

Geography class has local twist

By Casey Hens
staff writer

Instead of studying various cultures around the world, Nancy Handelman's students look to their back yards for a geography lesson.

Many students enrolled in the community education geography session at Ten Mile Community School in Farmington are foreign-born. Handelman said it is as important for them to learn about the United States as it is for U.S. students to learn about other parts of the world.

"I have more foreign-born students than ever before," she said. "I wanted to see what they needed" before formulating a lesson plan.

"The best place to familiarize yourself with geography is to start in your own back yard. I figured I would make it as relevant to them as possible."

The class took a field trip to Farmington City Hall Nov. 20, where City Manager Robert Deadman delivered an overview of Farmington-area history, a brief civics lesson and a tour of city facilities.

Some of the students are from countries where they might not be invited to tour a government building, he said.

SOME OF this term's geography students are from Iraq, Mexico and India, according to Handelman.

The former psychology and social studies teacher said her students enjoyed touring the public safety facilities the most. She said "they were fascinated" by the dispatch operation, fingerprinting and lock-up facilities.

They also saw the Southwestern Oakland Cable Commission offices

in city hall, offices of the city assessor and clerk, how and where residents pay water bills, and viewed the city's computer room — the heart of most city operations.

Deadman explained the differences between the various forms of local governments and compared the operations of other local cities — such as Livonia's strong mayor form of government — with Farmington's council/manager government.

He told the group about the area's original settlement in the 1820s and about how just a short time ago, there were acres of apple groves stretching across what is now the city of Farmington Hills.

THE LAND annexation process, which accounts for the odd shape of the city of Farmington, was also mentioned by Deadman. It caused at least four properties to be split by two city borders.

"It's complicated, and quite frankly, it is complicated for those who have spent a whole life going through our system," Deadman told the students. "Each state can be different."

Some of Handelman's students are taking the class for enrichment, while others are taking it as a requirement for a high school diploma. She said she is learning as much from her students as they are learning from her class.

"They're a pleasure to have in class," she added. "Not only do we talk about geography, but we talk about customs, special holidays and cultures. Sometimes, we find out about tropical fruits and diets."

Much of the class was spent helping the students find their way around the local area, teaching them



City Manager Robert Deadman (left) discusses city government with a class from Ten Mile School. Clockwise from Deadman

are teacher Nancy Handelman and students Rose Robles, Basil Mansour, Nirmala Pirohlt and Josephine Schmidt.

how to read maps and helping them with usable geography skills, Handelman said.

She said teaching through the community education program shared by the Farmington and Clarencville districts is "a little different than the traditional classroom experience."

"Students have a very high regard for the teachers, which is very re-

freshing," she said. "Many times, English is a second language for them. I bend over backwards to help them succeed. They do succeed and go on."

Information about the community and adult education programs in both the Farmington and Clarencville districts can be obtained by calling 473-8900 in Clarencville or 474-5244 in Farmington.

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Road work advice eyed

Farmington Hills officials will get the help of a financial adviser in setting up the city's \$7 million financing program for major road improvements.

City council members last week authorized City Manager William Costick to retain the Detroit-based municipal financial adviser, Bendzinski & Co., for \$9,600. The adviser's fee could change, however, depending on the amount for which the city's bonds are sold. The city also will reimburse the company's expenses incurred on the city's behalf.

In September, Farmington Hills voters authorized the city to issue \$7 million in general obligation bonds to finance the city's share of a total \$14 million road improvement program.

Of the \$14 million, the city's share is approximately \$9 million. But the 1 mill the Farmington Hills City Council levied for roads in July is being used in conjunction with \$750,000 from the city's major road fund to finance \$2 million of the \$9 million city share this year. The city's remaining \$7 million will be financed over 10 years.

Under a service agreement, the financial adviser will help structure a bond maturity schedule and other items that will help enhance the bonds' marketability. The adviser also will prepare a bond official statement that is distributed to prospective bond bidders, rating applications with Moody's and Standard & Poor's rating agencies and obtain the best interest rates, according to the agreement.

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