

# Opinion

33203 Grand River / Farmington, MI 48024 Bob Sklar editor / 477-5450

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O&amp;E Thursday, March 23, 1989

## Broaden PR

### Promote housing rehab more

**I**T'S A terrific city service. But Farmington Hills' 7-year-old housing rehabilitation loan program isn't as well publicized as it should be.

As loan board member George Roberts bluntly told the city council Feb. 27, "I'd like to see this advertised a little bit more to get some people in here who really deserve — who really need — this money."

He cites many people who seek a loan "to get what they can out of the system, whether they're entitled to it or not."

We especially like his idea of selective mailings to neighborhoods that are home to low- and moderate-income residents.

The program benefits eligible seniors, single parents and families through low-interest loans, deferred loans and grants.

**THE IMAGE** is unceasing. Mention Farmington Hills and subdivisions of expensive homes quickly come to mind.

Still, not everyone who calls the city home can afford to keep their house in good repair. If it's a choice between paying for heat or fixing the roof, it doesn't take long to figure which wins out.

The reasons vary: layoffs, illness, fire, fixed income, divorce. No matter. Other more pressing needs — food, clothing, medical bills — always seem to gobble up available cash.

The city is en route to depleting its annual lending budget in the never-ending quest to help keep owner-occupied, single-family homes, particularly in the older south end, habitable.

With four months left in the fiscal year, about \$208,000 of the 1988-89 budget of \$250,000 is spent or committed.

Over the years, \$1 million has been loaned for periods of three to 15 years to fix 250 houses. The code-related improvements not only brighten the marketability of individual houses, but also the citywide housing picture.

**THE LAST** two years, we urged the city to

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continue increasing the amount of federal community development block grant money earmarked for the housing rehab loan program.

In 1989-90, for the first time, the program will receive at least 58 percent of the city's CDBG funding, or \$197,000. That will be added to carry-over dollars and loan paybacks to determine the actual 1989-90 lending budget.

The change came slowly. But we applaud the city for shifting two-thirds of its CDBG funding from capital improvements to housing rehab loans over the past five years.

In the years ahead, we urge the city to put even more CDBG funding into the lending pot and assume more of the cost of capital improvements, which, as infrastructure improvements, benefit the city as a whole.

**AT THE U.S.** Department of Housing and Urban Development's urging, \$20,000 of the \$197,000 this year will be set aside for loans to improve rental housing.

Time will tell how that new wrinkle stands up to scrutiny. It's rife with question marks, not the least of which is how to guard tenants from greedy landlords who use a loan to fix up their house solely to justify raising the rent.

Given the vagaries of funding the past seven years for the housing rehabilitation loan program, we think George Roberts hit the bull's eye in saying better publicity would "give us a lot more credibility."

## Alcohol-free

### Students must have a choice

**I**T'S EXCITING that starting this fall nearly all of Michigan's public colleges and universities will give students the option of alcohol-free rooming.

It appears the only holdout is Michigan State University. MSU officials say they're still unsure whether to allow students to request non-drinking roommates. That's too bad, because MSU's dormitory system is by far the largest of any institution of higher learning in the state.

We urge MSU officials to join their public college and university counterparts before fall term housing applications start pouring in.

That issue aside, credit is due those other institutions of higher learning who have adopted the alcohol-free option and to people who urged them to do so.

It's a diverse lot, with members ranging from West Bloomfield High School senior Eric Worley, who testified before a state legislative committee that it was his right to have the choice of a roommate who didn't use alcohol, to federal Judge Bernard Friedman, who was disturbed at the number of young people who came before him for alcohol and drug-related offenses.

Documentation that students recovering from substance abuse problems must have a safe place to live was provided by representatives of Maple Grove Youth Treatment Center in West Bloomfield.

In the end, it took two responsive legislators to put enough pressure on the colleges and universities to get them to agree that students should have the same right to choose a non-drinking roommate, as they now have to choose a non-smoking roommate.

**STATE REP.** David Honigman, R-West Bloomfield, drew up the proposed legislation, while state Rep. Burton Leland, D-Detroit, when he was chair of the House Committee on Colleges and Universities, agreed to delay action on the bill before the committee, giving the universities until this spring to respond and ward off the legislation.

Honigman previously had insisted on total compliance from public colleges and universities. He plans to meet with area members of an ad hoc committee to discuss the next move. It's unfortunate that it took the threat of legislation to get public schools to make a commitment. Honigman has had no response from the association that represents private colleges.

We hope that private colleges will follow the lead of their public counterparts.

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It will also aid students who come from homes where alcohol has been a problem, students whose religion doesn't allow them to drink and students who simply don't want alcohol-related parties in their rooms.

**IT MAY** even lead to an overall reduction in college-age drinking.

Rather than weakening their position on in loco parentis (charged with a parent's rights, duties and responsibilities), the schools have taken a further step toward increased student rights. Students have another opportunity to determine the kind of lifestyle they want.

We urge parents to take the first step in separating from their college-bound students and allow them to fill out their student housing applications for themselves.

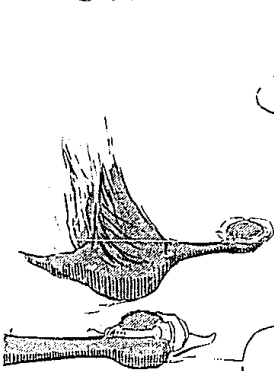
That what's happening at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which this fall will have a wing for students who chose not to drink or use drugs for any reason.

Making the decision to choose a roommate who doesn't smoke or who doesn't drink must be the student's choice, for it will be the student who must enforce it.

The state's public institutions of higher learning can take pride in the example they are setting for the rest of the nation in stepping up to the fact that drinking is a choice, not a necessary part of college life.

