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Farmington Observer

Volume 97 Number 77

Thursday, July 3, 1986

Farmington, Michigan

58 Pages

Twenty-Five Cents

Seat belt law now year old

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

They seem to be saving lives. Exactly how many lives have been saved because of Michigan's year-old seat belt law is impossible to pinpoint.

"But the law is having an effect,"

says Sgt. Ray Cranston, commander of the Farmington Hills Police Department traffic safety section. "The severity of injuries has been reduced."

Through the first five months of 1985, Farmington Hills logged nine traffic deaths. That compares with

one during the same period this year.

"I can't attribute all of the reduction to the seat belt law — two of the victims last year were motorcycleists but it certainly is a contributing factor," Cranston said.

The one death this year involved an unbelted man thrown from a car

when it rolled over on Farmington Road April 22.

Effective July 1, 1985, it became mandatory for Michigan drivers and front-seat passengers to buckle up, although the law does not apply to buses, motorcycles, antique cars and some commercial vehicles. A 1981 state law requires infants to ride in

car seats and children between ages 1 and 4 to either ride in car seats or be belted.

Misdemeanor tickets can only be issued if a motorist is stopped for another violation and officers discover non-compliance with the seat belt law. The penalty is a \$25 fine. It does

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Farmington FOCUS

If you have a news item or an idea for a feature story or an action picture with a Farmington-area connection, send a note to our downtown office at 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

GLEAMING gold.
Gary Goss, Farmington Department of Public Safety deputy director, took three gold medals in cycling events at the Michigan Police Olympics in Clare the week of June 15.

This was Goss' first time competing in the annual event held for officers throughout the state. This year's Olympics drew an estimated 500 competitors.

Goss won two events for his age division and was the overall winner in the 13 1/2-mile short course event.

MOVING up.
Gerson Cooper, president of Betsford General Hospital in Farmington Hills, was named chairman of the Michigan Hospital Association Board of Trustees.

Cooper is a former chairman of the American Osteopathic Hospital Association and former president of the Michigan Osteopathic Hospital Association.

NOTE this road closing. Thirteen Mile, between Drake and Halsted, will be closed through Aug. 22 for paving, Farmington Hills Engineering Division reports.

Paving as well as curbs and gutters will be done on this stretch of 13 Mile. The area's natural beauty will be retained as much as possible.

A detour route has been set up and signs mark the way. Halsted to 12 Mile to Drake is the detour.

The paving project is part of the city's major road improvements planned for 1986. Completion is subject to change as the project progresses.

TODAY, at 10:53 p.m., houses of worship and the Farmington Hills Fire Department will ring their bells and sirens in unison with other participants across the nation as President Reagan lights the Statue of Liberty's torch.

The bell ringing is sponsored by the Ellis Island Foundation's Liberty Weekend Committee.

MONDAY, July 7, is the last day to register to vote in the Tuesday, Aug. 5, primary.

Farmington City Clerk Josephine Busby will be in her office from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. that day to register voters.

In Farmington Hills, City Clerk John Reynolds will be in her office from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. July 7.

To register, you must be a U.S. citizen at least 18 years of age and a resident of the city for at least 30 days before voting.

FOOTNOTES: One year ago this week — "This location here looks like a nice southern setting, just like Louisiana," said Angela Turley, an independent producer who picked the facility for the Hecny-Sundquist Funeral Home on Farmington Road in Downtown Farmington as the location for filming a 30-second commercial.

A full day's work for a Detroit-based filming crew, the commercial, produced for New Orleans Buick Dealers, will be viewed in New Orleans.

Undisusing old memories

Looking back at the road to America

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

The first glimpse of the Statue of Liberty and nearby Ellis Island meant different things to three Farmington-area residents who sailed into New York Harbor and a new life in the early- to mid-1900s.

For Charles Cini, 74, entry to America wasn't necessarily a chance at freedom as much as it was a chance for a better way.

"I had friends, cousins, here. I thought, maybe I would get a good job here," said Cini, who left the island nation of Malta in 1934.

Mary Marshall, 77, was five years old when her family left their village of Casale in northern Italy for America. The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island is far from her memory. But her memories of the long trip across the ocean are as vivid as if the journey was yesterday.

Sarkis "Sam" Mekjian has a different story. He came to America in 1912 for freedom.

"Someone told me to get out of country," said Mekjian, recalling his youth during the Turkish massacre of the Armenians. "If you didn't take 50 gold pieces, you don't have to be in the army," he said.

Although Mekjian's father, a successful veterinarian, wanted to pay off Turkish officials, his son refused. "Others in the town came here. So I did too."

WHILE MEKJIAN found a new life in America, tears still fill his eyes when he speaks of his family, of their attempts to survive the Turkish invasion of Armenia. "My father, they put him in jail for seven months. They beat him like Jesus," Mekjian said, crying.

