

Outdoors educator

He tailors his classes for the family

By Loraine McClish
staff writer

When Farmington Community Schools announced its first class called "Women's Fishing," 55 women showed with their rod and reels ready for their lessons. That's an impressive number if you know that the average adult education class offered in any season usually draws between 12 and 15 people.

"If it's been offered any other place in Michigan, I'm not aware of it. And at the end of the class, I got a standing ovation," said instructor Joe Derek. "All the classes I've offered here or through West Bloomfield's adult ed I've devised myself, and I haven't been turned down yet (with an idea)."

The naturalist and outdoor educator has devised classes on putting together an aquarium, fishing in salt water and fresh water, hunting, ice fishing, collecting tropical fish and even preparing and serving a fish or wild game gourmet dinner.

Coming up are sessions on bug and butterfly collecting, the nature hikes, wildlife habitat improvement, preserving the last of the wildflower patches and cultivating new ones.

"Kids are free when they come with their parents," Derek said. "All of my classes are family oriented — getting the families oriented to do things together — and getting them all to learn how to protect what we've got before it's gone."

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— Joe Derek
he knows outdoors

someone about orchids or killifish or the disappearing rain forests, I've got to join a club.

"I have no competition in classes and no competition on the lecture circuit," Derek said. "My goal is to lure them into class with fish or frogs or how to lure hummingbirds or butterflies into their own back yard, whatever it takes to make them realize why it's important not to pave the world with concrete."

He is currently changing careers from a research lab technician at Sinal Hospital of Detroit — as post he has held for 18 years — to full-time spokesman for the love and protection of the environment. "There aren't that many of us around," Derek said. "All the experts are either very old, retired or dead, and the kids are playing computer games. There's no one coming up to take the place of the experts. I used to take for granted that people liked what I liked but that isn't so. If I want to talk to

people

forum where I could tell everyone to write a letter like that. They could send me those letters and I would deliver them personally to Lansing."

DEREK GREW up on a dead-end street in Detroit where he "collected" everything that crawled out from under a rock, and used the local library to find out what he had captured.

It was at St. Mary Schools in Orchard Lake that he learned how to fish. "My parents sent me there for an education, but all I saw was the lake, and the pheasants, and the ducks. It was the perfect setting for a frustrated fisherman who grew up in the city and was now surrounded by woods and water," he said.

Big game hunting followed, and so did more appreciation of the outdoors.

"People who don't appreciate our woods are people who don't know our woods," Derek said. "I want our kids to get back into the woods and see and learn what's back there."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Joe Derek talks about his love of the outdoors in the living room of his Farmington Hills home. The caribou was bagged on a trip in northern Quebec.

Parents challenge WL school gun program

Continued from Page 1

has been in effect for 32 years and an estimated 15,000 youngsters have participated.

Subjects studied at the hands-on science program include wildlife, eyeglasses, forest conservation, soil and water, crafts, orienteering, pond life and the controversial firearm safety. In winter, animal tracking, cross country skiing and snowshoeing are added.

In addition to science and conservation, Lange said, the study promotes social skills and cooperative learning.

The outdoor center is also used for activities for other grades throughout the year and a one-week science camp in summer.

Holman specifically objects to the sixth-graders firing 10 rounds of ammunition in .22-caliber rifles, a part of the gun safety class. He said he is not anti-guns.

"I BELIEVE any parent has the right to teach firearms to his child but it should not be the function of the school," he said.

He has three basic objections. "Safety is most important," Holman said. Youngsters in groups of four or five shoot from a kneeling

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rather than a prone position without ear or eye protection. The range, he said, is in the middle of the camp. It lacks the five feet between shooters required by the state licensing agency and a 30-foot high barrier above the target area.

Secondly, Holman said, "What is the educational value of this activity? I'm told it's to show the power and respect for guns, but it's more like an arcade-like atmosphere. . . I question the need for a hands-on approach to make that impact."

Holman felt a trained police officer demonstrating with a high-powered gun could better influence students.

And third, he said, "What is the long-term effect on children? From 10 to 13 is the most influential stage of a child's development. What studies have been done? There are a lot of people out there that could be

called a bit whacko right now. I don't know what the cause and effect relationship is."

"I'm saying let's stop and take a look at a program that's been going on for 32 years. Things change."

HOLMAN SAID he learned accidentally that the children were handling firearms. The gun safety class was mentioned in information sheets sent home, he said, but not the fact that the children actually fired the guns.

