

Experts say diverse cultures must be blended

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helping to bring an understanding of cultural diversity here.

"I really want them to feel comfortable — that they are welcome."

This changing population represent two groups with different needs: the immigrant population of people who have moved here permanently, as well as families sent to the U.S. by employers to live and work here for just a few years. Regardless of their roles, bilingual experts and community leaders want everyone to feel a part of the community, and for those established here to learn to accept the new traditions.

"We need to know who is there, but we don't want them segregated," "The more diverse, the better," agreed Jackie Moose-Burke, a bilingual consultant for Oakland Schools, the county's intermediate school district, who sees new families with children entering the school system every year. Although cultural issues impact entire communities, many issues arise in the schools, she said. "It is truly the area where the rubber meets the road."

In Farmington's program, Alameddine shows just how the school district program can impact entire families. He not only involves children in the school district's bilingual program but visits with families and shows them around the community. He points out churches, social opportunities, and generally makes them feel welcome.

One expert called Alameddine's approach "like a home away from home" that encourages people to continue their traditions in a new place.

SEVERAL GROUPS in the Farmington area are making an effort to understand the cultural changes here and how to offer better services.

A 15-member Multicultural Community Council comprised of government, business and religious leaders, and students representing the three public high schools has been in place for the past two years, meeting regularly over lunch to discuss the changes and how the community can be improved. The group plans a special program to commemorate the Martin Luther King.



A traditional Albanian dance is demonstrated by (from left) Fatmira Sulejman, Tonis Dodai, Maria Vulaj and Hana Lekocaj at East Middle School. Bilingual director Haroun Alameddine

Jr. holiday and possible informational seminars in the coming year.

Also, the local Council of Community Resources — which includes 10 Farmington-area government and service agencies — is hosting a seminar Aug. 15 to hear about updated ethnic statistics for the area and find better ways to offer their services. "I really think it should help to sensitize our staff," said organizer and Farmington Community Library director Beverly Papal.

"Our community is becoming more culturally diverse," she added. "Are they sensitive enough to the cultural diversity? Do they have the skills to give the best possible service?"

Over the past few years, occasional problems have arisen involving various ethnic groups in the Farmington area, with some involving young people in the schools. These problems usually occur because of

cultural differences or lack of cultural understanding, experts agree.

"It needs to be handled very directly," Moose-Burke said. She advocates the team approach to working with school staffs, parents and students so problems can be alleviated.

THE CHANGING cultural make-up of communities like Farmington and Farmington Hills challenges those who are settled here, but also offers an opportunity. "It's an issue of personal feelings," Moose-Burke said. "The community has to become involved, and challenged to learn about new cultures. They're comfortable — and they like it that way."

"We feel very fortunate to have so many (different cultures) coming in," she added. "It prepares children to function in a world where we are going to be interdependent."

An influx of Eastern Europeans, Kurds and other groups experiencing political unrest in their home countries are expected in Oakland County and throughout Michigan in the coming year. Alameddine said he expects to see a particular increase in the number of Albanian families moving here, because a large number of families are already settled here.

On Thursday, Come into the home of the Nakamura family of Farmington Hills, read about one North Farmington High School teacher's impressions of his visit to Japan, and meet a key person who encourages the ethnic blend here.

What started as a multicultural open house several years ago, has grown into an ethnic extravaganza where community can learn about, and share in, the different cultures of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Now called "We Are the World — A Celebration of Our Diversity" the spring event is co-sponsored by the Farmington schools Bilingual Department, parents and families involved in the bilingual program, and a Multicultural Community Council comprised of civic, community and religious leaders attempting to bring a better understanding of cultural diversity to the area.

Bilingual director Haroun Alameddine said the event is held "to bring parents of the different cultures under one roof and have them meet each other." It is also designed to encourage interaction by others in the community. About 100 students and bilingual staff members help to provide entertainment, and hundreds of people attend the event each year.

This year's multicultural night was held May 16 at East Middle School, where a variety of ethnic foods were tried, people of different backgrounds donned colorful clothing for traditional dance and entertainment, and people were given the opportunity to interact with different segments of the community.

Photos pictured in today's Observer were taken at the special night.

The bilingual department serves between 300-400 students and 27 different languages. It tests students for eligibility and offers bilingual tutoring at all levels. The department is also making an effort to train regular classroom teachers to help them work with bilingual students who use English as a second language and who may have cultural beliefs different from those of a traditional American student.

Series begins

Cultural diversity in our community changes by the day.

As our world becomes smaller, all cultures intertwine and must learn to live and grow together.

Beginning today, the Observer will tackle cultural issues in an occasional series, "The Cultural Tree — Growing New Roots in Farmington and Farmington Hills." In it, we will explore the various ethnic groups which make up a growing segment of our community and related issues.

Our series begins with an overview of cultures and discussion of cultural awareness. Other articles will profile a Japanese family, look at a community-based multi-cultural committee and consider the changing ethnic impact on the Farmington/Farmington Hills business community.

Stories about other groups and ethnic issues will be written periodically in coming months.

Casey Hlans and Sharon LeMieux

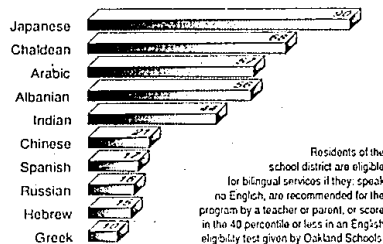
said he expects more immigration of Albanian families because of political strife in their homeland.



Anna Flanagan, wife of Farmington superintendent of schools Michael Flanagan, dances with Harrison High School student Asel Esho during the Chaldean portion of a multicultural program at East Middle School.

Twenty-seven languages are spoken within the Farmington Public School District

The chart below shows the top 10 languages and the number of students who are eligible for bilingual services



Source: Farmington Public School's, listing of eligible bilingual students as of January 23, 1991

TAMMIE CRANE/Oakland Schools & Economic

Cultural extravaganza is growing in Farmington

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Kenyon 7/28



Jean Yasso, a recent graduate of Harrison High School, participated in the multicultural night with a traditional Chaldean dance. Behind her is Suzanne Essi.