

Opinion

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Home day care It's not a passing fancy

IN MANY suburban families, mom and dad both work. Big house payments make it a necessity. And it's time Farmington Hills' zoning ordinance reflects that in its child care provisions.

Granted, Darlene Feldman has created a media story by seeking out newspaper and television coverage in her crusade to make professional baby sitting legal in Farmington Hills.

Despite that self-serving tactic, she's on the right track in her quest to have state-certified home day care permitted in Farmington Hills, just as it is in several other Oakland County cities.

But while Feldman prefers no special conditions attached to such care beyond what's required by state guidelines, having a limit of, say, 750 feet between day care homes would go a long way in preventing an unwieldy concentration of such homes and resultant traffic problems. A limit of that kind should be part of any ordinance amendment Farmington Hills planning commissioners recommend to the city council.

A former Oak Park beautification advisory commissioner, Feldman is no stranger to politicking. When she addressed the Farmington Hills City Council, she came armed with a weighty packet of informational data — punctuating the extent of her commitment.

THE HOLLY Hill Farms resident is one of 23 state-licensed day care home operators in Farmington Hills and one of nearly 1,000 in Oakland County.

By their nature, such homes do not only offer more of a family setting, but also provide more personal attention than commercial day care centers. They're businesses only in the sense they add to family income. Commercial ventures they're not.

Pointing up the narrowness of Farmington Hills' zoning ordinance, Feldman said: "If you have two children and you decide your neighbor needs to watch your child, this is inappropriate."

Inappropriate, maybe. But it's still being done — and in far greater numbers than state licensing figures show, based on Feldman's review of Observer

want ads offering child care.

JUST HOW out-of-touch is the zoning ordinance? The letter of the law calls for home day care providers to meet the same criteria as Kinder-Care Learning Centers — something akin to, as Feldman aptly put it, "trying to fit round pegs into square holes."

Strict enforcement of the ordinance — which limits businesses like nursery schools, day nurseries and day care centers to large lots and frontage on major roads — could mean jail terms and fines to lawbreakers like Feldman.

It hasn't come to that — yet. But what the overly restrictive ordinance has done is foster an underground network of unlicensed home day care providers.

SAYS FELDMAN, state-certified to care for up to 12 children: "Many women are afraid to step forward and say 'I baby sit in my home.' They're afraid to go to the state and get a license."

A neighborhood buster she's not trying to be.

Feldman and her 4-year-old service only caught the public eye in June when a neighbor complained about excessive traffic. A zoning violation, a zoning variance denial and a family decision to install a circular drive followed.

Now, as Feldman says, greater attention should be paid to legitimizing "the status quo."

"**WHAT FRIGHTENS** me more than what's happening to me is the black-market baby sitting and the underground economy that's flourishing," Feldman says.

"There are too many women sitting at home watching television with a herd of children running around them."

"Let's get these women out in the open. Let's have police and reference checks done on their families to see if there's any history of child abuse or neglect. Let's get them regulated, scrutinized and licensed."

"Let's, in short, protect the children in our community."

Well put, Ms. Feldman!

— Bob Sklar

We still can make others time to help

THE GOVERNMENT — it can tax your wages, tax your savings and even steal away your incentive to donate money to others. But it can't steal away your dedication to others. Not yet, anyhow.

We all should be thinking about that during this holiday season. After these few final days of giving — to your family and friends and to charitable organizations — the feds will be foisting a most surly tax law on Mr. and Mrs. Middle Class America.

It will change the way we treat those in trouble — economic or otherwise.

You may have given it little thought as you signed a check or two to help out the local Goodfellows in your town or some other charitable organization.

Sure you give because you care. But in truth many people give a little more, and sometimes much more, because a tremendous tax write-off is available.

AND THAT'S all right. We all know that tax incentives inspire us to do things we may otherwise have forgotten to do. Good enough.

