

Shaping up for safety

Firefighters, cops get on fitness TRACC

Farmington Hills firefighters and police officers are shaping up for the sake of safety with a little help from TRACC, Botsford General Hospital's newest outpatient health care department.

TRACC, an acronym for Total Rehabilitation and Athletic Conditioning Center, is the first facility of its kind in Michigan to offer comprehensive health care programs in athletic medicine, orthopedic rehabilitation, executive fitness and industrial medicine — all under one roof.

At least three times a week, you'll find Farmington Hills firefighters and police officers working out at TRACC, using state-of-the-art strength and aerobic conditioning equipment to build their cardiovascular system.

The reason? A computerized, evaluative test given to the firefighters last year and police officers earlier this month, by the TRACC staff, showed there was room for improvement when it came to endurance and aerobic capacity.

"From this, we prescribed a personalized aerobic program designed to build each participant's cardiovascular endurance," said George Andrews, TRACC director.

"Although we have some very sophisticated exercise and aerobic equipment at TRACC, they were given the option of working out at our facility or in their own station's fitness rooms. The idea was to make our exercise program as convenient as possible so it would become part of their lifestyle."

AFTER THREE months of regular, vigorous aerobic exercise, the firefighters took the same evaluative test as before. The second test showed an increase ranging from 30 to 50 percent in endurance and aerobic capacity.

"This is good news indeed, because recent studies show early signs in firefighters are occurring on a national basis. The reason is that they lack the cardiovascular endurance to fight a fire from beginning to end."

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Farmington Hills Fire Chief Richard Marinucci agrees. "Firefighting is a highly physical job," he said. "Firefighters not only need strength to battle fires, but they also need the endurance and aerobic capacity to see them through both the length and stress of the fire."

Marinucci said the firefighters are planning a third evaluation for the end of May, and they expect even better results at that time.

ALTHOUGH THE police officers are just beginning their personalized aerobic program, they're enthusiastic about the possible positive results.

"We plan to be tested again after three-month and six-month intervals," said Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer. "But we're hoping the officers won't stop their exercise regimen at the end of the six-month program. Instead, we believe this will be the catalyst for them to continue a lifelong aerobic exercise regimen."

And that's Andrews' goal as well. "We want the firefighters and police officers to be committed to being fit for the rest of their lives because what's really at stake here is not just their own health, but more importantly, the safety of those in the community they serve."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington Hills District Fire Chief Bob Rebtzy works out on a treadmill at TRACC, a physical fitness center in Novi operated by Farmington Hills-based Botsford General Hospital.

Hills man heads solidarity walk

William Lakritz of Farmington Hills has been named an associate chairman of the Walk for Jewish Solidarity, Sunday, May 6, in West Bloomfield.

Thousands of Detroit-area residents, including many from Farmington Hills, are expected to attend this community-wide event.

Sponsored by the Jewish Welfare Federation and the Israel Anniversary Committee, the walk will celebrate not only Israel's 42nd anniversary, but the historic exodus of hundreds of thousands of Soviet Jews.

Joining Lakritz as associate chairmen are: Dr. Andrew Colman, Rabbi Chuck Diamond, Dr. Mark Diem, Dr. Steven Grant, Mark S. Kahn, Ken

Korotkin and Rabbi Norman Roman. James Colman is adviser.

Registration will begin at 10:45 a.m. on the Maple-Drake Jewish Community Center Campus. The walk will start at 11:30 a.m. The 3.3-mile event will include a rest stop at Temple Israel for refreshments.

After the walk, the day of fun will continue at the Israel 42nd anniversary celebration on the Jewish Community Center grounds.

Slated are children's and family activities, an Israel "kumzitz" (an informal gathering featuring music and dance) highlighted by a concert by Habbib, the annual Israeli quiz bowl, entertainment and food and refreshments.

Chemistry teacher has explosive style

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She studied teaching and chemistry at State University in New York — because studying to be a teacher allowed her free tuition, she said — then went on to capture a full-ride grant to Wayne State University where she earned a master's degree in chemistry.

She taught as a temporary measure to earn a little money between degrees. But after starting graduate school, she realized how much she loved teaching. She chose it over a chemist's life, and has taught in the Farmington district ever since.

BUT SCHMITT got the best of both worlds.

She married a chemist, who helps keep her abreast of current and changing issues in her field, which helps her keep current in the classroom. She and her husband have two children.

Since her start in Farmington, Schmitt has helped keep interest alive in the chemistry program. She has maintained 11 chemistry sections, even though there is half the number of students. She now gets students registering for chemistry who don't plan a career in it — but simply want to take the class.

"A lot of kids don't necessarily like my style," she said. "But once they realize I'm going to treat them fair-

ly, they're OK."

Schmitt treats her students like part of a team. "We try to make each class a community," she added. "We work together."

HER RECENT teaching award was a "pleasant surprise" to an educator who sticks to the classroom.

"Frequently, these awards go to people active on committees. I don't do that," she said. "I decided that long ago — I can't do that and do what I do for the kids."

She's encouraged that schools are getting back to good education. "We're back to more motivation for good grades and good education," she added.

Schmitt will be eligible to retire from teaching in five years, but she has no plans to do so.

"There aren't many jobs where you see that immediate gratification," she said. "The bright kids — they're going to make it no matter what. The average kids — you can make it count for them. And the slower ones — well, you must make them feel good."