We hope that the public schools will live up to the spirit of their voluntary, verbal agreement, and we call upon MSU and the state's private colleges to make it unanimous.

THINKERS



HOW DO STUDENTS KNOW WHEN TO FLY SOUTH?

MAYBE THEY HAVE A SPY AMONG US WHO TELLS 'EM WHEN WE'RE GOING TO FLY NORTH.

## Open enrollment plan: It sounds like a winner

**IT'S A** good move. Farmington Public Schools Superintendent Graham Lewis is right on in eyeing an open enrollment policy for all three senior highs next fall.

As he aptly put it: "Schools should be schools of choice within the community. You should have a choice of a school just as you have a choice of a supermarket."

No red flags went up after Lewis' initial study of the plan. No imbalance is foreseen, particularly since there's declining enrollment at the senior high level. Just a few students choose to leave their home school.

Simply put, there's no longer a need to establish arbitrary attendance boundaries.

This school year, only Harrison High, under capacity at 900 students, has been open to students from any of the district's three senior high attendance areas.

About 15-20 students from both the North and Farmington attendance areas have transferred to Harrison this school year — primarily from families new to the district. Most teenagers prefer their home school, where most of their friends go.

**A SURVEY** of current middle school eighth graders revealed inci-



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dental changes between those who would go to their home school or transfer to another school under a districtwide open enrollment policy at the senior high level.

That policy has always been in effect when personal or family problems dictated it.

Lewis hopes to one day extend the open enrollment policy to middle schools. Because it is under capacity, only Warner of the four middle schools now is open to students from any part of the district. Transfers to Warner have been minimal.

The fear that open enrollment would prompt star athletes to rush to one school over another just hasn't materialized.

In fact, just a few of the 37 students who transferred to Harrison from the North or Farmington attendance areas this school year even play varsity sports, Lewis said.

Besides, academics — not athletic

ies — should dictate district policy. But to quell recruitment fears, the district must make darn certain the athletic programs are squeaky clean and able to stand up to scrutiny.

"Teacher on TV," emerging on cable educational access Channel 10, will solve the problem of meeting the needs of, say, only a few German students at one of the senior highs.

**RISEING ENROLLMENT** and overcrowded conditions are among the roadblocks to extending open enrollment to the elementary level.

But the policy already is in effect to some extent at the kindergarten level. Parents now may choose to send their 5-year-olds to kindergarten at their assigned elementary school or at one of the two early childhood centers.

Lewis envisions a district where students who have their own transportation "can opt to move at any time between schools."

But I think he's right in never stopping to ask the question, "Is there something we're doing at that school causing you to move but which is something we can correct?"

Students should be able to attend a school by choice, not by force.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

## Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

### 14/Drake dangerous

To the editor:  
Your Feb. 20 article, "Could traffic signal have saved girl?", appearing on the front page, distresses me and gives me considerable cause for concern about my area.

West Bloomfield police Sgt. Mike Madigan's indecision about whether there is a need for a traffic light at the intersection of 14 Mile and Drake tells me he is not too familiar with the area he is addressing.

Anyone using 14 Mile on a regular basis knows the traffic backs up on Drake, both on the north and south sides of 14 Mile, at various times of the day. The worst times being between 7:30 and 9 a.m. and between 4 and 6 p.m.

Traveling at this time of day is both dangerous and deadly. The situation becomes a problem when the cars stopped at Drake, turn onto 14 Mile, or go through the intersection.

What is observed is a terrible and very dangerous case of "dangling" across to get to the other side of Drake or pulling out onto the traffic on 14 Mile and hoping cars will slow down. How insane and deadly! Isn't it about time someone woke up to the fact that a traffic light here would save lives?

Since this situation is so disastrous, whenever travel takes us on 14 Mile, we slow almost to a complete stop at the intersection of 14

Mile and Drake. Now we become a traffic menace. We could potentially be rear-ended by a tailgater speeding along at 50-55 mph in a 45 mph zone.

Also, we strongly disagree with Sgt. Madigan's observation that the fatal accident on Feb. 14, 1989, was a seat belt issue, not a traffic light issue. It's interesting to note that your Dec. 28, 1987, article, "Southfield man killed in fatal crash," describes another fatal accident at this intersection. This victim was wearing his seat belt!

Our statistics say there were nine accidents in 1987; eight accidents in 1988; one fatal accident in 1987; and one fatal accident in 1989. Is a human life not important and justification for the need of a light?

How many more accidents and how many more fatalities will it take to change this intersection to a higher rating?

Living in Ramblewood subdivision for the past 12 years, our taxes have increased every year. The development and expansion in this area has been very extensive in the past six years and still continues. As the development continues so do the traffic problems.

Yes, initial steps have been taken to correct our traffic problems — traffic study after traffic study has been conducted; and even Gov. Blanchard has been enlightened. It is obvious to me that nothing in the near future will be done to correct or solve the traffic problems in the area.

As taxpayers and concerned residents of Farmington Hills, we want a traffic light at this deadly intersection now.

Is this a case of Rome burning while Nero fiddled?

Dolores Harding,  
Yvona Fujisami,  
Farmington Hills

### Helping us tell others of need

To the editor:  
The Salvation Army's commitment is yearlong and the warm feeling of Christmas is one we strive to carry with us 365 days of the year.

On behalf of the Salvation Army, I wish to express my heartfelt thanks to the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers for helping us communicate our services to the public throughout the year.

All of you were a tremendous help in effecting a great response from citizens to assist us. As a result of your generous support, we are happy to report we were able to provide 2 million services throughout the year in the Detroit area.

My deepest appreciation to you and your associates.

Lt. Col. Clarence Harvey,  
The Salvation Army  
Detroit

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