

Farmington Observer

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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

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IN THE PAPER

TODAY

Still looking: Police are still looking for an arsonist who destroyed a Farmington Hills house, but they're not getting a lot of help. /2A

He has spoken: A Farmington District Court judge has ruled that part of Michigan's stalking law is unconstitutional. /2A

Preacher power: If there is any group in the Farmington area that has learned about racial and cultural diversity in recent years, it is the clergy. /3A

SMART questions: The Farmington City Council will hear from SMART officials and Oakland County commissioners about a plan to save the bus system. /3A

Garage fire: Their garage is a gutted goner and two expensive cars are history, but a Farmington Hills couple is counting blessings these days. /4A

TASTE

Healthful foods: Find out what "Dr. Mom," pediatrician Susan Bellefleur, feeds her family. /1B

Focus on wine: Kenwood Vineyards in California's Sonoma Valley produces exceptional wines. /1B

MALLS & MAINSTREETS

Behind The Label: Meet the entrepreneur behind the epicurean delight Alaskan Silk Pies. /4B

Green Retailing: Celebrate Earth Day by discovering the recycled and eco-friendly products at the mall. /4B

SPORTS

Too time: The Mercy golf team hopes to defend its Catholic League title and qualify again for the state tournament. /1C

Goal scorer: Ali Lord is on track to break her North Farmington scoring record in girls soccer. /1C

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Parents field tough sex questions



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Parents, not teachers, will have to answer children's questions about sex outside of heterosexual, reproductive intercourse.

The change is one of a few revisions made to the Farmington Public Schools' Family Life curriculum, which includes sex education for

fourth- and fifth-graders.

Abstinence has been part of the program, but is now specified in the document. Also, parents who want to sit in on the sex education portion may do so.

The district — in accordance with state law — conducted three public hearings to discuss the changes. An

estimated 100 people attended the sessions.

"When you deal with a topic like this, you get a cross-section of viewpoints," said Don Cowan, executive director of K-12 Instruction and Student Services.

"I think we've answered their concerns. We don't anticipate any problems."

Revisions were prompted after an incident last year at an elementary school where a student asked a teacher in a written question to define a "blow job."

The teacher provided a curriculum-

approved definition. Parents complained.

In the future, questions regarding such sexual acts or practices will be referred to the child's parents.

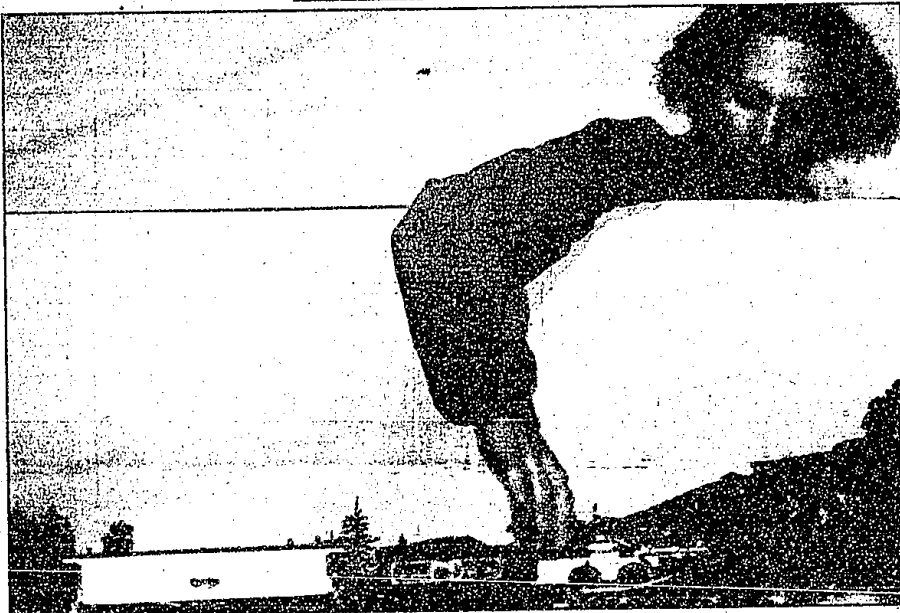
"All those things kids are exposed to, we felt we needed to look at and evaluate appropriate answers to questions that were occurring at the fourth- and fifth-grade level," Cowan said.

The Family Life curriculum has existed since 1972.

A committee of administrators,

See CURRICULUM, 6A

Parts of train town are offered



STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LAMBERT

Basement line: Plastic landscape from a model railroad setup will be donated by Jeremy Spoon (above) and his father, Jeffrey. Jeffrey Spoon created several cities (below) surrounded by mountains that span his basement. Their basement rail line is set for abandonment.

'Railroad town' nears end of line

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

He wants to make sure his train was not in vain.

So Jeffrey Spoon is offering one last glance at — and a piece of — his cherished model railroad in the basement of his soon-to-be-sold Farmington Hills home.

"He started the train in 1977, setting up a track on a table. . . . His comment from my son and daughter was, 'Is that all it does, go around in a circle? That's boring,'" said Spoon, whose children's initial indifference perhaps made the biggest difference.

Spoon spent the next nine years creating a hobbyist's ideal train town.

Included on one 60-foot table is a seven-foot mountain, a lake, two freight yards and buildings so detailed there are drapes in the windows. A 1/87-scale Lionel train snakes through the setting.

On another table, a smaller, HO-scale train takes the track through an ornate valley scene that includes roads, apple trees, and a schoolyard. Light poles are even wired.

Such attention to railroading detail is not uncommon, said Glen Chapman at Joe's Hobby Center in Farmington.

"There are trains in a bridge and they put the same amounts of rivets in a model bridge," Chapman said. "Some of these guys are real perfectionists."

Most model train hobbyists range from 50 to 80 in age. The "sexual hobbyist" is looking for something to do at Christmas time, Chapman said. The serious one is making sure some of the numbers on his HO-scale cars are the same.

Spoon's father had a train set in the family's basement in Detroit. The model railroad prompted him

See TRAIN, 6A



Council wary of mayor's power to appoint

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Although Farmington Hills has yet to directly elect a mayor, there are some reservations about the potential power of that office.

Farmington Hills City Council members discussed the mayor's prerogative to appoint, with council approval, members of the city's many boards and commissions. Next year will mark the first two-year term for a mayor, elected directly by voters.

Mayor Joanne Smith can claim the distinction of being the last mayor elected to a one-year term by her fellow council members.

"Some appointments in the past did not necessarily reflect a majority (of the council) view," said Councilman Terry Sever. "It was a concession to the mayor. But there is a danger with the mayor having a two-year term, and (possibly) two terms in other communities."

As City Attorney John Donohue pointed out, appointments to commissions by the mayor would be approved by City Council members.

Councilman Aldo Vagnoni, who like Sever voted to put the directly elected mayor issue on the ballot, said he did not understand why the process would change because of the different position. The

mayor's appointment can be voted down.

"We haven't even tried it under the new mayor and we're trying to change it?" Vagnoni said.

Vagnoni said with from 40-50 appointments a year to various commissions and boards, reviewing each candidate extensively would be very time-consuming. He said in the past, when an appointment was controversial or there was a question, council members and the mayor had been able to work it out.

Resident Al Rosen said circumventing the mayor's prerogative to appoint would deny the voters

See MAYOR, 8A