weather Service in Detroit.

"They put out the watches, and we put out the warnings," Deedler said.

The Oakland County Disaster Control office is responsible for disseminating severe weather information throughout the county.

"What we do with that information is tell people about it," Phelps said. "We disseminate the information to the agencies and individuals."

THE DISASTER Control Division, which is housed at the county's Service Center in Pontiac, operates a 24-hour communication center. When the National Weather Service issues a severe weather condition report, the office broadcasts detailed weather information.

Please turn to Page 4

Purim: Time for fun and remembrance

By Julie Brown
staff writer

Thursday wasn't the most ordinary of days at Hillel Day School in Farmington Hills.

Students at the school were busy celebrating the Jewish holiday of Purim, which began at sundown Wednesday and ended at sundown Thursday. Celebration of the holiday at the school includes carnivals and the wearing of costumes.

Do the students look forward to Purim?

"Very much," said Rabbi Robert Abramson, the headmaster. "Who doesn't look forward to having fun?"

"It's something out of the ordinary routine of school, obviously. The nice thing that happens here is that we do it as a community."

PURIM RECALLS Haman's plot to exterminate the Jews of Persia. Through the intervention of Mordecai and Queen Esther, the Jews escaped the fate planned by Haman.

The word "Purim" comes from the word "Pur," or lots. When Haman plotted to destroy the Jews, he cast lots to determine when the destruction would occur.

Celebration of the holiday at Hillel Day School includes explanation of its historical and religious significance, the rabbi said. "And yet, it has all those elements of being a fun day."

Abby Magid and Howard Kahn, 6-year-old students at the school, were glad Purim had arrived.

"I like dressing up in costumes," said Abby, a first-grader in Debbie Golding's class. She was dressed as Queen Vashti, a character in the Book of Esther story.

Abby's classmate Howard was dressed as Ahaseuerus, the King of Persia. "The fun" is what he looks forward to. "Eating the hamantaschen" also ranks high on Howard's list. Hamantaschen are three-cornered ples baked for the holiday.

THE YOUNGER students frequently choose costumes based on the Biblical characters. Abramson said. The older students often choose costumes based on television and movie characters.



Teacher Debbie Golding and her students show off their Purim attire.

"This year, I certainly don't see any pattern of who's what," the rabbi said. The oldest students, the ninth-graders, decided to dress as various cartoon characters.

Thursday, students at the school gathered to hear the story from the Book of Esther, read from a special scroll called a "megillah."

The students used noisemakers, or "graggers," to make noise each time Haman's name was mentioned.

"We try to make enough noise to stamp it out," Abramson said.

Students at the school also had the chance Thursday to have their pictures taken in costume. A "fun house" and a Purim play were also part of the day's activities.

"It's a time for satire," the rabbi said of the play. "I won't be surprised if someone ends up playing me. I consider myself lucky if I don't come out as Haman."

what's inside

Cable Connection . . . 2A
Community Calendar . . . 7B
Editorials 3A
Inside Angles 6A
Oral Quarrel 6A
Shopping Cart . . . Section B
Sports Section C
Suburban Life 5, 8, 7B



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Amy Goldman reads from the Megillah during the Purim celebration at Hillel Day School.