

Writer visits schools to share his insights

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Gary Paulsen says he does his best writing while hidden away in his dog kennels, which he shares with 104 sled dogs.

From his house and kennels near the Canadian border in Minnesota, his books are written, then distributed across the country. Most are fictionalized accounts based on the people he meets and his experiences in the wilderness.

Like running the Iditarod, a 1,200-mile dogged race across Alaska where it's man against the elements, Paulsen said he felt exhilarated, never lonely.

"After a while, when you're alone, you begin to lust after it," Paulsen told students in a recent visit to Farmington schools. "It gives you time to think. It's not like being lonely."

Paulsen, 50, has written many adult and young adult novels, both fiction and non-fiction, but says his novels for young people seem to be the most popular. He thinks he's written about 80 books. "I lost count at 60," he added.

THE AUTHOR visited with students from all four of Farmington's middle schools recently, offering tales about his brand of life, his views about the establishment, and encouragement to young people to make the extra effort to read and learn on their own.

His visit was sponsored by the Farmington Public Schools DELTA Department, as part of the department's emphasis this year on advanced language arts study, said DELTA coordinator Barbara Rebeck.

Paulsen said he has spent the past three years traveling around the country, visiting students.

"I'm trying to reach young people, basically," he said. "There's a tremendous thirst to know. I don't think we're giving them the tools they need to handle the things we're throwing at them."

DURING PAULSEN'S daylong trek around the district, he visited



Author Gary Paulsen

Warner Middle School in the morning, held a panel interview session with student journalists at TV-10 with East Middle School students as members of the audience, then visited Power and Dunkel middle schools in the afternoon.

At Power, several groups of students had the opportunity to have "lunch with the author" where they could ask questions and he could share in a more informal setting. He told students that "all books are better than the movies" because "You can go inside somebody's head."

"Reading is as important as breath," he added.

Although he has become popular as a young adult writer, Paulsen explained, "I'm a writer — other people put those labels on. I don't write for kids or adults, I just write."

PAULSEN'S LOVE of writing began when he was 17, and he's had the urge to write ever since. He and his wife Ruth, an artist, live miles from nowhere in Minnesota with their 74 adult dogs, 30 just-born pups and "three really paranoid cats."

Before beginning his writing, Paulsen gathered life experiences through a variety of jobs. Various accounts have Paulsen — an Army brat as a child — working as a

teacher, field engineer, editor, soldier, actor, director, farmer, rancher, truck driver, trapper, professional archer, migrant farm worker, singer and sailor.

"I was a soldier and a failed student," he said about his pre-writing life. "Three teachers tried hard to help me. I was a miserable student."

His life has taken him through a bout with alcoholism (he has been reformed for 16 years) and through other inner struggles. In one account he said of his childhood: "had teen suicide been a topic in the news as it is today, had it in any way suggested a way out, I know I would have seriously considered the possibility."

But Paulsen struggled through into his middle years with a philosophy he shared with the students: "I don't do the war. I don't do food stamps. I did the Army — that was it. I don't owe anybody anything and they don't owe me."

PERHAPS THE most exciting thing Paulsen has done is run the Iditarod dogged race, which runs from a mining town in mid-Alaska of the same name to Nome. He ran it twice in 1983 and 1985 and is training to run it again in 1991 and 1992.

The race is a challenge, but stories induced by sleep deprivation pour from his memories.

"I had an Eskimo guy help me," he said about his visions during one trip. "He would untangle my dogs. A little short, round guy. I swear he was real, but it was all in my head."

Another time, Paulsen swore he saw his dogs burst into flames.

As much as he loves his life in the wilderness and looks forward to another chance at the Iditarod, Paulsen despises television and what it has done to our society.

"Television will suck your brain right out of your head," he told students. "It's stupid. It's just awful. There's great eloquence in some of the things they (good authors) write, and television has ruined it for you."

Some of Paulsen's best selling titles read by Farmington middle school students, include: "Tracker," "Dogsong," "Sentry," "Dancing Carl" and "Hatchet."



Author Gary Paulsen has lunch with a group of seventh graders from Power Middle School in Farmington Hills, where he talked about dog sledging, writing and anything else about which students had questions.



Photos by RANDY DORST/staff photographer

Advanced English students at Power Middle School ask questions of author Gary Paulsen.

