

Hopefuls share fiscal concerns

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Candidates running for the Farmington Hills City Council were more conspicuous in their agreement on issues than differences at a forum sponsored by the League of Women Voters Oct. 6.

Incumbents Jon Grant, Larry Lichtman, Ben Marks and Aldo Vagnozzi and challengers Vincent Lorelli and Cheryl Oliverio all pronounced themselves fiscally prudent and responsive to the needs of the community.

Gretchen Pubsley of Novi moderated the forum, which featured questions from the audience at the Farmington Hills City Council chambers and call-in questions from the cable TV viewing audience. Answers were kept to one minute.

One notable disagreement came when challenger Vincent Lorelli, an attorney and restaurateur, said the city should be especially frugal because it may have to use tax money to support the school system, especially in light of a controversial new state law that will cut property taxes earmarked for schools.

Vagnozzi, himself a former Farmington school board member, said the city does not have taxing authority for the schools and cannot give them tax dollars.

All said that if there were public support for an ice arena/multi-purpose facility, they would be in favor of it as long as it would not mean added taxes at the outset.

"At this time, we're trying to lure a private investor," said Lichtman, chairman of a committee studying a possible ice arena for Farmington Hills. "The city would not subsidize it."

"Under no circumstances should the city subsidize an ice arena," said Lorelli, adding that a Fraser city ice rink had been taken over by a private concern and had made profitable.

Marks and Oliverio agreed that if such a venture did not look as though it would be profitable, it should not be undertaken.

Vagnozzi said the city erred in not asking about the arena's financing in a questionnaire sent to residents to determine whether it had support.

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Grant said it should be run only with private money unless voters decided to endorse a dedicated tax in the future.

On other issues:

■ In response to the question of how the city can keep up good services without raising taxes, Ben Marks said public officials would have to push their local agenda to officials in Lansing and Washington.

"Local elected officials will have to get more involved (in the legislative process)," Marks said. ■ In response to the question of how she could claim on her campaign signs that she was "uniquely qualified" for office, Cheryl Oliverio said as a stay-at-home mother who campaigned door-to-door, she was in tune with resident needs. Oliverio said she has already served as a mediator between the city and residents since beginning her walking campaign in July.

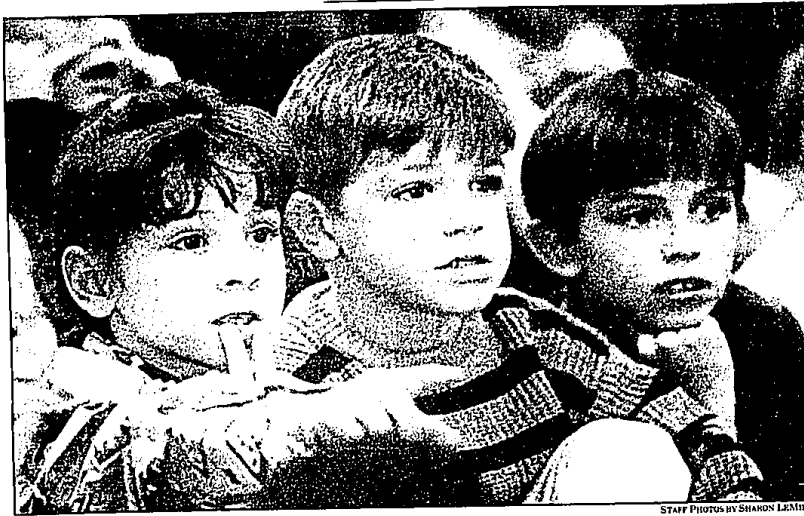
■ In response to the question of why council members were not better informed on the issues they took up at council meetings, several answered that they were informed, but that often more information or action by the city staff was needed before a good decision could be rendered.

"I receive my packet by late Friday (for Monday's meeting)," Vagnozzi said. "I wish we could get that information sooner. But I probably ask more questions than any other council member." ■ In response to the question of how the city could maintain high services and keep taxes down, Lichtman said Farmington Hills already has one of the lowest tax rates in Oakland County and the "strategic budget planning" would be the key to taking advantage of having debt retirement bonds paid off in the next three or four years.