He attended a Nov. 15 parents orientation meeting and during the video presentation sat next to a parent whose older child had attended the class in a previous year.

"She said, 'Wait! All they show the shooting part,'" Holman said. The range shooting was not shown in the video.

Holman began a quiet campaign to eliminate the shooting from the outdoor program. "I began to call (Superintendent James) Geisler two or three times a week without success. I was trying to keep it low-keyed and not make a three-ring circus out of it."

On Dec. 23 Geisler finally responded by letter saying he would go out to the center and evaluate the program Jan. 16.

"We had to let the school know by

Jan. 11 if Bradley was attending," Holman said. "That would be too late." He then decided to take it to court with the help of Birmingham attorney Barry Stelway.

Lange said Walled Lake administrators are always willing to review the curriculum and alter it when necessary, but by going through a process, "but it's not based on one parent's displeasure."

THE OUTDOOR education program was one reason Oakley Park

School was named an exemplary school by the state last year, she said. "Our outdoor education program was cited as one of our strengths," she said. "The hands on science approach was highly acclaimed."

Bradley and one other sixth-grader spent the last few days at Maple while other classmates were at the center.

"He has mixed feelings the day after," Holman said, not about his decision, but about his alternate as-

ignment. Bradley has been asked to write 44 one-page reports on topics that would have been covered at the center. "They expect in 18 hours he'll write 44 reports. That's three items an hour. That's a heck of a burden," Holman said.

"He'll finish it. He's a trooper. He's taking it very conscientiously." "Is it funny? I was talking to people in Dade County, Fla. last week. There they have a campaign to say "no" to firearms. Here we've done a 360 degree turn."

Owner burns over ticket

Continued from Page 1

He also accused the city of "not clearing your own walks" within the mandated 24 hours.

DEWARD HAS dealt with the city on several issues, including the size of a "for lease" sign used in his window, and because of his building's non-conforming use status and limited parking, which has caused problems in renting out space.

Mayor Richard Tupper read minutes from an early January meeting, in which the city council called for "more aggressive enforcement" of the snow removal ordinance, especially downtown. Tupper called snow removal in the city's central business district "essential."

City manager Robert Deadman defended his staff, saying they do a "yeoman's job" of removing snow after storms. He told DeWard that others had also received tickets.

"Mr. DeWard does not set the enforcement policy of this city," Deadman said. "I sympathize with you, but we've gone out and issued lots of tickets, lots of tickets."

"Quite frankly, we're only going to be on the major streets of this city. That's the Grand River and Farmington Road corridors."

SNOW REMOVAL has been an ongoing issue during Downtown Development Authority meetings, where board members are concerned with keeping the downtown maintained properly.

DDA executive director Wendy Strip Sittsamer said the concern about snow removal is twofold: "because we recently completed the first phase of streetscape improvements, and because we're really trying to encourage pedestrian flow and make downtown a friendly place."

"There's nothing friendly about getting your shoes filled with snow," Strip Sittsamer has worked for 1 1/2 years to try and find a contractor who would work with the DDA on removing snow from sidewalks, she said. So far, no luck.

"We know the DDA board thinks this is an important issue," she added. "We haven't closed the book on it yet."

Vote decides fate of new school

Continued from Page 1

voter ballots are available through Monday, Jan. 30, at the Schulman Administrative Center, 32500 Shilawasee, Farmington.

Increased enrollment at the early elementary level, overcrowding at several elementary schools and lack of an elementary school on the district's west side are the major reasons the district is going for the bond issue.

Three informational meetings

held last week by the Friends of Farmington Schools, a parent political action committee, drew only a handful of interested residents who needed information on the issue, according to school district representative Pamela O'Malley.

BECAUSE OF the district's retiring bonds, approval would not raise the district's debt retirement levy beyond the current 1.2 mills. With approval, the total debt retirement cost to a taxpayer whose home is

valued at \$150,000 would be no more than \$90 annually.

The proposal is the district's second effort to design, build and open a school by fall 1990.

Farmington lost a proposed \$27.25 million bond issue Sept. 19, which would have built a new elementary school and early childhood center, and addressed safety concerns and renovations in each of the district's school buildings.

The September bond issue was defeated by 218 votes.

Dips seen in water pressure

Farmington-area residents will experience an occasional reduction in water pressure this month and next, as city of Detroit water employees change system pumps.

According to Farmington's public

services director, Earl Billing, specific maintenance work will be done the weekend of Feb. 4. Residents may experience some discolored water once the pumps are turned back on, he said.

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for our annual inventory
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