

points of view

Mayor cries foul but I stand by coverage

FARMINGTON HILLS Mayor Terry Sever has long said he can take the criticism. But in the first public test of his leadership, he cried foul.

In a public attack at a city council meeting Monday night, the mayor accused the Observer and this reporter of printing inaccurate stories about closed-door discussions and negotiations for land acquisition. With Sever's knowledge, the Observer released information May 8 and May 11 about possible land purchases for recreation and an 18-hole golf course. The stories discussed the city's legitimate concerns and questions about the land dealings. The stories included Sever's responses to those concerns. When the public reacted negatively to the mayor's plans, Sever ran for cover. Clearly, Sever is using the Observer and this reporter as a scapegoat for the poor perception the public has of the mayor and the



Joanne Maliszewski

Farmington Hills City Council.

That's not so. Whenever the city council has found themselves in a tight spot, it must be the Observer's fault or the fault of an interfering resident.

The wailing mayor charges that the Observer is misleading the public. Sever also charges that this reporter failed to give him an opportunity to respond to Fium's questions and concerns.

LET ME set the record straight. The mayor was contacted on several occasions. The mayor was asked his opinions and his reactions to Fium's questions and concerns. And

he was asked for details of the discussions, negotiations and plans for land purchases near Quaker Valley subdivision and the city-owned San Marino Golf Course.

Sever has not questioned the accuracy of his quotes in both stories or the facts he presented to the Observer. Now that public reaction has backfired, Sever believes the stories "totally misrepresented" his position.

I challenge the mayor and his covering council colleagues to specify what, if anything, in the two stories is inaccurate.

After covering the Farmington

Hills City Council since 1983, I've long known that public interest and needs take a back seat to fragile and troubled political egos. That appears the case here.

It's unfortunate that Sever and council members have neither the courtesy nor the courage to confront the newspaper or this reporter face-to-face. They obviously felt their greatest impact would be in the council chambers, particularly since I wasn't there to witness their public attack against me.

Sever continued his attacks and cries of inaccuracy in a May 18 letter to the Observer. "I fully intend to communicate to residents that the (May 8) article was totally inaccurate. I will not make any accusation but will take full blame for my participating in the article," Sever wrote.

THE MAYOR and the city council

When the public reacted negatively to the mayor's plans, Sever ran for cover. Clearly, Sever is using the Observer and this reporter as a scapegoat for the poor perception the public has of the mayor and the Farmington Hills City Council.

are entitled to their opinions. But I stand behind my stories and any resident's right to question city officials and the right for those concerns to be printed.

A reputation and credibility for accuracy and fairness is all a reporter has as their claim to fame.

Sever and the city council have attempted to damage this reporter's reputation to divert attention away from their poor public image. It won't work.

Joanne Maliszewski is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

School race no snoozer

THIS IS probably the most exciting school board race I've covered here in Farmington.

This year, we truly have a race. It's the most competitive one since 1985, when two incumbents chose not run, leaving two seats on the board open and prompting 14 people to file and 13 to eventually run. The two incumbents running this year were the two winners in that race.

At least in this year's race, there are equal numbers of incumbents and challengers vying for two seats. In the past several years, there has either been one challenger — or none. Last year, the lone challenger did not even respond to Observer questions and never showed up for his scheduled interview.

THIS YEAR shows more promise. It also has a lot of people eyeing the race with interest, given a successful school board recall in Troy, and tax issues raising the public's ire.

The Farmington school district is also starting to negotiate contracts with four of its collective bargaining units this year, which always makes for an interesting election. A fifth union is in fact-finding. Incumbents Edithary and Jack Cotton were endorsed by the Farmington Coordinating Council PAC, repre-



Casey Hans

senting four of the groups, last week. But challengers John Akouri and Robert Ramsey also offer plenty of good ideas on any number of issues.

Tonight's and Monday's candidates nights in Farmington Hills will give us a better feel for how they really handle issues when put on the spot.

And because of the general citizen unrest, people are talking about elections like Farmington's. Some believe there might be a shake-up in the power structure of not only this school board, but other government boards across the country.

PEOPLE SAY they are mad. They want lower taxes. They want better education. They want more bang for their buck.

I hear the anger, but don't know how it will pan out at the polls in Farmington on Monday, June 12.

Traditionally in Farmington, school election turnout has ranged

from 1 to 8.5 percent, even after publicity on major issues. Last fall's defeated bond issue drew only 1 percent of the registered voters; the successful January bond election drew 8.6 percent — and that was after a concentrated campaign by area parents.

Considering there are about 55,000 registered, active voters in the Farmington Public Schools district, even an 8 percent turnout is pretty pathetic.

Some incumbents believe a low turnout shows that voters are satisfied with the status quo. That's hard to believe in a community where hundreds of people have come out to debate kindergarten, school enrollment and boundary issues during the past few years.

PEOPLE SAY they are angry, but rarely do they speak with their vote. This year can be different. Real about the candidates, attend a candidates night or watch them on local cable television, or call the candidates directly.

Only through activity in the political process can voters effectively speak their mind, place their concerns on the appropriate agenda, and get something done.

Casey Hans is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

Focusing in on bus safety

The writer, Beverly Hausman, is Farmington Public Schools supervisor of purchasing and transportation.

SEVERAL RECENT newspaper articles have again raised the issue of the safety of school buses.

Although the Farmington Observer has published several informative articles this past year on the same issue, I'd like to briefly respond to some of the recent questions we've received at Farmington Public Schools.

Yes, we have:

- Protective fuel tank cages on all buses.
- Roof escape hatches and fiberglass fire protective seat covers on buses bought in the last two years.
- Two new types of mirrors to eliminate any blind spots in front and alongside the bus.

guest column

- A rule that students are not allowed to stand on the bus.
- Bus safety assemblies each year.
- Bus evacuation drills semiannually.
- Rating of excellent on the Michigan State Police annual inspection for over 15 years in a row.
- Cooperative program with Farmington Hills Police Department to ticket drivers who pass school buses when signals are flashing.
- Radio equipment on all buses.

IN HIRING and training drivers,

Farmington Public Schools does require:

- Obtaining traffic records from the state.
- Interviewing and checking references.
- Completing routine physical, including hearing, vision, urinalysis and agility.
- Extensive training with district trainer — usually one month to six weeks.
- Road test conducted by Oakland Schools' testing team.
- Enrollment in Oakland Schools' safety school for a 16-hour, extensive school bus safety program.
- Advanced training at Oakland Schools is attended annually by almost all drivers — minimal requirement is at license renewal.
- Continuous district in-service training on first aid, assertive discipline, special ed transportation, etc.



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