



Lydia Cheuk (right) performed the role of assistant public services director and addressed the city council on the issue of bike paths and sidewalks. She is a student at Harrison.

Students take Hills hot seats for a day

By C. L. Rugenstein
staff writer

Theo Seans Haines thinks it would be a good idea, for safety reasons, to widen 12 Mile, between Farmington Road and Haggerty, to a four-lane highway with a landscaped median.

"I think it should be taken care of as soon as possible," said Haines, a senior at Farmington Harrison High School. That way, if a person got caught in the middle of the road when the light changed, he could run to the median for safety, Haines explained.

Haines, acting as a very temporary mayor pro tem, was one of 40 students from Harrison and North Farmington high schools participating Tuesday in the annual Student Government Day at Farmington Hills city offices.

The students, who apply in government classes beforehand for the city offices, pair up with their real-life counterparts for the morning, following them around as they work. Then in the afternoon, they get a chance to use what they've learned about how a city runs by participating in a mock city council meeting.

This is the seventh annual Student Government Day,

and assistant to the city manager Karen Birkholz, who's experienced four student days, thinks the group was a lively one.

"It was great — the kids were very outspoken," Birkholz said. "There were conflicts of opinion within the group (about the three issues discussed). That makes it more interesting."

THE EVENT is co-sponsored by the City of Farmington Hills and the Farmington Rotary Club to introduce students to the workings of city government.

"It's the form of government that affects them most closely," Birkholz added.

Things like widening the road, building bike paths and sidewalks, or plowing snowy city streets are things that would have a direct affect on these teens, she said. Unlike state and federal officials, city officials are here and accessible to answer questions. "Some of them (the students) may stay here to live. We want to educate our future voters and taxpayers about who we are and what we do."

There were three items up for discussion on the mock council's agenda: widening of 12 Mile, building bike paths and sidewalks, and building a teen center to

give teenagers a place to go at night.

Students weren't coached about what questions to ask beforehand but were encouraged to come up with their own. They had to consider where funds would come from, (like an extra million dollars per mile to make the proposed, widened stretch of 12 Mile a landscaped boulevard rather than a five-lane highway), as well as safety factors and residents' reactions to their decisions.

"People who are walking are in danger" of being hit by cars, Haines said of Farmington Hills' lack of sidewalks for pedestrians.

"You have to consider lawsuits from bikers hit by cars because they're riding on the streets," another student acting as a council member pointed out. "You might need more 'Walk' and 'Don't Walk' signs" also, adding an extra expense as well as liability to possible city concerns.

IN DISCUSSING the difference between bike paths and sidewalks, acting senior engineer Alex Grossberg, a North Farmington senior, said: "I've been an engineer for about three hours now, and I can tell you a sidewalk is five feet wide, and a bike path is eight feet

wide!"

"We basically figured out what questions to ask while we were with the city officials," said Patty Dutton, from Harrison.

She was deputy chief of police for the day. "Before I came here, I was interested in really on interior design," she said, "but now I'm thinking about something in police work" as a career.

Her friend, David Hebert, also of Harrison, thinks he may want to serve as a volunteer firefighter, though he has a job lined up at General Motors after he graduates. He applied for the office of fire chief, but was appointed assistant city manager by Harrison teacher Richard Steele.

About that teen center they discussed: consensus was about equally divided that one was needed, but it might invite trouble and outsiders to the city.

Said acting Police Chief Jeremy Gold: "I don't believe the police force has enough manpower to spare to supervise it."

But, said Haines, it would sure be nice to have, instead of hanging around the local 7-Eleven or Taco Bell.

Switchboard operator listens with open ear

By Susan Buck
staff writer

When Farmington Hills residents call city hall, Dorothy Savage is the first person they talk to.

Savage, herself a 33-year resident of the Hills, has been the information receptionist for the city's main municipal building during the last 10 years.

From the time Savage begins work at 8:30 a.m. to the time she finishes at 4:30 p.m., she operates the switchboard, taking up to 800 calls per day that are directed toward the city hall, police department and DPW.

With ear to the phone, she's a woman who listens with her head and her heart.

"You have your funny calls, your serious calls and your sad ones," said Savage. "A few years back, we had an ice storm. We were running on emergency power and a lady called. She was quite upset. She wanted the police officers to bring her some water so she could have tea."

calls that express real versus imagined need is both a learned and acquired ability for Savage. As a mother of five children, Savage also has a mother's sixth sense. "I do get emergency calls at times," said Savage. "You can't afford not to take each call seriously. This little girl called, and she said she was being raped. I put her through to the police department. It bothered me and stuck in my mind."

THE NEXT day, the call was still on Savage's mind and she called the police department to inquire about it. "Sure enough she was. She had the wrong police department. But she was being raped. She was 13 and they were able to help her, thank God."

Likewise, Savage gets calls about domestic violence. "Sometimes I get calls for the police department and hear somebody very angry in the background, yelling. That bothers me because I wonder if the police will get there in time before harm is done," she said.

During school vacations, Savage automatically expects crank calls from kids. "They'll call the police and say, 'Pigs,' or make some bright comment. Usually a switchboard operator knows pretty well what is going on just by the calls coming in."

Likewise, an elderly lady used to periodically call Savage just to find out what day and time it was. "I'd



Dorothy Savage, at the switchboard at Farmington Hills City Hall.

people

tell her," said Savage. "In the first place, to have this job and to do a good job, you have to like people. Due to the fact that my husband had spent long periods in the hospital, I know you can get disoriented because your days run together."

Savage, 61, decided to become a switchboard operator following husband Robert's first heart attack 25 years ago. "I looked for work where I didn't have to bring the responsibilities home at night. I was raising a family of five children at the time."

THOSE CHILDREN, now grown, are: daughter, Sandra Dodson, who resides in St. Louis and is employed in banking; and sons, Terry, a Virginia resident who works for Federal Mogul; Stephen, a salesman for Monarch Printing, Dearborn; Kevin, an engineer for Central Stamping, Grand Rapids; and Thomas, who attends Ferris State University, studying hotel management.

Her husband, a film booker for the now-defunct Butterfield Theatres, retired in 1980.

Savage, trained on an old-fashioned cord board, began her career as a relief operator for Michigan Bell, taking assignments anywhere west of Telegraph to as far as South

Lyon.

She learned the importance of a good business voice and common courtesy.

Her personal motto is "Kill them with kindness." In spite of the fact that she knows she often has to bear the brunt of residents' anger because she is the public's first contact with city hall.

Savage, an Ohio native, also held receptionist positions at Alger Quast Realty and Heslerton, a computer company for real estate, both in Detroit.

AFTER A job hiatus caused by bronchial problems, Savage began her present position the day after Christmas 1978.

"At that time, we had a 13-line call directory. I handled just the city hall calls then," she said.

Savage has an internal line for the fire department, too. This totals 100 direct dial lines to city hall and 100 direct lines reserved for the police department.

"Dorothy is always courteous and cordial. She has empathy. She is somebody you can count on," said William Costick, Farmington Hills city manager.

In a city with a population of 70,000 in 33.5 square miles, Savage has a tall order to fill.

"I like to think I know what is going on in the community," said Savage.



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