

## Season's spirit

## It shines in Farmington, too

There's good news, we think. People in the Detroit area seem to be spending a little more money this Christmas, they say. At least the season doesn't seem to be quite as bad as the Gloomy Gus media had predicted.

We've noticed that Twelve Oaks Mall is jammed with holiday shoppers these days and nights. The solid-state cash registers in the stores are beeping and chirping merrily away.

A lot of Farmington-area folks with serious shopping on their minds do flock to that sprawling monster of a mall in Novi, the next suburb west of Farmington.

Sure they go there. It's close with a nice selection of stores and, of course, there are acres of free parking.

With so many people doing so much of their shopping at the malls, we almost have to believe that Christmas would have to be cancelled if some environmentalist waved his magic wand and the malls suddenly reverted to corn fields, orchards and meadows.

But a stroll through the brittle broadsheets of the old Farmington Enterprise, the forerunner of the Observer, seems to prove that yes, Virginia, there was life — and Christmas, too — before the advent of shopping malls.

In days of old, people simply shopped their hometown business districts and apparently came away none the worse for the experience.

An Enterprise editorial from 44 years ago advised readers to "help yourself and your home town" by giving your local merchants first crack at your Christmas dollar.

"When Farmington's merchants prosper, the entire community prospers," the editorial said. "You not only help yourselves, but you help your friends and neighbors."

But the missive also spoke of "the responsibility of the merchants to encourage and promote greater interest in the Farmington shopping center. Cooperative effort must be

made to make the entire community attractive to hometown shoppers."

That was good advice then and now. And we're happy to note that Judy Downey and the Farmington Downtown Development Authority seem to be taking it.

Show up in downtown Farmington this Saturday, Dec. 2, and see what we mean.

There'll be a big shopping whoop-de-doo — called "Holiday Hunting" — beginning at 11 a.m. Saturday when Santa arrives by helicopter in the parking lot of the Downtown Center. Santa will be at home to youngsters with wish lists in a big tent in the parking lot.

Developed as a family, multi-cultural event, Holiday Hunting celebrates December holidays from around the world through performances, educational activities and a "treasure hunt" through downtown.

Children receive fun activity sheets and trinkets relating to holidays like Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Dawali and Boxing Day.

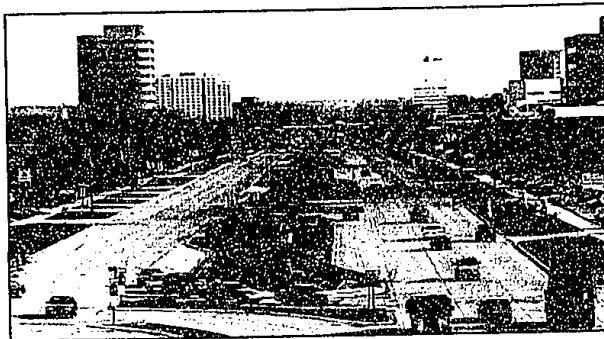
Adult shoppers can ride a free trolley from store to store in the business district (no, it's not a real trolley car, but you can't have everything) as well as the Farmington Historical Museum and the Community Library.

And one of the nicest touches: The venerable Civic Theatre — the closest thing to an anchor store in the old business district — will be showing a youth/Christmas movie for free that afternoon.

All things considered, there are lots of good reasons to be in downtown Farmington this Saturday and throughout the holiday shopping season.

No, the old shopping district isn't a monster mall with dozens of stores and acres of free parking. We're not suggesting that shoppers desert those malls. We're just asking them to remember that the spirit of Christmas shines in downtown Farmington, too.

## Big Beaver bound



Motorists from throughout Oakland County are hailing the opening of the widened Big Beaver in Troy, shot from the Somerset Skywalk with a boulevard looking eastward. Traffic is flowing better and business owners are delighted.

