

Latchkey

Telephone calls warn parents of early closings

By Susan Steinmueller
staff writer

YOUR THIRD-GRADE'S school lost power and heat in the middle of a sub-zero winter day.

The principal made the decision to close the building at noon and send home the students, many of them members of the latchkey generation.

You're at work when you hear the news a couple of hours later. Do you know where your child is?

You should, according to area school districts. Many suburban districts (Birmingham, Troy, Farmington, West Bloomfield, Rochester and Southfield were contacted) require that each child file with them a list of three emergency numbers.

In the event of an early closing, they will try to contact you or a responsible adult on that list to take care of the child.

Schools also expect parents to have briefed their children in advance on what to do in the event of early dismissal.

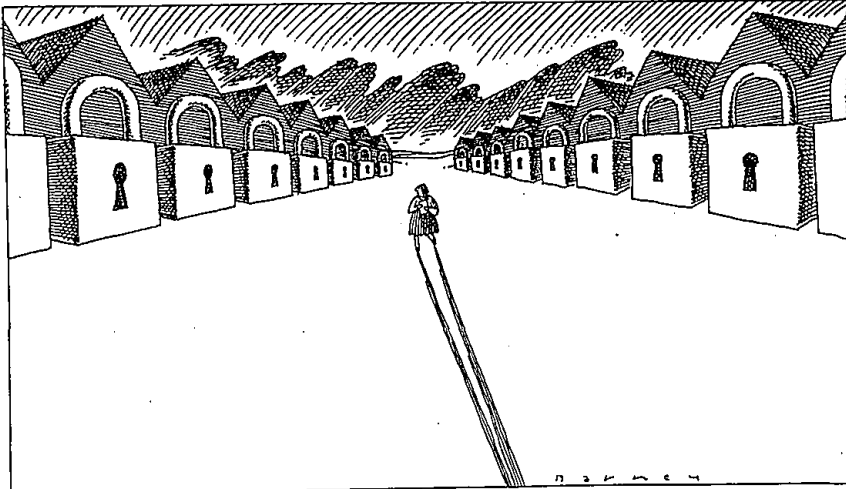
The Birmingham district, for example, has a policy that states, "It is imperative that all parents discuss thoroughly with their children the possibility of an early dismissal and make certain they know where to go when parents are not at home."

Said Michael LaBay, assistant superintendent of elementary education in Birmingham, "It really is the parents' responsibility to tell them the priorities, whether that is to go to a neighbor's house, or if it is an older child, to have a key."

The Rochester district also puts the onus on parents to tell children what to do.

"Children are supposed to be educated at home in terms of what to do if there isn't anyone there, such as go to Mrs. Smith's for a key, or go to Mrs. Smith's and stay," said Diane Iras, school communications consultant.

The 1986 school calendar spells



Many suburban school districts require that each child file with them a list of three emergency numbers.

out parents' responsibilities in case of school closing for inclement weather: "In the event that no one is home, parents should make arrangements with neighbors to receive the young children on such occasions."

SCHOOL DISTRICTS use a "fan-out" telephone-calling system in the event of early closings, in which parent volunteers are called and asked to notify other parents.

"We can call everyone from kindergarten through grade eight within half-an-hour from the time we close," according to Larry Thomas, West Bloomfield assistant superintendent of administrative services.

Most schools only call through middle school. In the Southfield

District, every home through fifth grade is called, with middle school children being in a "borderline" group where homes may also be called, according to Ken Silver, public information director.

"With middle school and high school students, it's not a problem. They have a key to the home... the where-withal (to look after themselves)."

However, some school officials point out that the system is not always foolproof.

LaBay noted that telephones can go out.

And Lynn Nutter, assistant superintendent of administrative operation for the Farmington School District, said, "Even with all the efforts, there is always a chance

that we can make a mistake."

Two years ago, the Farmington district closed Wood Creek Elementary at 11:45 a.m. after the school was plunged into darkness by a power failure.

Parents complained that some students were sent home without parents being notified, despite the use of the "fan out" system — a plan that was hampered when the school's telephone became unable to receive incoming calls.

It was suggested by one parent that children whose parents couldn't be notified should have been kept on the school grounds — electricity or not.

GENERALLY, however, schools will not send elementary-age chil-

dren home until parents have been notified.

James Doyle, Troy assistant superintendent, said, "We just do not send elementary children out unless someone is there."

He said that in an extreme case, "We might know enough parents in that particular block (of the child's home) that we could call if necessary to make sure that the child is with a responsible person that we trust."

In the Southfield district, said Silver, "If we determined it was safe to dismiss the children, we would dismiss them, but only if we knew that there was a safe place for them to go. We wouldn't send a child home to a locked door or any that kind of thing."

If no one on the emergency number list could be found, he said, "The child would stay at school. We would keep them here until we find somebody."

"Of course you're dealing here with neighbors... the parents know each other, so it's easier to keep track of these types of things."

Principals and teachers often take a child home, or stay with the child if they know he or she has nowhere to go, administrators said.

At Acadia Montessori School in Rochester, a private school for preschool through elementary age children, the same system of parent notification for early dismissals is used.

But, because there are no buses at the school, it is easy to keep track of children who are not picked up by parents or neighbors, said Marlene McCormick, administrator, who said the staff would take care of a child until the parent could pick the child up.

"In the last six years, we have only had to close school early once," she said, when there was a heavy snowfall.

EARLY SCHOOL closings are rare, school officials claim. One reason is that in cases such as weather emergencies, there is enough advance warning that schools do not open at all.

And, even in the event of a power outage, schools will try to remain open unless, as stated in the Birmingham policy, "conditions develop that are detrimental to the health and safety of students."

