

Easing tension

Multicultural council plots school strategy

By Ralph R. Echlin
Staff writer

In an effort to stifle ethnic tension blamed for three fights in Walled Lake Middle School Sept. 30 to Oct. 4, a "multicultural council" met last week to plot strategy.

District spokeswoman Lois Lange said each fight involved two male students, occurred in school hallways, and was accompanied by "ethnic slurs." Two of the fighters were Caucasian, one black, and three belonged to no distinct ethnic group. One was injured, but the pugilists were suspended and their parents scheduled for conferences. Lange said there have been similar isolated incidents in the last years at Walled Lake schools. She added that the problem is not

specific to Walled Lake schools, but rather reflects ethnic tension in society.

The council, formed by Walled Lake Middle School principal Joan Hein, is made up of 14 teachers, 35 parents, two school board members, two high school students and two children residents. The idea is to encourage tolerance of all but the intolerant, and as a result, make another round of ethnically motivated fistfights less likely. The council is not designed to address ethnic problems in the whole school district, but just at Walled Lake Middle School.

"It was a very productive meeting," said parent Patty Field, who also works in the Walled Lake Middle School media center. "Everyone came together in good faith to look for a solution."

"I thought it was one of the best meetings I've ever been to," Lange said.

T.K. Foo, a Walled Lake Methodist minister, was asked to serve on the council by district officials. "I was really impressed (with the first meeting)," he said. "They are trying to build bridges and understanding. (Bad) things begin to happen when people don't understand (each other)."

Tentative plans include expanding Walled Lake Middle School's student conflict resolution groups, training staff in multiculturalism, establishing multicultural retreats for students and starting a rumor-control network.

Council members broke into seven subcommittees (school staff development, curriculum and instruction, guidance and counseling, student ac-

tivities, safety, parent involvement, and public relations). The subcommittees are supposed to make recommendations to Hein by Nov. 25.

Among the recommendations from the staff development committee is a suggestion that the school district seek out minority candidates when jobs open up, said Cathy Ferguson, bilingual and English as a second language coordinator. "There's a need for more minority teachers in the district as a whole," Ferguson said. "(That) is something that needs to be continually looked at."

There are more than 600 students at Walled Lake Middle School, including 13 American Indians, 16 Asians, four Hispanics and nine black children. Chaldean students are classified as Caucasians.

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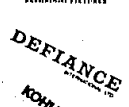
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Road construction displaces wetlands

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CITY OFFICIALS also looked at Heritage Park and 10 other sites that the city doesn't own. To buy new land to replace the wetlands will cost \$500,000-\$600,000 just for the land, excluding the costs of wetlands replacement, Call said.

"Heritage Park just doesn't work," Call said. "If we build wetlands at Peltz-MDOT it will further guarantee that property be developed and maintained in a very native state."

The DNR requests replacement of wetlands at 1 1/2 times what will be filled in. That means the city needs about nine acres to replace the boulevard wetlands. "It has to be newly created in areas that are not floodplains or wetlands now," Call said.

Receiving a grant of \$2 million over two years from the Michigan Land Trust Fund to buy the approximately 93-acre sod farm on Eight Mile played a role in looking at Peltz-MDOT for new wetlands, Call said.

The sod farm is expected to fulfill needs for youth sports fields. Without the acreage, some in the

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— David Call
Farmington Hills assistant city manager

city feared that eye would turn to the flat land on MDOT near I-496 to build ballfields.

Creation of new wetlands in that area, however, would probably remove the threat of ballfields on MDOT, Call said.

The new wetlands would be created while work continues on the boulevard. The DNR requires that the muck in the 12 Mile wetlands be put into new wetlands. The DNR also monitors the new wetlands for 2-3 years, Call said.

"That way, the state guarantees that you build a wetlands," he added.

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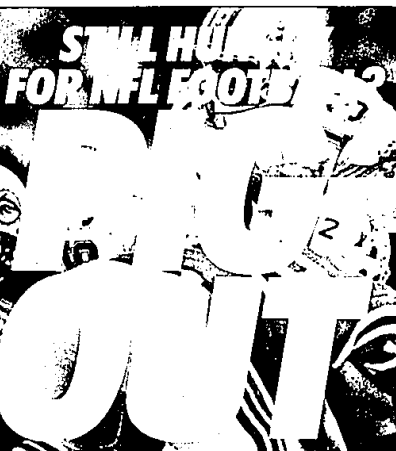
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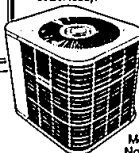
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