

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

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O&E Monday, June 11, 1990

Sled hill

Danger: It can't be minimized

IT'S ABOUT time the Farmington school district takes a constructive look at the sled hill at Shiawassee and Farmington Road, next to the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center in Farmington.

Hundreds of colorfully snow-suited kids flock to the easily accessible hill after a good snowfall — the specially designed sled hill at Heritage Park in Farmington Hills notwithstanding. As far as we're concerned and as fun as sledding can be, the Shiawassee hill is an accident waiting to happen. We've witnessed our share of both head-on and side crashes, which have brought not only bloody injuries but also a toboggan ban.

That's not to say we necessarily favor closing the hill to sledding. But that option can't be dismissed unless the hill's safety record improves — dramatically.

WHAT'S DISTINCTIVE about the hill is that it can be enjoyable one moment and dangerous the next. School board member Susan Rennels is right: Times have changed on the once-rural hillside.

Slippery conditions, mud holes, wild sledding and limited stopping distance at the base often combine with the hill's huge width to spell trouble.

The wide-ranging age of the kids who take to the slope also has triggered collisions between sleds going at different speeds and in different directions.

School board member Susan Rennels is right: Times have changed on the once-rural hillside.

What's more, the hill's base abuts a major road with only a temporary fence in between. We await the school board's June 19 discussion of an administrative proposal to plant evergreen trees on the hill, effectively closing it to sledding. We don't know if that's the answer. Such plantings could well pose a safety hazard of their own.

BUT WE do know the situation demands a full public airing. If safety improvements can be introduced and sledding rules can be enforced, great. Then let the sleds run. But if they can't, parents must wake up to the hill's persistent danger.

Meanwhile, the Farmington City Council should formally present its reservations about the hill to the school board.

We don't want to see a youngster seriously injured while we wait for the schools and the city to step up to their civic responsibility and meet the need for safer conditions on the best-known sled hill in the community.

Safety and liability can't be compromised, even in the face of nostalgic public sentiment.

State lawmaker's survey sparks heated response

The writer, John F. Hubbard, is a resident of Farmington Hills.

QUESTION: ASSAULT weapons have been an active topic of discussion in Lansing and in Washington. Would you favor or oppose restrictions to limit the availability of assault-type weapons?

According to the Observer's May 7 front-page article, "Residents say no guns," state Rep. Jan Dolan's conclusions from her questionnaire results regarding "assault-type weapons" were:

• Dolan: "Ninety percent want limits. That's very strong feelings." According to standard arithmetic, 90 percent of the 3,634 survey responses out of 39,172 questionnaires mailed equals only 3,271, or 8.3 percent, positive responses for unspecified limits on assault-type weapons. I am curious as to what her conclusion is about the remaining 91.7 percent. How can she infer exactly what further "limits" these 3,271 respondents wanted?

If I reported her flimsy conclusion of "strong feelings" from this limited data and questionable methodology for a design of experiments project in my engineering office, I'd be promptly ejected from the meeting.

• Dolan: "They don't see the National Rifle Association's justification for assault-type weapons." Dolan: "They said they saw no need for them to be in private hands."

I don't see how she can make these conclusions. What information in the questionnaire and the response support these assertions?

• Dolan: "These responses help me when we get to issues, such as guns. They give me something on which to base my standing." What a revealing statement. First, the question specifically referred to "assault-type weapons," which Rep. Dolan now changes to "guns." What does this mean?

guest column

ABOUT ONE year ago, newly elected Rep. Dolan initially co-sponsored some legislation that proposed some limits or restrictions or registering requirements for owners and/or potential purchasers of a vaguely defined "assault-type weapons."

My objection to the proposed legislation was based on the pointless strain to police and the law-abiding citizens who would comply with a new law, but wouldn't be committing crimes in the first place. To comply with the proposed law, I would have had to stand in line for several hours with several hundred other law-abiding citizens who happen to be firearm owners, while the Farmington/Farmington Hills police then try to cope with the sudden increase in firearms examinations and paperwork-reporting requirements. The police have better things to do than this, and so do I.

WHAT A lot of people may not realize about the Stockton, Calif., schoolyard atrocity that started the "assault" firearm controversy is that the killer was a known multiple felon with a known history of mental problems and was nevertheless able to easily and repeatedly violate several firearms purchase restrictions.

Not only did the California police and judicial system repeatedly drop the ball on this killer, but California (and Washington) did not appropriate enough resources to enable enforcement of extensive laws and restrictions already on the books. A developing trend now appears to be various governments making even more laws that can't be enforced and still won't help any crime problems.

In summary, I don't have a problem with law-abiding citizens owning any type of firearm, nor with law-abiding citizens driving any type of automobile, nor with law-abiding citizens drinking any type of alcohol.

But I do have a problem with criminals possessing firearms of any type, drunks driving automobiles of any type, irresponsible use of alcohol, and with elected representatives that aren't thinking clearly, rationally and fairly.

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

from our readers

Students earn public praise

umented, scholarly formatted report, and gained an appreciation of our local community's history.

Kathryn Briggs,
Farmington Historical Society

To the editor:

Personally, and on behalf of the Farmington Historical Society, I wish to publicly thank and commend the students and teachers who participated in the Farmington Historical Society's recent writing contest.

Many of the entries from eighth graders of Power and O.E. Dunkel middle schools were excellent, showing well-done research into our local history, conducting personal interviews and producing well-written final reports.

The quality of most — not just a few — are exceptional, and bespeak well of the personnel of the Farmington Schools.

It was very difficult to judge these topick the "Winners," but I consider all the entries "Winners" in that the students learned how to do original research, how to prepare a well-documented, scholarly formatted report, and gained an appreciation of our local community's history.

Thanks much for helping

To the editor:

Thank you for helping make our American Association of Retired Persons Tax-Aide Program for the elderly a real success.

We completed tax returns for 649 cases. There were 411 federal returns and 1,021 state forms. We answered questions in 87 cases and visited nice homes to complete tax returns for people who were not able to visit our various sites.

John J. Antonilli,
program coordinator
Farmington

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