

Ex-councilman urges lower school, county taxes

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

The Farmington Hills City Council won't tell the Farmington Board of Education to hold the line on taxes. But it doesn't mind sharing a letter from a former councilman who spells out the need for lower taxes.

In a letter to city manager William Costick, former councilman Earl Oppenhausser applauded city officials' intention to roll back the city's tax rate in light of this year's increased property tax assessments.

But Oppenhausser urged the council to adopt a resolution putting its intentions in concrete as an example to other taxing units, such as the public schools and Oakland County.

"I also urge that such resolution not only

set the example for the other taxing entities, but that it call upon those bodies to take similar action. Such a resolution would allay the fears and concerns of our citizens, and hopefully convince the county and school boards to take similar action. If such action is not taken, a citizens tax revolt is a distinct likelihood," Oppenhausser wrote.

A couple of weeks ago, Costick told the city council that efforts were being made to hold the line on city tax increases. A study session on the proposed 1989-90 budget is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Monday, May 1, in council chambers, 31555 11 Mile.

CITY OFFICIALS expect to reduce or roll back the tax rate to a level where homeowners won't pay more in taxes to the city even though residential property taxes

increased an average 6-10 percent this year.

While city officials can pat themselves on the back for their efforts, they're aware that most Farmington Hills taxpayers will see little reduction in their total tax bill if other taxing units don't follow suit.

"I don't want people in Farmington Hills to think the tax bills will be lower," councilwoman Jean Fox said. "People will not get a lower tax bill as the result of what we're doing."

Ever-increasing property tax assessments and the failure of other taxing units failure to roll back tax rates to offset the increased assessments are to blame, city officials said.

Still, only one councilman, Paul Sowerby, was willing to bluntly tell the school board

and county taxing units that they need to follow the city's lead. "I don't see any harm in being candid with the school board. I'm in favor of telling the school board our position. We're not telling them how to budget."

But other council members weren't as willing. They agreed instead to send Oppenhausser's letter.

CITY OFFICIALS' attempts have no effect on tax rates levied by other jurisdictions such as the Farmington Public Schools, Oakland County Intermediate Schools, Oakland County and Oakland Community College.

This year's city tax rate is 9.4 mills. Under the state's Headlee Tax Limitation Amendment, the city was required to roll back its rate to 8.6 mills, which would have

generated the same amount of money the city would have received if property tax assessments had risen at the same percentage as the rate of inflation.

City administrators last year announced at a public hearing their intent, under Truth in Taxation laws, to collect 9.2 percent more than they did the previous year to help finance a \$24 million budget. Assessments last year increased an average 12 percent, with some going up as much as 20 percent.

The school board last year levied 30.65 mills — a decrease of 1.15 mills from the previous year. Despite the millage reduction, school trustees did not roll back to a level that would have offset the increased property tax assessments.

Scouts tour computer wilderness

By Noreen Flack
special writer

Campfire sing-a-longs and lessons on wilderness survival are not all there is to being a Girl Scout these days.

Digital Equipment Corp. in Farmington Hills is no Camp Kookanawa, but the company pledged Scouts Honor by educating local girls in computer technology for four Saturdays in April.

Maureen Kaplan, 27, of Farmington Hills, a senior software engineer at Digital, and a member of the Michigan Metro Girl Scout Council in Detroit, organized the program, designed to expose girls to computers, in July 1988.

"When I went to college at Michigan, only 10 percent of the students were women," Kaplan said. "The program encourages girls to be more involved with math and science."

The 140 girls in green, ranging from ages 10 to 14, showed up every Saturday for hands on training in electronic mailing, word processing, and spread sheets. They viewed demonstrations in graphics and listened to employees speak on the history of computers.

Kathy Crisp, 10, a fourth grader at William Grace Elementary School in Farmington Hills, says she was surprised that so many women worked for Digital.

"I thought it was just for men because mostly men work on computers," Crisp said. "You know, they make buildings and houses. But I'm not afraid to get in front of the computer."

THE ROBOTICS program captivated the most interest.

"I love robots," said Jennifer Pichler, 10, a fourth grader at Garfield Elementary School in Livonia. "I like buttons. I learned a lot here. The computers at school are a lot more boring."

The three-hour Saturday sessions focused on each girl as an individual. Although 10 Scout leaders did participate in the program, girls did not attend in troops.

"This program is part of a long-range plan to get girls more involved in math and science," said Lisa Raycraft of the Michigan Metro Girl Scout Council.

"The girls can talk to professionals like engineers and scientists. This will start a trend to move on to science studies and let them know that

all these career options are open to them."

The program ended Saturday after Scouts received their diplomas by the Digital vice president for east central sales, Chuck Pickle.

"The workforce has become highly technological," Pickle said. "The U.S. recognizes women at a substantial competitive advantage. Digital and other companies want to take

'I learned a lot here. The computers at school are a lot more boring.'

— Jennifer Pichler
Girl Scout

advantage of what that large female workforce has to offer."

