



SHARON LAMIEUX/staff photographer

With a song in her heart

Hilary Levey, 11, of West Bloomfield, seems to be putting her heart into the finale of "The Best Christmas Ever" staged earlier this month at the Farmington/Farmington Hills Community Center. She's a member of the Community Center's children's theater, called The Chocolate Chip Players. The group, directed by Laura Schwartz, will begin a new session in January. If interested, call the center at 477-8404.

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Botsford school checked after teacher faints

By Anne Sullivan
staff writer

When Cindy Berkaw, a kindergarten teacher at Botsford Elementary of Clarenceville school district, mysteriously fainted in her classroom, students were removed that day from the classroom "for safety precautions," according to Superintendent David Kamish.

The room has been checked since the Dec. 2 incident for every possible cause, according to Kamish, and an air vent has been repaired.

As a result the teacher and students will return to their classroom today, Clarenceville includes north-east Livonia, northwest Redford and southeast Farmington Hills.

BERKAW WAS taken to St. Mary Hospital in Livonia where she was kept overnight.

Tests run on Berkaw found nothing physically wrong with her. She was later checked by her family doctor and was found to be in good health.

The week before she fainted, Berkaw and the para-professional in her class were not feeling well. They became lethargic and very sleepy a couple hours after arriving in the classroom, said Berkaw. A parent who was in the classroom also complained of similar symptoms.

"I knew it wasn't me," said Berkaw. "Others were feeling it too, so I knew something was wrong with the room." She notified Principal Jesse Baker of the problems the day before Thanksgiving break.

After Berkaw's complaint, the district had her classroom tested on Nov. 29 for formaldehyde, gas fumes, and carbon monoxide by the Michigan Environmental Auditors. The tests all came back within safety limits.

Berkaw was told if there were problems again, that she and the students would be placed in another room.

The following Monday, while in class, she fainted. The students were removed from the room. On Dec. 5, the building was checked for gas leaks. No leaks were found.

The district's next step was to test the water, said Kamish. The Wayne County Board of Health took water samples, tested them, and found them "safe for human consumption." Kamish told trustees at Thursday night's board meeting.

THE CAUSE of Berkaw's fainting spell is still a mystery.

On Dec. 9, instantaneous readings were taken for the carbon monoxide and oxygen levels in Berkaw's classroom by Henry Maciejewski, hazardous materials manager of the Wayne County Health Department. The levels were found to be within the safety guidelines.

Maciejewski suggested that the room be tested for carbon dioxide.

The Michigan Environmental Auditors were called back to test the school for carbon dioxide. Berkaw's room tested at 700 parts per million. Recommended levels are 700 parts per million or less, and the human threshold level is 5,000 parts per million, according to information provided to Kamish.

Although the levels can reach 5,000 parts per million before causing problems for humans, he was told drowsiness, dizziness and nausea can be experienced by some people at levels of 1,000 parts per million.

The second kindergarten room at Botsford tested at 1,000 parts per million.

Berkaw's classroom was empty at the time of the carbon dioxide tests while the other kindergarten room had students. The auditors suggested that if the empty classroom had students, it could have tested at a level of 1,000 parts per million too.

A heating and cooling firm was called to inspect the school's heating systems. They found that the classroom was receiving only recirculated air because of an air flow differential problem.

KAMISH SAID the necessary repairs were made to the heating system. Dampers now open properly and 20 percent fresh air flows in the room.

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Cuts in state-paid FICA hurt schools

By Casey Hans
staff writer

Farmington school Superintendent Michael Flanagan has asked a group of parents active in the politics of school finance reform to tackle the issue of Social Security cutbacks at the state level.

He encouraged all residents to "badger the Legislature" over the issue of cutbacks in that area, which could cost districts upwards of \$440 million per year. Currently the state pays the employer portion of Social Security for public school districts, but action has been taken to cap how much they pay.

"I recommend we encourage our legislators at least not to make this worse," Flanagan added.

Three Gill Elementary parents — Jan Bennett, Debbie Lukasak and Kerry Kelly — are active in the Coalition of Michigan Parents group which is beginning to make political inroads in Lansing. They have joined parents from other districts in looking at the overall school financing picture and determining ways to address concerns.

"This might be an issue for the parents to sink their teeth into," said Flanagan, referring to the COMP group. With other issues such as tax base sharing and recapture, districts have been focusing on immediate concerns and not watching this future issue quite as carefully, he said. "It has almost taken our eye off the ball, so to speak."

THE FARMINGTON HILLS parents were given copies of an article

on the topic, which Flanagan recently wrote for the Michigan School Business Officials, of which he is president. In it, Flanagan said he has been warning of the Social Security cutbacks since early 1989.