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

● SUSPECT NABBED

A Farmington Hills man is charged with breaking and entering in connection with a break-in at an Orchard Lake Road office building Friday night.

Arraigned Saturday before Magistrate James Brady of Farmington, Kenneth Hugh Johnson, 38, stood mute to one count of breaking and entering of a building. An innocent plea was entered on his behalf.

Brady set cash/surety bond of \$2,500 pending a preliminary examination in 47th District Court. Johnson faces up to 10 years in prison if convicted.

Two nuns driving by an office building on the southeast corner of Orchard Lake Road and 11 Mile at 9:25 p.m. Friday saw a man climbing through a front first-floor window. Police secured the perimeter, found an open window and searched the building.

They found a man hiding in the men's room, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

● WOMAN BURNED

A Farmington Hills woman was

burned on both hands while putting out a fire in the her bedroom at Oakland Hills Mobile Home Park, 25720 Orchard Lake Road, Saturday.

Community EMS paramedics treated the woman before taking her to Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Hills.

About five minutes after lighting a nightstand candle at 12:30 a.m., she discovered a wall curtain on fire. She smothered the flames but burned her hands in the process.

The fire was out when firefighters arrived. Damage was estimated at \$550.

● MAN FLEES

A man wanted on drunk-driving warrants ran from the emergency room at Botsford General Hospital Sunday after apparently feigning illness at the Farmington Hills police station, police said.

The 35-year-old Farmington Hills man fled from the Farmington Hills hospital at 9:25 p.m. Sunday, Farmington Hills police spotted him near Nine Mile and Middlebelt 10 minutes later, but the man was able to elude them.

Farmington Hills police arrested the man at 7:30 p.m. Sunday on outstanding warrants from Livonia police and the Michigan State Police.

At the Farmington Hills police station, the man said he was ill. So paramedics took him to the hospital. Farmington Hills police notified the other police agencies, but neither would take custody while the man was at the hospital.

At 9 p.m., Farmington Hills police discontinued custody and notified Botsford hospital security. The man fled 25 minutes later. Police believe he feigned illness.

● KITCHEN FIRES

A resident burned in a kitchen fire that caused \$1,000 in damage at Green Hill Apartments on Nine Mile Saturday refused medical treatment. The 11:40 a.m. fire was ruled accidental — the result of cooking grease in a pan being left unattended on a stove burner, according to a Farmington Hills Fire Department report.

No one was hurt in a kitchen fire at Green Hill Apartments at 1:18 p.m. Monday. Neighbors used dry chemical extinguisher to put out a fire on a stove burner. The apartment resident said she accidentally turned on a burner containing a thermometer.



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Alternate Haggerty plan gains support

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The hearing is scheduled 3-5 p.m. and 7-9 p.m. in the Novi High School auditorium lobby, 24042 Taft.

"We'll evaluate all the input we get from the hearing. We'll look at that as well as engineering reports and environmental impact," Chisholm said.

MDOT officials will choose the final alternative.

Concerns of residents, particularly in Novi, who may be affected by the proposed road improvements, will be addressed at the public hearing, Call said. Homeowners in the Novi Summit Hills subdivision signed petitions calling for an end to road improvement plans that would cut a swath through their subdivision.

Alternative 4A is less expensive than alternative 4 at \$73 million. Alternative 4 would curve westerly around the bog. It would displace 30 residences and three businesses; 101 parcels would be acquired for right-of-way.

Call said he endorsed alternative 4A rather than alternative 4 because it is less expensive, has less effect on

the environment and displaces fewer people.

THE PROPOSED boulevard would begin with the construction of additional ramps to connect with the I-96/I-496/I-275 interchange. From 12 Mile, the new boulevard would continue north to 14 Mile and would curve around the bog. The new alignment would end at its intersection with Pontiac Trail.

An \$11.5-million state grant has been approved to begin the Haggerty Road connector. The project would improve the flow of traffic in the five-mile stretch of Haggerty from I-96 on the Novi/Farmington Hills border north to Pontiac Trail on the Commerce/West Bloomfield borders.

If the road is taken north to M-39, the thoroughfare would be designated as a state trunkline, named M-9.

Another major alternative, at more than \$100 million, calls for rebuilding the existing roadway as a controlled access boulevard, with direct access to the area's freeways: I-696, I-275 and I-96.

Haggerty Road Connector - alternative 4A