AS MANY as 45 Digital employees from sales, service, and technical writing departments offered their time, including lunch hours, to organize the program.

"There are many outstanding people at Digital," Pickle said. "Programs like this give us the chance to offer something back to the community."

A \$5 registration fee from each Girl Scout paid for a merit badge and diploma upon completion of the program. The remainder of the money went to the Michigan Metro Girl Scout council and to the Digital Scholarship Fund for women.



BRIAN TOOVALIAN

Girl Scouts Barbara Rowe (left) of Farmington Hills and Catrina Lokken, Shana Ntiri, Kathy Dezor and Corbett Williamson, all of Troy, watch as Vadim Beginin of Digital demonstrates use of a computer.

Businessman makes the way sciences are taught his job

By Casey Hane
staff writer

One Farmington Hills businessman has a definite opinion on how science and technology should be taught in the schools.

Richard "Buzz" Brown, president of the Farmington Hills-based Advanced Center of Technology training, took exception to views presented at April 4 Farmington school board meeting, where several trustees said they were skeptical a general education teacher could effectively teach science to students.

"I think they're mixing issues," said Brown, also a parent with a child at Wood Creek Elementary. "I find that to be absolutely not true. People have an inherent fear of delivering that subject matter. They (the board) may be sensitive to that. It's really an unnecessary fear people have of math."

BROWN SAID he has written to superintendent Graham Lewis and invited the board to visit his facilities on Northwestern Highway.

Brown travels around the U.S. speaking to school boards about technology, science and math training. He is working with Southfield



Richard "Buzz" Brown
trainer in technology

schools and Oakland Intermediate Schools in training teachers in technology, math and science.

"I have found the biggest barrier to empowering teachers to deliver math and science instruction is the unnecessary fear about the material," Brown said in his letter to Lewis. "Once that fear is overcome, the teacher may actually become an excellent source of guidance for the students."

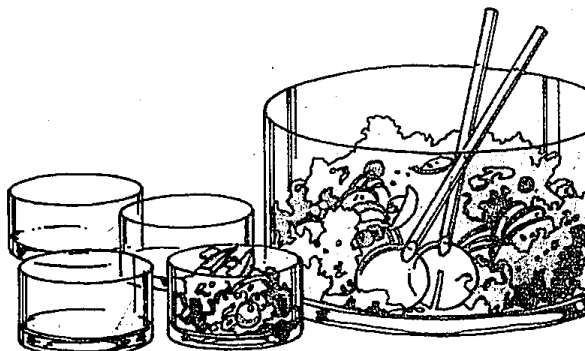
The issue was raised by board members April 4 as Farmington school administrators presented new elementary science curriculum and textbooks for adoption. The administration recommended staff in-service science training instead of hiring specialists — a similar stance to Brown's.

ALTHOUGH THE board voted to approve the new curriculum plan, they approved it contingent on a review of the program in one year. And several voiced reservations about the lack of science specialists. Trustee Janice Rotnick said: "I think it's a fallacy, and I think it's irrational to believe all teachers can teach all things."

Trustee James Abernethy agreed, saying a language arts teacher may not be capable of delivering math and science.

In a position paper Brown will deliver this year in Oklahoma, he says "we need the general education system to adopt creative instruction in applied math, physics and science."

"We have experienced significant success in developing these abstract problem-solving skills through a modular, hands-on, systems approach to teaching technology literacy."



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Open enrollment on the way

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rollment. "I don't think it's going to be a substantial amount. Most want to go where their friends go."

"There's good points and there's bad," he added. "It's been suggested that it (a choice program) makes a school get on its toes."

Farmington High principal Jerry Potter agreed. "Kids are still going to want to go to school with their neighbors," he said. "I guess we just don't know (the impact). I don't think it will make any significant difference. I think you'll see minimum movement this spring and fall."

Potter said once improvements to the building facade and media center are made at his school, students may want to attend there.

AT NORTH Farmington, principal Don Cowan is watching carefully for students requesting transfers to his school, but so far, he said, "it looks like maybe it's not going to be impacting as much as I thought. Time will tell."

Because of residential expansion in Farmington Hills, both Farmington

'It is time to consider removal of "set" boundaries of the high school attendance areas . . . If we run out of seats, we would say "The house is full."'

—Graham Lewis
superintendent
Farmington Public Schools

High and North Farmington have reported larger enrollments than Harrison, but all three high schools have had decreasing enrollments over the past few years.

The Farmington schools decision comes just as a state Senate subcommittee is considering legislation that would allow voters to petition for an election proposing a "schools of choice" program for their district.

If approved by voters, the district would have to allow parents to choose from among the schools in the district for their children. The Senate Education and Mental Health

Committee is considering the measure, a similar bill is before the House Education Committee.

Lewis said in earlier reports he sees viability in Farmington for open enrollment policies at the secondary level, but not in the near future for elementary schools.

Farmington Public Schools covers the city of Farmington, most of Farmington Hills and a small portion of West Bloomfield Township at the northeast corner of the district.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.