

## Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

## Test your bone mass

A new diagnostic technique called dual-photon absorptiometry uses low-level radiation to obtain an accurate assessment of a woman's bone density.

This new diagnostic device is available at four health facilities in the state, including the Farmington Hills Center for Metabolic Diseases in Farmington Hills.

## Spreen speaks out over Lazaros case

To the editor:

For 12 years, I served Oakland County as sheriff. Yet for 10 of those years, I was caught between two county lawyers and county politics in the unusual Valentino vs. Oakland County Sheriff case.

The recent unanimous decision of the Supreme Court of Michigan, which overturns the \$2.2 million judgment against me, is certainly a relief and allows me to speak out now.

A lower court found that in 1976, my undersheriff John Nichols, was negligent in removing the guards from Peter Lazaros's hospital room — and that I was "vicariously" liable for the acts of my undersheriff.

I accepted that responsibility because a sheriff or a police chief does not do his job all by himself. He must also delegate authority to his subordinates.

However, it was stated that I was negligent in failing to restore guards to the hospital room of Peter Lazaros and that I did "nothing" about Lazaros's signing himself out of the hospital after the guards had been removed. This bothers me because neither accusation is true.

The facts are that Lazaros was guarded around the clock for over two weeks (April 21, 1976, through May 6, 1976). On May 6, the undersheriff, John Nichols, directed the removal of the hospital guard pursuant to instructions from Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson, who, in a letter to Judge Thorburn of the Circuit Court stated "... the removal of the guards is solely my responsibility. If there are any questions regarding this recent action, please do not hesitate to contact me personally."

The next day, May 7, 1976, as Lazaros was signing himself out of the hospital, I received a call from the hospital's security chief advising me of this fact. Contrary to what has been stated in court and what has been printed "... that I did nothing."

I had Lazaros held by two Bloomfield Township police officers. I then contacted the corporation counsel, Jack Hayes, the official lawyer for county employees and for me as sheriff, and asked him for legal advice. He returned my call within five minutes with the message, "Nichols took the guards off. Let Lazaros go; we'll untangle this later."

After 10 years, this has been resolved after great worry and cost to me and my family. The 12 years as sheriff were not pleasant ones for me as the single, countywide elected Democrat in a completely Republican-controlled county. There was absolutely no cooperation from County Executive Daniel Murphy, little from Patterson, and very little from most of the Republican County commissioners during these tough 12 years.

Between the politics, some of the explosive, and political media, and the unending litigation with its "vicarious liability" and "punitive damage" lawsuits which plague law enforcement officers, one does not have to wonder why law enforcers have been and are losing the battle against crime.

The real losers, of course, are the people — who become victims one way or the other.

Johannes F. Spreen  
Farmington Hills

## Barnaby's view was courageous

To the editor:

I was thrilled with the editorial entitled "Southfield High School class prepared to show Dearborn," by Steve Barnaby (Feb. 6).

I taught at SHS from 1968-1972. It was a time of emotional electricity which was not well received by many school personnel. I commend the perseverance of the students, and I wish I had a facility to offer them. It is too infrequently that we find people taking a stand, and I would like to reinforce the courage of the youth.

I would also like to reinforce the courage of Steve Barnaby and your paper. In the past my experience of The Observer papers has been one of a conservative nature. It is courageous to bring an issue of humanity to a community that could easily escape involvement.

Natalie Rice  
Farmington Hills

## Remembering the Challenger crew

To the editor:

Once there was a Challenger that flew high in the sky.

Once there were seven people that had alot of pride. People watched that plane go up, way up in the sky for only a few seconds and then I heard them cry. Oh what has happened, no that can not be! You say we've lost our Astronauts and even Christa. Well now there is only silent and alot of prayers. May God be with each of you and let you know we cared.

Jennet Johnston  
Farmington Hills

## Privatization — view irrelevant

To the editor:

Mark Steckloff's Jan. 23 letter is irrelevant to the current discussions of transit privatization in the Detroit area.

Yes, subsidies to the New Jersey private monopoly did increase by \$50 million in the 1970s, just as subsidies increased by nearly as much to public transit monopolies in the Detroit area (though a lot less service was provided in the Detroit area). Both public and private monopolies are unable to control costs. And that's the problem — monopoly.

Competitive service contracting is a much different. The public transit agency decides to use private operators for some of its service, and there is competition between the operators for the right to

provide the service for the contract period. This approach is being used in a myriad of public services, including school transportation, refuse disposal, street light maintenance, etc. In transit, the cost savings around the country have ranged from 20 to 60 percent.

The New Jersey Governor's Management Improvement Coalition (1985) has recommended greatly increased use of private operators through competitive contracting.

No, private costs are not higher than public costs in Houston, in fact, they are about 50 percent lower.

That is why Houston Metro is expanding its competitive contracting program.

No one wants to return to the days of private monopoly, and even the most casual observer is horrified at the cost escalation that has occurred under public monopolies. Fully 60 percent of transit subsidies have been used for excess cost increases. Only 40 percent went to lower fares or new service for the riders. That's an abysmal record, and something has to change.

It is time to put the riders and taxpayers first. Competitive contracting is the only way to rescue

transit from the merry-go-round of escalating fares, lower service and increased fares. The private sector is not inherently better than the public sector, rather competition is inherently better than monopoly.

The test of any public service approach is its impact upon the users and the taxpayers, and competitive contracting has yielded nothing but positive results.

Wendell Cox

Urban Transportation Consultant  
Washington, D.C.

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