She makes enough of an impression that former students come back to share their successes. "They come back a lot," she said. "It's nice to hear from them and learn that they grow up to be nice people."

Homer Simpson's antics reflect a bit of the Hills

By Louise Okrusky
staff writer

Homer Simpson is the kind of guy you'd give his wife a bowling ball for her birthday. Nice idea, but his wife doesn't bowl and his name's engraved on the ball.

The animated prime-time series, an unholy marriage of the old "Honeymoons" and the "Far Side" comic strip, helped rocket the Fox Broadcasting Co.'s Sunday night ratings to the top this season. It debuted Jan. 14, 1990.

At first glance, Homer and his bug-eyed clan aren't recognizable as anyone's next-door neighbors. Underneath the exaggeration, a little bit of Farmington Hills thrives. One of the show's writers, Al Jean, is a 1977 graduate of Harrison High School.

"YOU ARE drawing on from where you were" in writing the scripts, said Jean, 29, whose parents, Myrna and Alfred Jean, run Jean's Hardware, across from Harrison, in Farmington Hills.

Any resemblance between Homer's son, smart-mouthed Bart Simpson, and Jean is purely professional. Jean wasn't the sort of child who sat in the back of the class with a quick answer for anyone.

"I was too shy," he said.

After high school, Jean majored in mathematics at Harvard, aiming at medical school. Along the way, he became vice president of the Harvard Lampoon.

"My roommate said they had great parties," Jean said.

SATIRE AND the parties must have suited him.

"It turned out to be a good career move," he said.

He moved on to the National Lampoon after graduation and soon out to the West Coast with his partner,



Al Jean
script writer

former Harvard roommate Mike Reiss.

Jean and Reiss ended up writing jokes for Johnny Carson on the "Tonight" show.

"It was a good way of venting whatever you thought," Jean said.

Then they moved on to scripts for the comedies, "Sledge Hammer," "L.A. 51" and the "Garry Shandling Show."

SHANDLING SAW a script the partners submitted for "Golden Girls" and liked it enough to hire them to write for his cable show.

Jean's two-year contract with the Shandling show ended this spring, freeing him to concentrate on the Simpsons.

Last summer, he spent 18 weeks helping write this season's programs.

"As professions go, it's pretty satisfying," he said.

He had a hand in writing the longer version of the episode in which the Simpsons attend family counseling. He also helped write the episode in

which Homer's wife, Marge, is swept off her feet by a bowling alley Lothario.

HOMER AND Bart seem to get goofier lines than Marge and daughter Lisa, the brains of the family. Baby Maggie doesn't do much beyond pull on her pacifier with gusto.

"It's harder when you're a man to write for a woman," Jean said.

It's tough, he said, to come up with dialogue that sounds convincing coming from a female character. Even if that character always wears a strapless dress and a cobalt blue beehive hairdo.

THE SIMPSONS family was created by Matt Groening, whose "Life in Hell" comic strip inspires a cult following.

Not everyone loves the Simpsons. The National Coalition on Television Violence has called Homer and the crew rude, mean and downright anti-social.

"Maybe it's just too close to the truth," Jean said. "It's realism and not cliché characters with too little emotions."

In the March issue of the Catalyst, the Harrison High newspaper, editor Jeff Silar profiled the Simpsons and quoted two students who are fans of the show.

"I like how they're straight up front and they don't pull any punches," Junior Ed Sakai said.

"Most cartoons are for little kids, but this show appeals to everyone," Junior Dariss Goff said.

ADHERING to cartoon tradition, the characters won't age. That means baby Maggie will probably spend her public life with a pacifier stuck into her mouth.

If she could only talk. What would her first word be?

"Well, because she's with the rest of the Simpsons, probably 'help' would be her first word," Jean said.

Farmington schools pull movie

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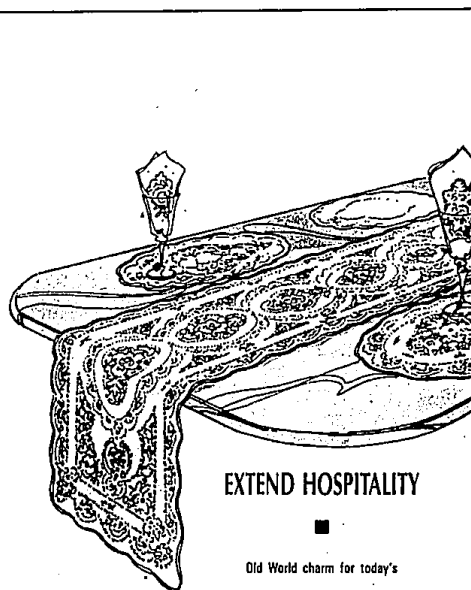
"We have tremendous empathy for the parents in this case," Flanagan said. "And for a school district which took a reputable film by a reputable firm . . . and possibly made an error in judgment."

Stephen Nalepa's mother, Debbie, viewed the film after hearing that it was shown the day before her son's death. She told reporters she was convinced after watching it that her son was mimicking the suicide attempts, not realizing the consequences. Her husband agreed.

"I am now of firm belief that my son was play acting," Larry Nalepa said. "My boy was very creative and he was playing out the scene."

Plymouth-Canton school board members also viewed the film, but said they purposely did it in small groups to avoid holding a public meeting where they would have to comment. Board members said they preferred not to comment on the film until police have completed their investigation.

Staff writer Mary Washko contributed to this report.



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