■ Lorelli said going to more privatization for services, such as snow plowing, could lower costs to the city.

"The private sector has been shown to be able to do just about anything better and cheaper than government can do it," he said.

Fire safety frolic



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEMLEUX

Magical show: Farmington Hills firefighters Don St. Clair and Lt. Mike Garr treated students at St. Paul Lutheran School to a performance of magic and other stunts Sept. 29. Students Jessica Castro (left), Phillip Mabey and Brandon Trimble were rather enthralled with the show that is designed to promote fire safety. Fire prevention week concluded Oct. 9.



Romney says volunteering nets personal satisfaction

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Former Michigan Gov. George Romney gave an impassioned speech for volunteerism that reflected his lifetime of public service and no-nonsense know-how.

"In my worst nightmare, I follow a speaker like George Romney," said Farmington Hills Library director Bev Pappi after Romney's inspiring speech to an audience of about 250 at the Mercy Center Oct. 5.

Romney, who has been a flesh and blood testimonial to volunteerism since World War II, made the case for volunteerism as the only real remedy to the country's ills and one of the best roads to personal satisfaction.

"Our country is great primarily because of what people did for themselves," he said, adding that government solutions to problems have fallen short.

Romney, honorary chairman of the Michigan Campaign for Volunteerism, said the country's economic success has in many ways sown the seeds of social ills such as crime and drug problems that are the worst the country has seen since the Civil War.

■ Representatives of 25 local organizations were on hand with booths to explain their missions and recruit volunteers. The event was part of a statewide volunteer initiative to match volunteers with the appropriate volunteer agency.

He was speaking to the converted. Representatives of 25 local organizations were on hand with booths to explain their missions and recruit volunteers. The event was part of a statewide volunteer initiative to match volunteers with the appropriate volunteer agency.

Romney praised Hills Mayor Nancy Bates for her leadership in the quest for volunteer solutions to problems.

"I don't know of another suburban mayor who is doing what she's doing," he said.

Romney, 85, cited Mothers Against Drunk Driving as an example of how effective volunteer agencies can be.

"MADD has done more to reduce drunken driving than anything in my lifetime," he said.

On the benefit side, volunteers

tend to give more money as well as their time to volunteer organizations. And, according to a University of Michigan study, they live longer, he said.

Romney said the disintegration of the family, the increase of divorce and drug use were needs individuals have to meet.

"Money by itself cannot do a blessed thing," he said.

But the former governor added that in volunteer hands, money can be used wisely.

He said the volunteer initiative is important not only in recruiting volunteers, but helping them find "meaningful" volunteer tasks is important in keeping them.

Bates said the materials most often stolen from the library involved AIDS, incest and suicide.

"That's scary," she said. "I think that's a wakeup call."

Many groups depend on volunteers

Organizations of all kinds that depend on volunteers were represented at the volunteer initiative at the Mercy Center Oct. 5. Among them were:

■ Farmington/Farmington Hills Neighborhood House — a clearinghouse matching those in need with those who can help. 477-7880.

■ The Healing Word Ministries of Farmington Hills. 553-9167.

■ Council of Homeowner Associations of Farmington Hills. 661-0993.

■ Windemere of West Bloomfield. A skilled care residence. 661-1700.

■ St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher

Center of Farmington Hills. 626-7527.

■ Team Farmington of Farmington and Farmington Hills. Affiliated with Special Olympics. 855-0532.

■ Clinton Valley Council of the Boy Scouts of America. 338-0035.

■ The Service Learning Program of Oakland Community College Orchard Ridge campus. 471-6392.

■ The Community Center of Farmington/Farmington Hills. 477-8404.

■ Deaf and Hearing Impaired Services Inc., of Farmington Hills.

■ Botsford Continuing Health

Care Center. 477-7400.

■ The Farmington Community Library. 553-0300.

■ Mothers Against Drunk Driving of Oakland County. 263-1700.

■ City of Farmington Hills department of special services. 473-9576.

■ Farmington Youth Assistance. 476-3840.

■ Farmington Area Community Women. 661-4765.

■ American Association of Retired Persons. 948-1640.

■ Farmington Hills Fire Department. 553-0740.

■ Handicap parking program — Farmington Hills Police Department. 473-9682.

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