"I think in the last five years, maybe it's happened twice where there were early dismissals," said Southfield's Silver. In Birmingham, LaBay said, only two elementary schools have had to close early in the last four years.

When there was a power outage at Quanton Elementary recently, the school stayed open. "It was kind of cozy," he said. "In winter, it's a different story."

Taking shape

Little Caesar eyes new offices

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

Plans are rolling along for Little Caesar's proposed headquarters on 12 Mile and Drake.

Farmington Hills planning commission approved the pizza chain's site plan Oct. 16 for the first of three major office buildings on the almost 39 acres on the southwest corner of Drake and 12 Mile, Farmington Hills Planner Ed Gardiner said.

Following a scheduled groundbreaking ceremony Nov. 6, company officials will release artist's renderings and other details of the proposed headquarters, including plans for two more buildings to be built later, said Little Caesar's Sue Sherbow, assistant director of corporate communications. Company officials will not release cost estimates for the project.

"We don't even have those plans on the drawing board yet," Sherbow said about the two additional buildings that, when complete, will provide an estimated 200,000 to 250,000 square feet on the site.

Preliminary work, such as laying foundations, will begin in mid-November on the first three-story, 125,000-square-foot building. "It's going to have the feel of a Cranbrook (Educational Community on Long Pine in Bloomfield Hills) but it will be adapted to a modern office building," Sherbow said.

COMPANY OFFICIALS must still obtain site engineering and building plan approvals before any work can begin, Gardiner said.

In addition to site plan approval, Little Caesar's officials requested an ordinance amendment to permit a taller and wider cupola and taller skylights than permitted in the office-research district on the 12 Mile/Drake corner. The skylight, from its midpoint to top, is six feet taller than the maximum 40-foot height limit, Gardiner said.

Planning commissioners agreed to study the request.

"They (planning commissioners) just took the skylight and cupola off the approved (site) plan," Gardiner said.

The buildings will be situated in a way that makes the best aesthetic use of the land, which includes at least one pond. The main entrance to

the proposed headquarters will be off 12 Mile. Architects are Kenneth Neumann and Robert Greager of Southfield.

Little Caesar's, owned by Mike Ilitch of Detroit Red Wings fame, purchased the acreage on the Farmington Hills' office corridor from the Farmington Public Schools last December for more than \$3 million in cash.

THE COMPANY has received approximately \$8.2 million in tax-exempt bonds through the Farmington Hills Economic Development Corporation.

The EDC is a municipal corporation that provides a mechanism that allows a bond purchaser to enjoy tax exemption on interest earned in exchange for issuing a more-favorable lending rate to the developer.

When the first building is complete, enough room should be provided for the company's more than 350 employees, Corporate Vice President Charles Jones said late last year.

In 1980, Little Caesar's moved into 67,000 square feet of rented space at 10 Mile and Haggerty, with officials assuming the space was adequate to accommodate any growth.

But within the last 4 1/2 years, the company has outgrown the two adjacent buildings in Tenery Park, on the city's western edge. Little Caesar's has more than 700 pizza stores in 38 states plus two in the United Kingdom.

Yet the business explosion has not been restricted to pizzas. The company also manufactures pizza production equipment and is in the wholesale food and distribution business. The pizza stores, for example, are designed by staff architects and designers.

Mothers March: not just for moms

Mothers may get top billing but fathers do it, too. So do grandparents and single folks and teen-agers. They all participate in the Mothers March against birth defects to help the March of Dimes.

Marchers won't be hitting the streets until January but recruiting is going on now. It takes a lot of people to cover southeast Michigan and the March of Dimes is hoping you'll help.

Marchers are asked to go door to door in their own neighborhood. It takes just about an hour to cover the 10 to 12 houses you'll be assigned. All marchers are given a kit containing instructions, identification and March of Dimes public health information.

As a marcher, you not only help raise vital research funds for the March of Dimes, you also carry an important health message to your friends and neighbors.

LITERATURE on good prenatal care and the part it plays in pro-

ducing healthy babies is left at every home in the march.

Because of thousands of Mothers March volunteers in southeast Michigan the March of Dimes is able to reach a wide audience on a person-to-person basis.

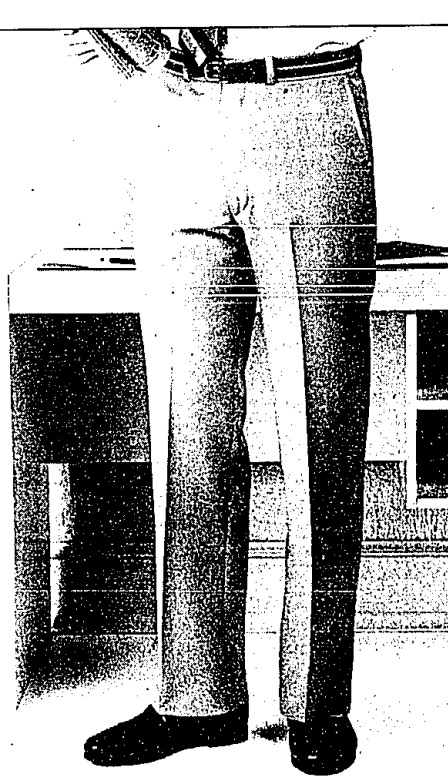
In southeast Michigan, the March of Dimes lends financial support to organizations like the Pontiac Health Care Center, the Corner Health Center in Ypsilanti and the Young Adult Clinic at Henry Ford Hospital.

The March of Dimes promotes prenatal care in individual communities and is also working to combat teenage pregnancy in a variety of ways, including a recent series of teen conferences held in the Port Huron area.

It takes so little time and reaches so many people. Become an active part of the fight against birth defects. Join the Mothers March. To volunteer your time, call Betty Gehring in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb Counties, 423-3200.

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