But the power barons in Washington, in all their collective wisdom, have decided to put the kibosh on a charity system that has worked perfectly well for many years.

It not only has aided the poor, it has been a considerable factor in the development of colleges and universities around the nation. Next time you happen to be on a campus, take a look around and see the number of buildings tagged with a person's name.

Many times you've probably never even heard of the person. Nobody famous, you say.

But fame is in the eyes of the beholder. And when a person donates tens of thousands or even millions of dollars to a university, that person possesses a definite type of fame in the eyes of university trustees. Hence a building, ~~has a name on that building.~~



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

OTHER CHARITABLE donations foster less ostentatious results. But the impact is the same.

Hardly anyone likes to give more to the government than is necessary to fulfill the requirement. Neither can the government afford to fund all the charitable causes in the nation.

So the charitable write-off has worked.

Next year will be bedlam in the charity business. Not even the tax experts are sure how the system works. You and I, the taxpayers, will be even more confused with all the other new tax regulations we will have to follow.

The results — millions of people won't give a dime, some because they are fearful that they can't write it off and others because they won't be able to write it off.

A real sad state of affairs brought to you from our national leaders who often are out of touch with the rest of America.

Next year, if you find yourself shut out from donating to charity, make a new resolve. Dedicate some of your time.

While money always is appreciated, time can mean a heck of a lot more to an organization. Just a couple of hours a week from you can mean the difference between success or failure for an organization trying to help others. Give it a thought. It could be the nicest gift you ever gave someone — or yourself.

From our house . . .



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Young Nicholas Strauch's hug for his special friend is enthusiastic and genuine and so is our wish to all of our readers this season. Whether you celebrate Christmas or Hanukkah, may peace and joy fill your home this holiday season.

Unending search for peace

A COLUMN should be many things — interesting, informative, funny, provocative — but its message should not be obvious. If it is obvious, that fact should be carefully hidden.

Why? Because if the column has an obvious message, why bother reading it?

This column is making an obvious point. I cannot hide that fact. The point is this: War is stupid.

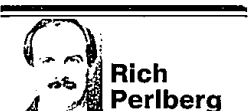
No great revelation there. Most of us already have decided that war is atrocious. For those few on the other side, there is nothing I'm about to say that will change their minds.

War is stupid, and most of us are not stupid, yet we keep having wars. You figure it out.

WHEN YOU DO figure it out, tell me about it. Then tell Bill McCullough. He is a Southfield resident who recently arranged a reunion with some of the men he flew with during World War II bombing missions.

After risking his lives time after time and bearing heavy odds by surviving, the crew disbanded after the war and just recently reunited.

Now that he's lived most of a life-



'I have a baby. He's also an innocent. He's just 3 months old. Tomorrow, he'll see his first Christmas, a time when his family celebrates peace on earth, good will toward men. I hope those are words he learns to live by.'

time, McCullough knows something he may not have fully realized 40 years ago: The bombing crew was not made up of the brave war heroes of the movies.

Oh, they were brave, all right. But they weren't war heroes until after the fact. When they started flying missions, they were not much more than children.

They were innocents. "We were all 20 years old," McCullough said.

They were so young that they should have been cruising the main drag of small towns; instead they were dropping bombs on other human beings, some of whom were doing their best to kill them.

At 20, you can be young enough to think the world lasts forever; when they were 20, they were old enough that each heartbeat could have been their last.

That's about as old as you can get.

HOW STUPID IS war? If this crew today met the people they were trying to kill (or who were trying to kill them), they would buy each other a drink and compare life stories. Forty years ago, they would have tried to kill each other; That's really stupid.

I have a baby. He's also an innocent. He's just 3 months old. Tomorrow, he'll see his first Christmas, a time when his family celebrates peace on earth, good will toward men. I hope those are words he learns to live by.

Someday he'll ask why, in a world where all want peace, he may be asked to kill a stranger, or to be killed by one.

"That's stupid," he'll say.
What do I tell him?