

# Suburban Life

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Phyllis Welch's history was written as a guide for the volunteers who give tours through the Farmington Community Center.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

## Original research

### History of Farmington Community Center wins first prize

By Lorraine McClellan  
staff writer

**P**HYLLIS WELCH has won the First Overall Award in 1987's Lee S. Peel Historical Research and Writing Contest for her "History of Farmington Community Center."

"It is a well-written account," said Steve Olson, speaking for Farmington Historical Society which sponsors the annual contest to encourage original research.

"Her work traces the property from its initial settlement in the 1860s through the building of the structure in the early 20th century and through the events that led to the founding of what is now an important social center for the community."

Welch said she certainly never expected to win any money for her

writing, much less see any of that writing in print.

But she did win \$150, a sum symbolic of and chosen in observance of Michigan's Sesquicentennial.

And the history, the first compiled of the house and grounds at 24705 Farmington Road, was put into booklet form by the staff of Farmington Community Center.

"It started out to be a help for the guides who give tours through the center," Welch said. "There were always questions someone asked that we couldn't answer. There are so many people who come through here that are curious about the house, it just seemed reasonable that all the bits and pieces of information we had should all be pulled together."

WELCH'S HISTORY reads very much like a novel. It is written in conversational form as though the author was telling a verbal story. It

could be used by a visitor for a self-guided tour of the building and grounds. The printed booklet could very well serve as a memento or souvenir of a visit to the center.

Welch describes her finished work as "a compilation of all the bits and pieces I could gather, some written history in the library and some word of mouth."

"When it was all gathered together, it was rather dull, cold, and very factual," she said.

She brought warmth into her history with minuscule vignettes which told of the runaway slaves found hiding in a barn on the property; the trolley line that made bringing electricity into the house possible; the neighboring farmers; celebrated personalities of the day who were guests in the house; and much of the life of the members of the family which lived in the house.

The history also takes the reader

from room to room, describing heirlooms, architecture, changes and additions.

Welch is neither a history buff nor a lover of antiques.

"I am just impressed with this building and its five acres we were all given as a gift," she said. "Not every town has a community center and this one was just handy to us. And while we can all enjoy and appreciate it, it is also up to all of us to maintain it."

WELCH HAS been a resident of Farmington Hills for 20 years, and has been a volunteer for Farmington Community Center for about 12 years.

"I became gradually involved with the center," she said. "I worked on a few committees for a few special events, worked in the kitchen, worked when they called me."

For the past few years, Welch has

served as a tour guide through the house and now coordinates the center's eight tour guides.

"If there is a big reception here, an open house, something with a lot of new people, there is always some who ask for a tour, so one of us will be in the lobby with an identifying tag telling the guests we are available to either give me a tour or answer their questions," she said.

In addition, Welch will make arrangements for groups on request, and guesses she has about 10-12 such requests every year.

"We don't have a set-down formal speech. I don't want it to be a formal speech. We have a very informal atmosphere here and we try to tailor the tours for the group, whether it is a Brownie troop or a senior adult group," she said.

THE ORIGINAL house on the property where Farmington Com-

munity Center now stands was a brick Victorian home built by Palmer Sherman in 1869. In 1915, the property was sold to Luman Goodenough, a Detroit lawyer, for use as a family summer home. In 1918, Goodenough contracted with architect Marcus Burrows to expand the home for year-round use.

The landmark stone fence in front of the home was erected in 1920 with stone collected in the neighboring farm fields.

In 1968, the home and its five surrounding acres were donated to the residents for use as a community center by the Goodenough's children, Eleanor Spicer, Daniel Goodenough and Elizabeth Schemm.

The sum of \$50,000 was raised by the residents for renovation and operating expenses to officially open Farmington Community Center in 1969.

## Summer camp

Day care at the Y meets the needs for both youth and parents

A generation ago summer camp was a luxury, a chance for children to learn new skills and meet new people.

Although it continues to strive to meet those goals, the camp programs at the Farmington YMCA also provide a type of summer day care for children of single parents or in double income families.

"Parents still want (enrichment programs) for their children but at this point there is a demand for child care. Fifty to 60 percent of the kids are in the programs because they need child care," said Sue Brooks, Farmington YMCA community program director.

Brooks recommends parents who intend to use the camp programs as day care or an auxiliary in their care arrangements ought to do so as soon as possible. Registration ends the Thursday before each session. Parents should register their children in person but mail-in registration can be arranged for special circumstances. The Y is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday and 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday.

Programs maintain a ratio of one adult to eight children.

This year's day camp programs are separated into four age categories. Children 6-12 years old are eligible for the Summer Fun Day Camp program. Last year this program was offered to children through 11 years old. This year, 12-year-olds are admitted in response, partly to the Y's impression that it's used as a child care facility, especially during the summer.

"These kids are still kind of young to be on their own," Brooks said. "Many parents use day camp as a child care vehicle. In the winter, they have different arrangements."

The program runs from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in weekly sessions from June 22 through Aug. 14 at the Y, 28100 Farmington Road, one-half mile north of 12 Mile behind Crowley's. Each child should bring a sack lunch, a swimsuit and a towel.

The program includes swimming lessons, traditional camp programs and field trips. The fee, \$50 a week for facility members, \$70 for pro-

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