

# Farmington Observer OPINION

21898 FARMINGTON RD., FARMINGTON, MI 48336

THURSDAY, APRIL 7, 1994

16A(F)

## Getting the business

### DDA needs new priorities

**H**ey, readers, thanks a lot! We asked . . . and you certainly answered. We were just overwhelmed with your response to our informal telephone survey on the Masonic Temple sign that we offered in the March 31 Farmington Observer.

We expected a few phone calls on the controversial green sign that announces the Masonic Temple at Farmington Road and Grand River in downtown Farmington. What we got was a veritable Niagara of opinion — at least 40 calls in about 30 hours.

Your comments filled three quarters of a newspaper page (it was page 5A in case you missed it) in the Monday, April 4, Observer.

And, my, didn't you trash that sign with its butterfly, grasshopper and frog in a marshy setting. Of the 40 calls, only two were pro-sign. The others asked how the Downtown Development Authority and the city could have allowed such an ugly thing to be erected within the confines of beautiful downtown Farmington.

Well, this sign flap started us thinking about the Farmington DDA and its role in the community. We guess we share readers' concerns about the sign and downtown Farmington in general.

We don't wish to belittle the DDA or its current director, Judy Downey. Since its inception about seven years ago, the DDA has done some excellent work in remaking downtown Farmington.

However, we do feel that the DDA needs some new priorities now. It's time to stop attempting to fix what isn't broken (the Masonic Temple corner) and start trying to repair what is (downtown's economic climate).

Enough with the fancy signs, the 100-pound pumpkins and the go-cart races. Let's have

some going businesses in the vacant storefronts. They stick out like sore thumbs . . . those vacant storefronts on one of Farmington's main streets.

In case anyone hasn't noticed, Cargo Express has left its huge quarters on Farmington Road in a hurry and a huff, and Ray Interiors just down the street also has expired, or will as soon as its liquidation sale is over.

There are other vacancies, both in the strip malls (an unfortunate fact of life in downtown Farmington) and on the main drags. It is this problem — vacancies — that the DDA needs to work on now.

The DDA, the city, the Chamber of Commerce and, yes, even the Realtors and landlords must work together to get as much business as possible downtown.

Most people understand that the economic salvation of a small, suburban downtown like Farmington lies with the small business people, the so-called entrepreneurs.

Let's have a concerted effort to make it as easy and pleasant as possible for such people to be in business in downtown Farmington. Please, don't make them jump through hoops with nagging sign ordinances, unrealistic rents and other restrictions.

City planners tell us that downtowns are becoming increasingly popular places to shop, visit and live. After years of, ah, mall-sie, the old-fashioned downtowns are making a comeback.

People — especially those who live in subdivision cities like Farmington Hills and Livonia — are looking for a point of identity and a sense of community that are so often associated with a city center.

That point is downtown Farmington for tens of thousands in this area. But for how long will that continue without the economic vitality?

## Parks need untouchable fund

**M**ichigan has a chance to rescue one of its greatest treasures — its parks system — from a future of continual neglect that might never be reversed.

The 75-year-old parks system, which has provided recreation opportunities to millions of residents and tourists, has been the victim of declining money. That has translated into higher fees but fewer park workers and less money to maintain the grounds.

Legislators have been working on a ballot proposal to change the state constitution that would create an endowment fund for the parks and prevent diversion of money from the Natural Resources Trust Fund for other uses.

The trust, started in 1982, is funded by revenue from oil and gas found on state land. But that money in the past has been raided for other projects, including balancing the state budget.

The constitutional amendment would end that practice, creating an endowment fund of \$20 million a year specifically for the 100-park system. In a few years interest from the fund could be used to improve parks, better staff them and buy other land to further enhance and protect the existing parks.

The fund would ease the budget burden while adequately providing money for a resource that can't be replaced once it is lost.

State appropriations for the parks shrank from 70 percent to 30 percent of the system's budget, and user fees made up some of the difference. But the parks have had to run on ever leaner budgets at the same time many parks are overused or in disrepair.

Private interests wouldn't be expected to hire

wildlife biologists, naturalists and the other professionals needed to maintain a top flight park system. It is the state's responsibility to protect this resource, especially because tourism is our second biggest industry.

Some critics in the Legislature have said their constituents don't use the parks and derive little benefit. But whether you use them or not, they attract tourism, which brings a lot of money to the state, and the parks ensure that generations to come will be able to enjoy the outdoors.

The constitutional amendment would simply use money from natural resources taken from state land to protect and preserve that very land. It is not an added tax. Interest from the fund would eventually provide operating money for the parks system.

The endowment fund has support from the Michigan United Conservation Club and many recreation professionals statewide.

Local units of government can provide many recreational activities, but for the most part, they do not have the means to provide the kind of recreation the state parks provide can.

Although Wayne and Oakland County communities provide active recreation parks, residents have to rely on metro parks and nearby state parks that are heavily used and understaffed if they want to go to beaches, wooded trails or winter recreation areas.

The endowment fund would relieve that pressure on parks and protect the future of this great resource from the whims of state legislators looking for money for other projects.

