

Persistence pays off

Hills woman finds soldier pen pal

By Joanne Mallazewski
staff writer

Barbara Darish wrote consistently to him. She sent him packages. But she never heard from her soldier pen pal in Saudi Arabia. And everyone teased Barbara Darish that he was only a figment of her imagination.

But when Darish, a member of the Farmington-area Friends of Freedom, sat down more than a week ago to write yet another letter to 23-year-old Army Sgt. Jerry Burdock of Redford Township, something came over her.

"I got the first paragraph done. Then I got this awful feeling. I am not into psychics. But I got this feeling to stop the letter," the Farmington Hills resident said.

She decided enough was enough. Darish was bound and determined to find out whether her soldier pen pal was a figment of her imagination or not.

"My first instinct was to call the operator."

Her persistence on the telephone paid off. First she got in touch with Burdock's grandmother who gave Darish his mother's phone number. Burdock is not a figment of Darish's imagination and he is safe.

FINALLY, DARISH spoke with Burdock himself, who has returned from Operation Desert Storm where he served on the front lines as a mechanic on trucks, tanks and rockets. He's back in North Carolina but will be coming home Wednesday afternoon. And Darish will be there to welcome the young man.

"He was on the front lines. He said he wrote to me. But I haven't gotten any of the letters yet. The mail is worse now than it was before. And he didn't get any of the packages yet," Darish said.

"I didn't write anything about the war. I basically kept the letters about my family," said the Hunt Club subdivision resident. When Darish goes to the airport to see Burdock, she'll be sporting a big patriotic-colored poster saying, "Welcome Home Jerry. I'm Your Pen Pal Barbara." She has no idea what he looks like and he has no idea what she looks like.

"Even though I was just talking to him on the phone, I just hear this guy's voice, I mean, my face lit up like a Christmas tree," Darish said, recalling her first conversation with the soldier she took interest in.

"You can tell by his voice that he doesn't take anything you do for him for granted," Darish said. "He's got a good sense of humor. He's a very warm guy, I can tell."



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Barbara Darish of Farmington Hills is ready to meet her soldier pen pal, Army Sgt. Jerry Burdock of Redford Township, when he arrives in Detroit Wednesday. Her persistence paid off and she finally located him a day after he arrived in North Carolina from months in Operation Desert Storm.

DARISH-DIDN'T let a week go by when she didn't write to Burdock. She's talked to him a lot over the phone since his return to North Carolina. She sent him a huge bouquet of flowers and an Easter basket.

Darish assured Burdock that, despite her persistence and investigation to find out if he existed and where he is stationed, "I don't work for the FBI. I just want to know he's all right. I took this guy into my life. He was always on the top of my list."

And he's just as eager to meet her. Burdock's mother, Candy Cubba of Redford Township, asked Darish to be there at the airport when he comes home. And standing next to her will be Darish's 10-year-old granddaughter Jennifer — Burdock's wife also is named Jennifer — who also wrote to the soldier.

"I'm not taking down that yellow ribbon (outside her house) until I see him," Darish said.

And it's still there, waiting for her pen pal's return.

The Observer begins changes to make paper reader-friendly

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and the comedy scene, as well as exciting features on activities for readers on the go.

And for those with a desire for good food to eat, the Taste section has exciting recipes and other home-entertainment ideas.

MONDAYS ALSO will include the regular features you have come to expect from your community newspaper — news about your hometown as well as high school sports.

With the debut of the Thursday Farmington Observer, readers will be seeing more of what they like and it will be easier than ever to find.

Our local section is being expanded by an entire section. Local sports, entertainment and business will be anchored in Section B. By the way, for your convenience, Business will begin on the back of the B section for easy access.

CLASSIFIED advertisement readers will note a convenient change. All classified sections will be continuous and led off by an index to help you find the service you most desire. You no longer will have to hunt and peck your way through the newspaper, looking for the advertisement that will meet your needs. This will be led off by the popular Creative Living section, featuring the best of the arts in metropolitan Detroit.

Of course, for those interested in social issues affecting your lifestyle, fashion and society news, you can turn to the Suburban Life section.

Premiering this Thursday, is news dedicated to the ever-important real estate scene as well as the ongoing coverage of the commercial construction in Building Scene.

Keep an eye out for these changes and let us know what you think. Thanks and enjoy.

Steve Barnaby
managing editor

Cities' leaders eye recycling, budgets

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In both cities and in the Farmington Public Schools, officials are busy tightening their belts and expecting a leaner budget year due to state and federal reductions.

SOME HIGHLIGHTS include:

• Major recycling efforts are under way in both cities, where mandatory curbside recycling programs take effect July 1 and recycling centers are well-used. In the school district, bond and computer paper and cafeteria trays are being recycled.

• Sewer projects in both cities are ongoing with a \$12 million project in Farmington updating the city's older combined sewers and adding a new retention tank, and the \$20 million Evergreen/Farmington project in central Farmington Hills which will alleviate flooding problems there.

• Farmington Hills had the largest growth of any city in Michigan during the past decade, according to the 1990 census. The Hills is now the second largest city in Oakland County after Southfield and the 13th largest city in the state.

• Meanwhile, Farmington discovered an eight percent decline in

population in the 1990 census, and a number of "empty nest homes" where longtime residents now live without their children. "While costs continue to increase... we'll certainly need to continue doing more with less," city manager Robert Deadman said.

• MAJOR ROAD projects will help both the north-south and east-west traffic flows through the community. The widening of Orchard Lake, which has been on the drawing board for 25 years, the start of the Haggerty Connector project west of Haggerty, continued expansion of the 12 Mile boulevard and plans to improve the M-102/Grand River bridge are all under way or in future plans.

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5 cases of hepatitis confirmed at Grace

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sometimes lengthy incubation period, which can range from 15 to 30 days.

"It's just so frustrating... there's nothing more we can do," said Don Cowan, director of building and student services for the Farmington District. "I hope the (spring) break helps."

School is closed this week for

spring break, and will resume again Monday, April 8.

Officials recommend anyone experiencing flu-like symptoms — diarrhea, jaundicing or yellowing of the skin — see their family doctor.

Students are also being advised not to share food or borrow pencils and other school items.

Families and friends can also obtain shots designed to beef up their immune systems from their doctor.

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