

# Middle school

## It doesn't need to be middle-of-the-road

By Casey Hans  
staff writer

Middle school is often considered a void somewhere between elementary school and high school.

Darlene Russell plans to change that "middle-of-the-road" philosophy.

The new principal at Warner Middle School in Farmington Hills has a special spot in her heart for the sixth, seventh and eighth graders who attend middle school. "As far as I'm concerned, they still need a lot of nurturing," said Russell who lives in Southfield with her husband, Bill, who is also an educator. "They're changing as much now, as they did when they were little kids."

"They don't drop out in high school - they drop out here," she added. "If you don't make this meaningful, they kind of get lost in the shuffle."

Russell is excited about the potential at the school on 14 Mile which serves the northeast sector of Farmington Hills, a small portion of West Bloomfield and, with the current open enrollment policy, any other Farmington-area students who choose to attend.

Since starting here, Russell has encouraged development of a school improvement plan at Warner, and working to get parents involved in any number of ways and believes the school-home connection is important.

"THIS PLACE is the home away from home," she added.

She is also excited about new concepts like team teaching, use of technology and other things she would like to see at Warner.

Russell said students and parents have welcomed her following the recent retirement of longtime administrator Walt Seoble. A number of students, including eighth grader Cary Rosen, say they like her style. "She's such a wonderful woman," he

said. "She knows what she's doing."

And, he added, she's fun: "She dances at the school dance - she told me next time we go, she'd dance with me."

Another eighth grader, Randi Salver, called the new principal "beautiful" and "the nicest lady."

Russell makes it a point to learn names - and remember them. "That's my goal," she said. "You personalize it by knowing students. That's how you make them feel important."

But she has no trouble being tough either. When students behave inappropriately, she can be seen calling to them down the hall and talking about the problem.

As the first black female administrator in the district and the first black principal of a mainstream school program in Farmington, she believes she brings a different perspective to the school. She sees herself as a role model for the girls there, for example, and is proud of her accomplishments over the years.

THE FEMALE role model was a strong one for Russell herself. She and her two sisters were raised by her mother and grandmother, who put education above all else. "They gave us a work ethic," she said. "It was a given I was going to college. I was taught that. My mother valued education. That is the foundation I have."

Russell started as a teacher and counselor in Detroit Public Schools in the late 1960s, rising to elementary assistant principal, then moving to Oak Park schools where she served first as an elementary school principal, principal of a middle school.

But education wasn't always her focus. In high school, Russell studied science and Latin and wanted to be a pharmacist. She got her elementary teaching degree in college but, upon graduating, left for Atlanta and went

into the business world. She worked first as a computer instructor, and also as a hotel reservationist and a secretary before deciding to go back to education.

"It was the only thing that was never boring," she said. "I tried the other jobs because I was curious. That's what makes it (teaching) kind of special to me. Everybody can't do this job. You really have to have a dedication to it."

She and her husband have no children, but she considers the more

than 500 students at Warner her own. In her spare time, she travels to Las Vegas to visit her mother and loves to sew, she said, pointing to the cream suit she wore during the interview.

She started her education career in Detroit, a large district, and moved to the smaller district of Oak Park. Now, she said, she has found the happy medium in Farmington. "This is a district that's the right size," she said. "It's like I've found a home. A place to stay."



Warner Middle School principal Darlene Russell encourages new things, such as a program on school improvement. "We're going to do some great things."



photos by SHARON LeMIEUX/staff photographer

New principal of Warner Middle School, Darlene Russell, talks with eighth grader Cary Rosen (left) while classmate Randi Salver looks on.

## These guys know how to help prevent crime

The Farmington Hills Police Department's crime prevention section was honored March 6 with the Unit of the Year Award by the Crime Prevention Association of Michigan for its 1991 accomplishments.

A key factor in the city's steady drop in residential burglaries in the past eight years is due to the Neighborhood Watch programs administered by the crime prevention section. Eighty-nine subdivisions are involved in the program.

Population figures in 1980 revealed a potential for a break-in in Farmington Hills of 1 for each 29.6 housing units. During 1991 this ratio improved to a potential victimization rate of one break-in for every 77 residences, police said.

In 1991, the crime prevention section made 256 presentations within the schools and to various community groups. That's an 11 percent increase over presentations made in 1990. The programs encompass a variety of topics including Stranger Danger for preschool children, Neighborhood Watch, Helping Hands/Safe House, and senior citizen programs.

CRIME PREVENTION members make regular appearances at other community events such as monthly senior center presentations and local trade shows such as Network '91, and the local builder's show.

In 1991, the crime prevention section also provided the THINK - Teaching, Helping, Involving, Notifying, Kids program to public and private schools in the Hills. Thirty-nine fifth-grade classes were given



SHARON LeMIEUX/staff photographer

McGruff the crime dog likes these officers. Among those honored are crime prevention technician Chris Cogar (front), crime prevention officer Jeff Anderson (left), crime prevention technician Kim Kemske and Sgt. Paul Cavan.

the four-class presentation. The program was developed in conjunction with Maplegrove Training Institute, with a primary focus on teaching the harmful effects of chemical use on students and their families as well as the dynamics that can lead to chemical use and abuse.

In an effort to address the needs of the business community, periodic presentations are provided about concerns such as robbery prevention, inventory shrinkage and bad checks, for example. In fall 1991, efforts were begun to make the Business Watch Program a more permanent fixture in the community by attempting to initiate monthly meetings.

## Free seminars teach how to avoid crime

The Farmington Hills Police Department is offering monthly free crime prevention seminars for business owners and merchants through May.

The following seminars designed to help businesses protect its people, products and profits are scheduled for:

• 9 a.m. Thursday, March 26: retail fraud/employee theft seminar. You'll learn how to protect your business against shoplifting and internal theft.

• 9 a.m. Thursday, April 30: robbery seminar. You'll learn some sim-

ple procedures and policies to protect your employees from the threat of robbery and from becoming a victim of this potentially life-threatening crime.

• 9 a.m. Thursday, May 21: business watch organizational meeting. Join fellow business owners in an effort to promote a business network focused on preventing crime in the city.

All seminars are scheduled 9-11 a.m. and will be in the council chambers at Farmington Hills city hall, 31555 11 Mile.

In 1991, the Police Journal was introduced to cable subscribers to acquaint them with the police department and its function, as well as to educate the public on available services and programs. The Police Journal has offered short segments on relevant crime prevention topics, such as vacation tips, National Night Out and Halloween safety.

THE CRIME prevention section also has produced a Neighborhood Watch training video to train residents who cannot attend a citywide or neighborhood training meetings.

To keep neighborhood participants better informed, a bi-monthly newsletter is now being written which contains pertinent crime prevention information along with citywide statistics. Periodic contributions are also being made to local publications to keep residents informed of current crime prevention issues.

The end result of the crime prevention efforts has been the creation of a positive and efficient communication network between the residents of Farmington Hills and their police department, according to police officials.

When crime statistics are analyzed, especially in the category of residential break-ins, the numbers speak for themselves to show the effectiveness of the crime prevention section's efforts. In other areas, where quantitative analysis is difficult, the crime prevention section has demonstrated imagination and enthusiasm in delivering programs to the public, officials added.



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