His anger and contempt for what happened to his family, friends and homeland has remained with Mekjian all his life.



'They asked me if I would fight for this country (America). I said, "Sure. You betcha. I would fight. The Turks killed my people."'

— Sarkis "Sam" Mekjian, World War I veteran.

Hille man leaves his mark in New York harbor: 6A
A story of patriotism: 8A

Shortly after Mekjian received his citizenship, he was drafted into the U. S. Army in 1917. Proudly, Mekjian shows a black-and-white photo taken in Germany of himself in his army uniform.

"They asked me if I would fight for this country, I said, 'Sure. You betcha. I would fight. The Turks killed my people,'" said Mekjian, the oldest World War I veteran in Michigan.

Like millions of immigrants across the country, Cini, Marshall and Mekjian have their stories and their first thoughts about America.

Cini recalls the day he sailed into New York Harbor. It was June 23, 1934. He was 22 years old. "I saw the statue (when traveling) from New York port to Ellis Island. To

me, it was something new. I had never seen anything that big," he said.

ELLIS ISLAND was a quick stop for Cini. "They were checking you for (entry) papers, to see if you have come in properly," he said.

Before he left Malta, where he learned a little English from British soldiers stationed there, Cini obtained health papers from a local physician. His cousin, who had been living in America for a while, also managed to send Cini entry papers. But officials tested his comprehension. "They told me, in my own language, to open the door, and so on."

Cini stayed in New York City for two days. He arrived by train in Detroit and went on to work at Ford Motor Co., where he had to pay \$50 for a job. He left the auto company to work in the grocery business with his cousins. He later worked for a manufacturing company.

America was a better place for



This fiberglass replica of the Statue of Liberty stands behind Alexander Hamilton Life Insurance Company of America in Farmington Hills. It faces I-696. The company plans to keep the statue in place at least until fall.

Schools file claim against state

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Farmington school officials believe the State of Michigan owes the district \$5 million for reimbursement of state-ordered programs since 1978.

The district recently filed a claim for that amount with the Michigan Claims Review Board — a legislative committee created after passage of the 1978 Headlee tax amendment, according to Deputy Superintendent Michael Flanagan said.

Officials took the action in lieu of joining lawsuits against the state by approximately 30 Southeastern Michigan school districts filed June 27 in the Michigan Court of Appeals.

The suits charge the state with violating the Headlee Amendment, which requires the state to pay for local programs it mandates, including special education, driver training, bilingual education and school lunch programs. The state has steadily decreased its reimbursements of such programs since 1978, Flanagan said.

"I still have an option to sue," Flanagan said, although he believes the claims procedure is the best route for the district today. "We've chosen not to exercise that option at this time. We felt we could give it a year and still have all our options."

THE LAWSUITS are being coordinated through attorney Dennis Pol-

lard, of the Birmingham law firm of Clark, Hardy, Lewis, Pollard and Page, retained by Farmington Public Schools and other local districts for their expertise in school and bond matters. They suggested the districts file lawsuits by June 30 in order to be allowed to go back six full years to collect, Flanagan said.

The many lawsuits and claims follow a recent Michigan Supreme Court ruling favoring Warren's Fitzgerald School District, which will be reimbursed for its expenditures for state-ordered programs.

Of the 600 school districts in Mich-

igan, the state could expend up to \$300 million in reimbursements, according to recent estimates.

Although Flanagan said he believes the district is entitled to the reimbursement, he does not know what to expect because of the large number of similar claims amount and the question of where the state would get the money to pay back local districts.

"At what price," he asked, "do we fund this settlement?"

He pointed out that a possible settlement may be reached for a prorated portion of the claims filed and

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Crackdown

Tighter rein on developers sought

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Tired of continuing problems with open space completion, Farmington City Councilman Ben Marks wants open space areas in new subdivisions to be finished before the neighborhood is anywhere close to total development.

As requested by Marks last November, city officials have developed a proposed new policy that would require developers to complete neighborhood open spaces — in new subdivi-

sions — before the fifth building permit is issued.

"I agree with it 100 percent. I have heard all the arguments (against it). They are valid. But not enough for me to change my mind," Marks said.

Although council did not discuss the proposed policy in depth, they agreed a hearing should be held to hear public comments. Council also agreed that if the policy is accepted, it should become an ordinance and included in the city's subdivision control act.

Under the proposed policy, open spaces would be treated as any other subdivision improvements, such as water and sewer lines, which are required in the subdivision platting process.

AWARE OF opposition voiced by builders and developers at a Farmington Hills Planning Commission meeting May 29, Marks acknowledged that the proposed policy could create hardships for builders.

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