

Longacre House gains ground, adds programs

By BILL COUTANT

While Washington politicians argue about deficit reduction, one Farmington Hills institution seems to have done something about it.

The Longacre House, formerly known as the Community Center, on Farmington Road has found its new niche, and with it a way out of the red, said Longacre Executive Director Ben Marks.

Marks took over the operation of the troubled institution after the board of directors let go the former executive director. Marks gets \$1 a year, as opposed to the old salary of \$28,000.

But aggressive fund-raising, researching which programs, rentals and classes are in demand, and some improvements to the facility have lifted The Longacre House from \$22,600 in the red to about \$10,000 down, Marks said.

"By 1996 we hope to wipe the deficit out," the former Farmington Hills mayor said.

The Longacre House, housed in an historic structure dating to 1869, now incorporates an organization where each of six part-time staffers have specific duties, such as volunteer coordinator or program planner, Marks said. That has made running programs and keeping track of finances easier.

"Before everybody was doing everything," he said.

The Longacre House regularly offers dance, voice, piano, photography and other specialized classes to fulfill a need not met elsewhere, Marks said. In addition, weddings, wedding receptions and corporate retreats have been important to its success.

But to prosper, The Longacre House must be known for annual events, Marks said. Two of those proposed are an art show, which

would be a smaller version of the Ann Arbor Art Festival, and a six-week, day camp program similar to Interlochen, designed for musicians and artists.

"I think we could have about 2,000 people come through here on a Saturday and a Sunday," Marks said.

The building has already undergone improvements, and a new sidewalk was donated earlier this year. In addition, computers and other equipment have been donated, he said.

Marks said driveway and parking lot improvements should be made this summer to the community landmark.

"We've advertised our resale shop and improved sales by 32 percent," he said. "It's just a matter of making sure people know what we're doing."

For additional information about The Longacre House programs, call 477-8404.



Man in charge: "I think we should have about 2,000 people come through here on a Saturday or a Sunday," says Ben Marks.



Historic site: The Longacre House, formerly the Community Center, is located in a house that dates to 1869.

Parents feel squeeze of redistricting

By TIM SMITH

STAFF WRITER

Another wide-scale redistricting plan being implemented in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District is touted as a space-saving, time-buying savior by officials.

But parents still feel as if they're getting the squeeze.

According to the plan, recently OK'd by the school board, six of the rapidly growing district's 14 elementary schools will have new students from other attendance areas when classes begin in late August.

Four schools will dispatch students elsewhere — largely to fill the huge void created when 475 of Maple Elementary School's 650 students were shifted over to Meadow Lake Elementary School, the leased Birmingham school near 14 Mile-Inkster roads.

"It's a done deal," said Steven Gaynor, assistant superintendent, who headed up the redistricting effort. "People have been transferred."

Including people such as Sue Lefkowsky, a parent and former PTA president at Maple Elementary who, because of the transfer, now lives in the Meadow Lake attendance area.

"I'm still not happy about it and

I don't think I ever will," Lefkowsky said, adding that with children attending schools at opposite ends of the district, it would take her at least 45 minutes to pick up both in an emergency situation. "I think there are other ways they could have done this."

School board president David Flammer said the plan does more than fill the void at Maple. "It also relieves other schools from potential overcrowding as well and it puts us in a position to deal with the growth that's still happening."

Gaynor said the plan will ensure enough room for students for the 1995-96 school year. But for 1996-97 and beyond, with large subdivisions being built all over the district, the picture becomes more cloudy.

"We're going to have fewer art rooms, fewer music rooms," Gaynor said. "We'll be able to maintain kindergartens in their rooms for one more year."

"Right now we don't know if we'll have room for all the new kids in '96-97. The long-term solution is still the bond issue."

But we have to focus first on the

(November) millage renewal.

Components of the separate \$116 bond issues that failed last September and on Feb. 4 included the construction of two middle schools and one elementary school and additions to existing buildings. District enrollment is expected to jump from 11,600 in 1994-95 to 13,800 by the turn of the century.

