



**Feed man: Ron Brown, a Joe's Feed Store employee, carries feed to a customer's car.**

## Joe's

from page 1A

provide chow for horses and other farm animals. Now it sells victuals for such yuppie pets as llamas and pot-bellied pigs.

After 40 years, they don't simply announce they're closing shop and not expect anyone to notice.

"Make her feel rotten and miserable," said Gail Williams of Southfield, a customer of more than 25 years.

Williams and Wickens draw back their fists across the counter in mock hostility. They call each other a few names, and laugh.

Williams comes to Joe's Feed to get some feed for her goat and chickens and buff lace polish.

"This is like my second family here," Williams said. "Last month, she showed me the pink piece of paper . . . When I heard they were closing, I went to pieces."

Joe Wickens moved his feed store into the Nine Mile Road building from Beech Daly Road in Redford Township.

The son of a feed store owner in Plymouth, Joe Wickens ventured out on his own.

"He definitely started out on his own," Mari-jo said. "He didn't get any help from his father. That's a nice way of putting it."

Joe Wickens developed a knack for making dog food. He'd get cornflakes from Kellogg's and oil from Velvet Peanut Butter to

make the kennel cuisine.

Ingredients became more difficult to get and substitutes weren't up to standard. So he discontinued the dog food line.

Wickens also developed a method for mixing birdseed. His process included cleaning away particles.

The hopper and seed cleaner still hum in the back room.

"The birdseed went whoosh," Mari-jo said. "The birdseed was really popular."

Wickens ran the business with

his wife, Mary, until he died 10 years ago after a heart attack. His cnp still hangs in a corner of the store.

Last month, Mary decided it was time to retire. The family had a party, inviting many longtime customers, many of whom are second-generation visitors.

Talk has it that Mary Wickens might sell the business to someone else, who would keep it open. Two customers are interested, Mari-jo said.

"It's her baby," Mari-jo said.

**■ 'This is like my second family here. Last month, she showed me the pink piece of paper . . . When I heard they were closing, I went to pieces.'**

customer Gail Williams

"We're not going to give it to just anybody."

Mary Wickens might keep the place open a few weeks after June 1 to sell leftover stock, Mari-jo added.

Mari-jo tries to explain that to several people who come in. The news doesn't register easily.

They want to know where they're going to get their kitty litter, or in Farmington Hills resident Ginny Ashe's case, reject peanuts for chipmunks and squirrels.

Amid the squeaky dog toys, bird feeders, and cans of flea and tick spray, Mari-jo also wonders what she's going to do.

"I've worked all my life," she said. "I don't know how it's going to feel not getting a regular paycheck."



**Special blend: Doug Juntunen of Livonia picks out one of the blends of bird seed that Joe Wickens developed years ago. With him is Barbara Bodden of Farmington.**

## Farmington mulls .24-mill tax hike for same services

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

For about the price of a haircut, Farmington residents will not have any of their city services trimmed.

The city administration has proposed a .24 mill tax increase to partially offset a 1.16 percent rise in spending as part of its 1994-95 budget. For someone who owns a \$100,000 home, that means an additional \$12 a year in city taxes.

More money is needed to continue to pay for the same level of services, city manager Frank Lauhoff said.

"Council is committed to not reducing city services," Lauhoff said. "I think the majority of people in Farmington are happy with their city services."

Residents can express their glee at a public hearing on the budget and subsequent tax increase 8 p.m. Monday, June 6, in Farmington City Council Chambers.

The .24-mill increase puts the city tax rate at 13.91 mills, which includes 3.62 mills in debt services. A mill is \$1 for every \$1,000 of state equalized valuation of property.

With the slight increase, Farmington still ranks below the Oakland County average of 14.97 mills.

Property taxes as well as other expected revenue amounts to \$5,092,839, which is still \$81,676 short to pay the bills.



Frank Lauhoff

The city plans to dip into its fund balance to cover the rest.

That will leave the fund balance at \$694,517, which is used to offset unexpected costs.

The approach of small tax increases and fund balance encroachment might appear to be the most prudent strategy in the wake of Proposal A passing.

The proposal is a serious reality to cities. Future SEV rates will be held to 5 percent or the rate of inflation. That will put a crimp on revenues since the city derives more than half of its income from property taxes.

Farmington is expecting a SEV growth of only .07 percent this year. Last year, the SEV growth was 4.25 percent.

As a result, the calculator will be humming in the city

manager's office in future budget years.

Lauhoff said much of the city finances depend on the economy. Services can be maintained if the revenues meet the rate of inflation, he said.

"We just don't know what's going to happen," Lauhoff said. "We've had 150 years of the same system of local finance, and it was wiped out in six months. We'll have to wait and see if they built a new system without any bugs."

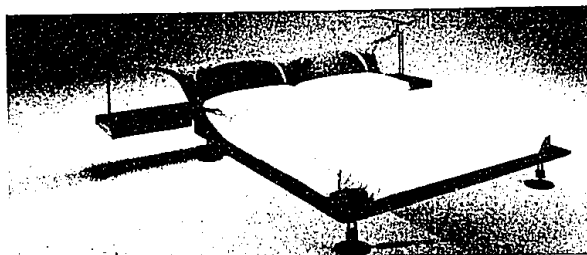
The only guarantee is the bill will keep coming. Salaries and benefit account for the biggest chunk - \$2.9 million - of expenditures in the \$6 million budget.

That number could change. The city and police officers union have not settled on a contract. Both sides are preparing for arbitration.

In terms of where the \$6 million will go, the city intends to spend \$1.6 million for public safety, another \$1.1 million for general government, including \$267,000 to operate District Court, and \$1 million for public works.

Miscellaneous costs include health care, \$226,000; social security, \$161,000; and retirement, \$195,000.

The city also plans to spend \$236,000 for the library, \$79,000 for community development and \$24,000 for the historical museum.



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## Volunteers go down to river June 4

Get out the rubber boots, the work gloves and the determination to save a stream. Rouge Rescue '94 is coming up.

The Farmington Hills portion of Rouge Rescue '94 will be 8-11:30 a.m. Saturday, June 4, at the corner of Belfast and Westminister in the southeast-

ern section of the city.

The location is west of Middlebelt Road and north of Eight Mile. A tributary of the Rouge flows through the area.

The volunteers will help remove debris and logjams that have accumulated over the past few years.

City crews will be on hand with their machinery to handle the heavy work.

As in past years, lunch will be provided by the city.

For more information, call Jean Barrett of the city's Department of Public Services at 473-9520.