Bennett said COMP would raise the issue at a January meeting. "Wake up," Flanagan wrote in his President's Report column. "By capping Social Security for all districts, the state is beginning the process of 'stealing' \$440 million a year. Those who believe the money will be used to supplement the formula are naive."

Flanagan said the state signed an agreement with the federal government "decades ago" and that "it is their legal responsibility to pay it — all of it."

The district chief has warned of the impact of state finance reform

since he returned to the Farmington district in 1985 as an assistant superintendent for finance. He predicted the recent change in the state recapture formula — although he believed it would be phased in — and has also talked about raids on Social Security and pension contributions.

Flanagan impressed by federal concern for future of education

Farmington superintendent Michael Flanagan said he was initially "skeptical" about a recent trip to Washington, D.C., where he met with officials to discuss the future of education.

But after the one-day meeting where issues were discussed among four superintendents from other parts of the country, Flanagan said he was "impressed" and that "the skepticism is gone."

Five superintendents representing the Midwest, West Coast, Rocky

Mountains, East Coast and the South all attended the Nov. 22 meeting. They met with David Kearns, deputy Secretary of Education and former president of Xerox, whom Flanagan said he would like to invite to Farmington someday soon.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT of Education held the meeting to get feedback from local superintendents like Flanagan, so they can see how their plans and policies impact education at the working level, he said. "They realize there is a genuine

void," he added. "I believe the people (in Washington) are as concerned as we are."

People can look forward to big changes in education in coming years, he added. "For us to think public education is going to look in the future the way it is today is... naive."

The U.S. Department of Education will likely keep a network in place, so it can communicate with local districts about the impact of federal action, he said.

Students take over city for day, cut budget and push snow removal aid

By Susan Buck
staff writer

There were many new faces around Farmington Hills City Hall Tuesday. No, there hadn't been a recall... it was just the 10th-annual student government day.

North Farmington High and Harrison High students assumed the roles of city officials, department heads and council members. The mock city council meeting, which lasted just 90 minutes, asked for solutions to two questions: How to cut the budget and how to plow and clear the sidewalks.

"They tried to defer the budget question," said Steve Brock, assistant to the city manager.

Students managed to pare the budget by making cuts in the special services and public services departments.

In the end, the new "council" was booed by certain "department heads," according to Bill Brinker, a teacher at North Farmington.

HARRISON HIGH supplied the Mayor, Alisa Koval, along with three councilmembers, Deron Cook, Julie Ritter and Jason Dreyer. North



Alisa Koval, a Farmington Harrison High School student, was Farmington Hills mayor for a 90-minute mock council meeting last week.

Farmington High supplied the remaining three councilmembers, Darren Spilman, Laura Williamson and Robert Thompson.

As for how the city should plow and clear its sidewalks, students decided that city staff should go around the city to determine who was able to physically clear his or her sidewalks and who was not.

Brock said.

The consensus was that charitable organizations could help out those who were physically unable, Brock said.

"Can you imagine the work?" asked Brock, who delighted in hearing the student reasoning. "This is unworkable."

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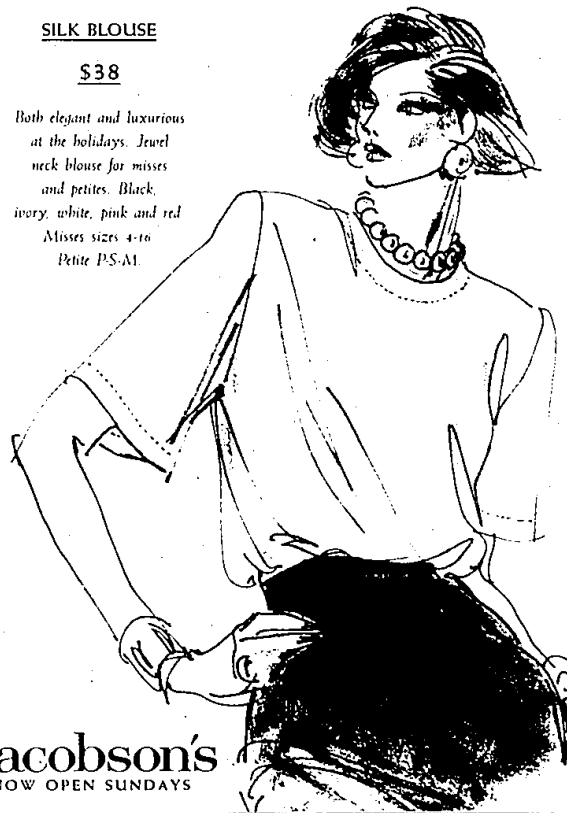
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