ARKIE HUDKINS



RACE FOR THE CURE APR. 9th



THE MS WALK APR. 10th



WORKOUT FOR HOPE APR. 16th  
(AIDS RESEARCH)

## LETTERS

### It's not a good road

**H**ello, my name is Abbey Cullen. I'm 12 years old and love to go to the Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi.

When we drive there, we take Halsted to 12 Mile Road. Twelve Mile is under construction. This has become very hazardous for drivers. My friend and I almost got into an accident at one of the tight bends. That also happened with my parents.

I know that this road is connected to the new freeway that is being built. On 12 Mile, where it is under construction, there are a lot of potholes as big as a car tire. So if anyone happens to be driving at night, they may not see the hole and drive right into it, and damage the car.

I don't want to be an enviro-freak, but a lot of trees were taken out on this road. Trees used to be there and also numerous homes. Many of those houses are being sold or are already destroyed.

I think we're doing the right thing about building a new and bigger road, but people are losing their homes and so are the animals. With potholes, people will get into accidents. People might lose their lives.

This road will hopefully be better than it is right now.

Abbey Cullen, Farmington Hills

### State sets example

**F**or more than 20 years, Michigan leaders have made education reform and cutting property taxes the first two items on their priority lists.

Looking back to the early 1970s, we find former Gov. Bill Milliken in his first State of the State address citing education reform as the Legislature's top priority.

In that same address, he called upon the Legislature to examine the heavy property tax burden, saying: "The tax burden on the individual now approaches the limits of tolerance." Even with all of this attention, these issues had always evaded a real solution.

In 1993, the state Legislature rose to the occasion and voted to wipe out property taxes as a way of funding schools. Six months and many meetings later, on the eve of Christmas, we hammered out a deal that offered Michigan citizens two different options: a ballot and a back-up plan. Both fully funded schools and cut property taxes, but only one was wholly good for the state and its residents.

Recently, Michigan voters made a most historical decision by overwhelmingly voting "yes" on Proposal A. By doing so, they have reaffirmed a commitment to schoolchildren, taxpayers and job providers. Proposal A was the best choice for this state; really, the only choice.

As a father of four children who attend public schools, I believe the proposal's constitutionally guaranteed funding level for public schoolchildren is a key component of the plan. So is the fact that our schools will be equitably and fully funded in the coming years.

As a taxpayer and a homeowner, I am looking forward to significantly lower property taxes, with my assessments capped each year at 5 percent or inflation, whichever is lower.

As a farmer and a businessman, I am confi-

dent the lower income tax and better overall balance of taxation will keep our economic recovery rolling and encourage job growth — which is good for everyone.

But let me say this: Proposal A's passage does not mean lawmakers can sit back and relax. Though we have climbed a better part of the mountain, we still have a distance to hike to bring Michigan to the top of the nation — and the world.

We must now focus our attention on issues of school quality, welfare reform, anti-crime legislation and limited government growth.

We did accomplish some noteworthy education reforms throughout this process, including the passage of charter school legislation. But because we concentrated heavily on fully funding schools, we put some quality issues on hold. Now is our time to finish the job.

Another top priority is further welfare reform. We have made terrific strides in this area in the past three years, though there is more we can do to help those dependent on the state to become self-reliant. As many state and national leaders have noted, welfare was designed as a temporary safety net, but has unfortunately evolved into a hammock because of a lack of incentives. We will concentrate on broadening education and job training programs.

Michigan lawmakers also hear and share people's concern with increasing violent crime, and we plan to do all we can to make our streets safer. On the front burner are truth-in-sentencing and sentencing-guidelines proposals which will ensure convicted offenders serve the sentence they earn and deserve. We have also continually supported legislation increasing the rights of crime victims, enhancing their notification, protection and restitution of rights.

And because I have seen the rewards, I will continue to fight for tax cuts and fairer taxation. In the past three years, we have cut taxes six times and consistently limited government growth. As a result, our unemployment rate has fallen below the national average for the first time in 25 years and more people are working in this state than ever before. Plus, our state will enjoy a \$316 million surplus this year. In contrast to the \$1.8 billion deficit we inherited in 1990.

Michigan has set a positive example for the rest of the country in more ways than one. If we continue on our current path, I am confident we will continue to serve as a national role model.

Sen. Dick Posthumus,  
senate majority leader

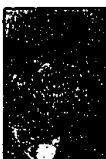
## COMMUNITY VOICE

**QUESTION:**  
How will the  
Tigers do this  
season?

We asked this  
question at the  
A&W restaur-  
ant, Touch of  
Spring cleaners  
and Beau's  
Blooms florist in  
the Farmington  
Crossroads  
shopping plaza.



"Right in the mid-  
dle. It's a good  
team, but the  
pitching is weak."  
Verla Stille  
Farmington



"Let's hope for  
the best. Pitch-  
ing seems a little  
better. Offense is  
good, too."  
Tom Hennes  
Farmington



"It's just a hunch,  
but they're gon-  
na lose."  
Andrea Ford  
Farmington Hills



"Not very well.  
There's a real  
lack of pitching."  
Ken Fox  
Farmington

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