Gaynor said the most-impacted attendance area was Maple Elementary, where only about 75 students from last year will remain. With roughly half of the former Maple attendance area lost to Meadow Lake (and most of its students), it was expanded to the west and north.

Meanwhile, enrollment at Maple will drop from 650 last year to about 415, including those moving over from other schools — mostly Pleasant Lake and Decker. Gaynor said it won't take long to make up the difference.

"At Maple, we created a lot of room for growth," Gaynor explained. "Both in terms of classrooms (being) available and classroom sizes."

Much of that enrollment

growth will be drawn from developing subdivisions such as Haverhill, Chelsea Park and Bloomfield Pines, he added. "Maple is going to fill up real soon."

Major components of the plan include:

■ Maple Elementary: 475 students have already been moved out to Meadow Lake; 332 will move in, from Pleasant Lake, Decker and Hickory Woods.

■ Pleasant Lake Elementary: 212 students to Maple; 76 in from Twin Beach.

■ Decker Elementary: 81 students to Maple; 57 students in.

■ Hickory Woods Elementary: 79 students in.

■ Twin Beach Elementary: 76 students to Pleasant Lake.

■ Walled Lake Elementary: 57 students out; 39 students in.

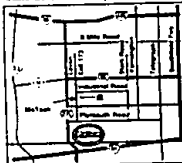
Gaynor said the plan "created room where we needed room," adding that attendance boundaries did not require an extensive reconfiguration.

"You don't have to redraw the attendance boundaries significantly to affect lots of kids," the administrator noted.

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Shifts mean changes for PTA volunteers

By TIM SMITH

STAFF WRITER

What about the PTAs in the wake of another redistricting in the Walled Lake Consolidated School District?

With students shifting from one elementary school to another, so too changes the allegiance of parents who volunteer much time and energy to the educational cause. It only makes sense to Alec Bender, principal at Twin Beach — which is losing 78 students, and some PTA members, to Pleasant Lake.

"Some of our loyal volunteers are disappointed their families will be moving to another school's attendance area," Bender said. "But that's logical."

Still, "we're going to really miss the people who were involved." Also logical is that, as new homes are built nearby, new volunteers (and students) will surface at Twin Beach. Bender said new blood could come from the Parkridge subdivision now being built.

Meanwhile, at least one PTA

veteran doesn't think the redistricting is going to cause problems in finding good, dedicated volunteers.

"I think parents who are involved stay involved," said former Maple Elementary PTA president Sue Lefkowsky, who, like virtually all of the 1994-95 Maple PTA, was moved over to the Meadow Lake attendance area because of the redistricting.

Although disappointed, Lefkowsky said she probably will be active on the Meadow Lake

PTA.

She added that her old school already is forming a new PTA, bringing in parents who were redistricted into the Maple attendance area.

But a Walled Lake Elementary PTA member, who did not wish to be identified, was dismayed about how the plan would shake up the membership of that school's volunteer group. "We lost a good majority of our good volunteers" to other schools, she said.

Restaurant puts consultant on menu, keeps cooking

By BILL COUTANT

STAFF WRITER

The Wing Hong restaurant on 14 Mile in Farmington Hills will stay open and will have a consultant to make changes in its operation that will ensure no future run-ins with the health department.

The Chinese restaurant and the Oakland County Health Department signed an Oakland Cir-

cuit Court approved consent agreement that will keep the popular restaurant up and running after several complaints to the health department.

The agreement, ordered by Judge Robert Templin, provides that the restaurant incorporate a training program with a consultant to avoid future violations. The restaurant could have

lost its license, without the agreement.

"The whole idea is to get them operating in a way that will avoid further problems," said Attorney Gordon Wylie, who is representing the health department. "A lot of the employees don't even speak English."

Employees did not understand American public health standards

and practices. As a result, the restaurant had been cited for having cockroaches and for other unsanitary conditions, Wylie said.

The agreement, effective June 21, requires closer scrutiny by the Oakland County and Michigan health departments and a review in six months to make sure the restaurant has adopted sanitary practices.