



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMIEUX

Telling it true: Author Jon Scieszka reads part of his book "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs" to Eagle Elementary School.

A howling good time: Eagle Elementary students Derrell Slaughter (left), Christian Flickinger (mouth open) and Daniel Nagelbach (right) react to author Jon Scieszka.

Kids say write on

Children's author gives classic fairy tales a twist

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Thanks in part to an odorous man of hardened dairy extract, Jon Scieszka has smelled sweet success as a children's author.

Scieszka explained the arduous road of a children's author, with its potholes of rejection, to an attentive group of kindergartners, first- and second-graders at Eagle Elementary School Nov. 1. The award-winning writer was visiting as part of Farmington Public Schools'

"Authors in Autumn" program. Scieszka spoke to children at several elementary and middle schools during the week.

With the same dry wit that inspired warped characters like the really ugly duckling and the aforementioned Stinky Cheese Man, he regaled his audience with the travails of a writer. Kids ate it up.

"When I took my first book to the publishers, guess what they said?" asked Scieszka, waiting for the kids to respond. They said, "We don't like it. It's too weird. Kids won't get it."

Scieszka knew better. As a former school teacher, he knew children were sharper than publishers gave them credit for being. After a few more rejections, he came into contact with illustrator Lane Smith.

Smith drew up the characters for "The True Story of the Three Little Pigs," a tell-all book from the wolf's point of view. They struck pure dirt with Viking.

"That was 1989. The Flint native has reeled off several children's books since: "The Frog Prince," chronicling the after-

math of the union between Sleeping Beauty and her almy beau; "Knights of the Kitchen Table"; "The Not-So-Jolly Roger"; "The Good, the Bad and the Goofy"; and "The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Stupid Fairy Tales."

The Stinky Cheese Man is sort of a wacky, Wisconsin-inspired takeoff on the gingerbread man.

"I had read the Gingerbread Man to my daughter about 3,000 times," said Scieszka, who is married and has two children. "I was wondering when they would

run out of gingerbread men so I could go to sleep."

The send-up of classic fairy tales is a good example of how Scieszka works. Such fun-loving appendices to and reconstructions of traditional stories prompt discussion among teachers and students alike.

But how is he able to take liberty with the classics?

"Mostly the stuff is part of the real tradition," Scieszka said. "Most of the tales don't even have authors."

The "Authors in Autumn" program is designed to motivate

kids to read. Each PTA contributes money to bring in writers and illustrators. The program produces immediate results.

"Following an author's visit, I'll see his books go out and go out," said Eagle media specialist Carole Kersten.

"There's always an interest in writing, also. For those interested in writing, this can have a big impact on them."

Artist/illustrator Demi is scheduled to speak at elementary schools, including Hillel Day School, Nov. 15-19.

Hearing on DDA assessment set

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A public hearing is set for 8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 15, on the Farmington Downtown Development Authority's proposed special assessment. But will the public attend?

The DDA is asking for an initial 9.5 mill special assessment on commercial property owners downtown. That's roughly \$9.50 of tax per \$1,000 of state equalized valuation of property.

The 9.5 mills is touted by officials as a preferable tradeoff to the 33 mills that were being levied by the schools. Property taxes for schools have been eliminated with Senate Bill 1.

Aside from a few grumblings, though, the contingency plan has not generated much outcry from downtown business and property owners.

Few questions were asked during a sparsely attended informational meeting Oct. 13. That indifference has some council members concerned.

"I wish each and everyone would come forward and talk to us about it," said DDA director Judy Downey to the Farmington City Council during a Nov. 1

meeting. "Sometimes people don't come forward. We wish they would."

Downey said she's contacted commercial property owners by phone and by letter about the plan.

The assessment will generate \$650,000 over five years, which will defray anticipated losses in tax increment finance revenue because of Senate Bill 1. The money will be used for administration, marketing, promotion and maintenance of the downtown area.

The assessment would be rolled back accordingly if any portion of the TIF base is restored.

As it stands, the DDA will lose \$130,000 next year in TIF revenues. TIF allows the DDA to capture money from increases in property value.

In its amended development plan this year, the DDA reduced its reliance on TIF by half. However, the loss of 33 mills in school taxes is substantial, officials say.

The DDA still captures TIF money from city and council taxes. The authority also receives money from a 2-mill ad valorem tax that pays for new construction and replacement of capital items.

"I don't know how the rest of

the council feels about it, I feel the council should get involved in promoting and getting the word to the business representatives," Councilman Richard Tupper said.

... and laying out the responsibility to these folks and saying, 'Gee we just have got to have your interest in this thing in order for us to keep pumping money into it.'"

Councilwoman Jo Anne McShane said she's talked to some downtown business owners. She said they have concerns about how the assessment would be reduced if new money became available. And, how the DDA's ongoing promotional work benefits them.

"So I say it would be good idea to put out a fact sheet, spelling out what these promotional programs' concerns might be so there is a little more clear understanding," McShane said to Downey at the Nov. 1 meeting.

The DDA is seeking the special assessment through Public Act 120, which allows cities to establish principal shopping districts for the purpose of redevelopment and development.

Move booked for library for blind

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills' loss in northern Oakland County's gain.

Although the county's finance committee agreed to a minor staff addition for the Library for the Blind and Handicapped, there is no other change in plans to relocate it from Farmington Hills to the county building on Telegraph in Pontiac.

"It's always been our intention to consolidate operations, even long before we had a budget deficit," said Phyllis Jose, director of Oakland County Libraries.

The move, she said, would not only consolidate the county's libraries, but cut staffing overall and save the county much-needed money. The county is looking at an anticipated \$21 million deficit this year.

The Library for the Blind and Handicapped is now in the Farmington Community Library's main branch on 12 Mile Road, where it will stay until an annex to the county building in Pontiac is completed next fall.

Not only were some of the staff positions cut, but the county's personnel committee voted to deny county seniority to staff of the specialized library. That meant that some staffers, who are Farmington Community Library employees working in the Library for the Blind and Handicapped, would lose years of seniority even if they were willing to work in the new location.

The county's finance committee did, however, add two student positions that had originally been cut, said Bev Pappi, director of

the Farmington Community Library.

That will mean the library for the disabled will have a head librarian, who will also be in charge of the county's government library, a library technician 1, a library technician 2 and four student librarians.

Worse yet, because of the move and the seniority policy, the Library for the Blind and Handicapped will lose out on some of its more experienced staffers, including Carole Hund, who until recently directed the specialized library.

She would have lost 12 years of seniority had she not chosen to stay in the Farmington library system, where she has 22 years of seniority.

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