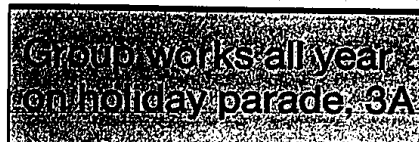


Capturing that kid look
Kim Jamieson style, 6D



Contest
champion, 10



Group works all year
on holiday parade, 3A

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Special ed discrimination charged

By Casey Hans
staff writer

A U.S. Department of Education ruling that the Farmington School District discriminated in its special education policies brought a parent and the school board president to verbal blows last week.

Parent Lorne Leon read a prepared statement to the school board Tuesday, requesting the district respond to a ruling by the education department's Office for Civil Rights.

The federal agency said the district discriminated against students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, sometimes called Attention Deficit Disorder.

"It is only because the federal government is forcing you, that you will now have to obey the law," Leon said.

The Farmington district had taken the position that ADHD and ADD were not recognized by state rules so were not addressed specifically in the local special education program, according to information released in the ruling.

Similar rulings have had an impact on some 40-50 districts across the country, according to

a growing, national parent lobby fighting for more specialized education for kids with ADHD — a disorder believed to be hereditary and neurological-biological in nature.

The disorder was known for years as "hyperactivity" or "hyperkinesis," even though some of the children show no hyperactivity.

LEON HAS TAKEN up the cause locally, as the parent of a child with ADHD.

Leon's discourse Tuesday was interrupted by an angry board President Susan Rennels who told Leon he was "crossing over some lines" involving the privacy rights of students.

"This board cannot comment on matter of litigation," she added. "You are welcome to pursue whatever remedies are available to you. We have procedures in place. They (the administration) will pursue whatever it is that needs to be done."

Leon, who has spoken to the board on special education issues and who has been embroiled with the district in litigation about his son's education for several years, responded just as angrily.

Please turn to Page 2

Campaign revs up for parks tax

By Susan Buck
staff writer

The Say Yes To Parks committee has explained its stance on the May 7 eight year, half-mill tax proposal to the city.

Now committee members, supported by the parks and recreation commission, are ready to campaign for the millage in the community.

Committee members, working out of phone banks, will call residents, primarily a friendly audience, at home between 7-9 p.m. this week to explain the tax. Closer to the election, another round of calls will remind voters to get out the vote.

A press conference will be held at the end of the month to demonstrate support for the millage. Also, speakers are available to speak before groups, by calling the parks and recreation department at 473-9570.

In addition, the committee will take out a large ad in the Farmington Observer listing the tax supporters, including well-known, influential people.

"With only a half-mill on the line, and a winning use for the money, a lot of people might say, 'Well, this should pass easily . . . and not take the trouble,'" said Mike Horner, committee chairman who hosted the April 11 meeting at the Farmington Community Center. "That's my biggest concern."

JODY SORONEN, former city councilwoman and honorary committee chairman, agreed that "turning out the vote will be the tough part."

"I think your supporters are probably there, it's getting them out to the polls," she said.

The need for the extended length — three years longer — of the millage renewal came about partly because of the Year 2000 committee's recommendations for parks and recreation.

Acquisition of land now is a must, Horner said.

Please turn to Page 4



Longtime Farmington High principal Jerry Potter talks with students during class exchange. Potter, who plans to leave his post in June, says he will miss

the hustle and bustle of the daily school day but is looking forward to new challenges.

30 and out Longtime FHS principal to leave

By Casey Hans
staff writer

For Jerry Potter, it's all a wonderful blur of events and people who have walked the halls and filled the classrooms of Farmington High School in the past 30 years.

The 55-year-old educator is leaving his post as principal of Farmington High in June to begin a second career as a visiting lecturer at the University of Michigan through North Central Association, a national accrediting agency, plus some work in real estate and consulting.

The move is something Potter has planned for the past five years, and he is spending his final weeks at the school "savoring the day, the moment, the experiences."

"I think I'm leaving it a little bit better for the new administration," he said. "I'm leaving feeling very happy, proud and pleased, both personally and professionally."

"The doors are just opening to more doors, and I'm not boring myself in."

Potter announced his retirement last

"If I had to do it over again, I'd come to Farmington, Farmington High, and do it all over again."

— Jerry Potter
FHS principal

Tuesday to staff and Wednesday to the student body. He said he doesn't expect to feel the impact until his last graduation ceremony in June, or maybe next fall when it's time, again, for a new school year.

POTTER STILL recalls the first time he saw the high school, which is housed in the Farmington school district's oldest building, which was recently renovated and now boasts a state-of-the-art media center.

"I remember parking on Shiawassee and walking up that long sidewalk to meet the principal who gave me my job," he said. "That was the longest walk in the world — I still remember that vividly."

He never looked back.

The Farmington resident took his first teaching job at the school in 1961 where he taught business and coached tennis, was promoted to assistant principal in 1967 and to the principalship in 1976. He has no regrets.

"If I had to do it over again, I'd come to Farmington, Farmington High, and do it all over again," he said.

Although most of the events of 30 years blend into the day-to-day hectic life of a high school, a few things stand out.

As the school's only assistant principal in 1967, for instance, he remembers stepping over students in the halls as they held a sit-in protesting the school's attendance policy. "Now, nothing surprises me," he added.

But despite the occasional event or excitement, it is the staff, students, fellow administrators and other support which he said have kept the school well-oiled and running smoothly, he said. More recently, parental involvement has become one of the keys to the school's success.

Please turn to Page 4



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

Coming through

Friends of the Parade Association president Bruce Lantto, a Farmington businessman, tries to poke his head through a papier mache petunia at the warehouse where items from the Michigan Thanksgiving Day Parade are stored. For a story and photos about the parade, please see Page 3A.

what's inside

Classifieds . . .	Sec. E,F
Index	2E
Auto	Sec. E,F
Real estate . . .	Sec. E
Employment . .	Sec. E,F
Creative living .	1E
Crossword puzzle	3E
Entertainment .	5D
Inkwell	4C
On the agenda .	4A
Police, fire calls	3A
Sports	Sec. C
Street Scene . .	Sec. D
Taste	Sec. B
Travel	5C-6C

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Gulf War pen pals finally get together

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Some pen pals keep at it for years without ever meeting each other personally.

Not so for Barbara Darish, a Farmington Hills resident, and Army Sgt. Jerry Burdock, 23, of Redford Township, who serves in the 82nd Airborne Division.

The pen pals — who got involved thanks to the recent Gulf War — finally met April 3 at Metro Airport.

It all started when Darish sent the local Friends of Freedom group a stamped, self-addressed envelope and they forwarded Burdock's name to Darish from a list of 900 enlisted armed services personnel from Michigan.

Darish ended up doing volunteer work for Farmington-area Friends of Freedom, too.

Please turn to Page 4

Items for Farmington Focus may be mailed to the Farmington Observer, 2189 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336, or dropped off at the newspaper office.