## LETTERS

## They're good folks

In this day and age, it is a rare thing when someone interrupts his or her daily schedule to help someone else. But that's exactly what is happening at Dunkin' Donuts on Grand River at Eight Mile Road.

Every Wednesday, Zuheir Dababneh and his employees kindly donate and box donuts to the Salvation Army. They receive no benefit from this other than knowing that they've given a treat to someone who's down and out, or brightened the day of the camp kids all summer long.

They are a group of dedicated, generous, compassionate people, and they deserve to be congratulated for their efforts. They provide all of us with a model of decency to emulate.

Sue Flanagan, Farmington Hills

## Reform needed

Columnist Tim Richard's episodic crusade against charter schools (Points of View, Oct. 12) provides an excellent example of the need for educational reform, especially in the areas of logic and critical thinking.

Charter schools may be a new concept, but as an alternative to an educational system that has failed to provide satisfactory education to so many children, they are really part of two centuries of tested and proven traditions of self-reliance, responsibility, and competition that built this great country.

It's about time that parents stand up for their children and seek alternatives when public schools not only can't do the job but show little interest in listening to parents about fixing the problem. When the academic growth of their children is sacrificed to the lowest common denominator, when their children are prescribed ritual instead of challenge, when the system is more concerned with social programs, political correctness, and employee benefits than academics, when educators promote teaching methods that have been proven failures and reject programs that are proven successes.

Too many parents have too long abdicated their parental responsibilities and turned their children over to the public schools to be raised. But when parents do attempt to become involved, their attempts are often ignored, stonewalled or worse. When the public schools no longer serve the needs of their children, parents who care should have options. They should not be dismissed as "authoritarian" and "fundamentalist" and somehow less than capable of representing their children's academic interests.

Richard stated his simplistic, narrow, and limited vision of education in this way: "The idea of public schools is to raise kids above the level of their parents." Wrong, Tim.

The schools have no business concerning

themselves with the level of any student's parents. The duty of the schools is to teach basic academic skills, to develop those skills and thus to equip students with the tools to raise themselves to whatever level they want.

To reject attempts to provide choices in education for our children whom the public schools fail to serve is to accept a status quo, which cannot be improved. It is to recede into the depths of know-nothing denial. Worse yet, it is to suggest that parents are some sort of reactionary boogies who cannot possibly serve their children's interests as well as the state.

Our children deserve better. They deserve a larger, more potent vision, not Richard's incessant myopia. Thank heaven we have parents who care and who are fighting for quality education with a passion and an understanding which he will never comprehend.

R. Thomas Hunter, Bloomfield Hills

## Don't knock PPI

As a parent of a 4-year-old in the proprietary intervention program, I was shocked to read the letter from Harvey Hoffenblum (Letters, Nov. 9) suggesting that hope is checked at the door.

I have spent 212 years involved in this program. My child has a speech problem only. He has an above average IQ. This program has done wonders for him. He is now speaking very well and will be able to exit this program at the end of this school year.

He may very well need speech therapy in kindergarten, but he has had a head start and will have no difficulty in communicating with his peers.

I doubt this program would accept a child that needs a little help or a child that is a little immature. There are guidelines that need to be followed by law for a child to qualify. Children that are a little behind should be able to attend kindergarten with a program that is developmentally appropriate for every child.

As a former educator and educational consultant, I have the background to observe and assess the PPI program. I have found that the program at Hickory Woods Elementary, with Debbie Kovancinaki, is built on the philosophy of developmentally appropriate activities for every child in the classroom.

I suggest Mr. Hoffenblum make an appointment to observe this program and see how well it operates. I have spent more time than most parents in the PPI classroom. No one is more critical than I when it comes to my children's educational experiences and I am more than pleased with this program.

Charise Fulton, Commerce Township

## Pioneers found home amid oaks

It was wilderness rich in virgin oaks as well as pine, elm, maple and beech trees. Three streams created a source for plenty of water power.

That was the setting when adventurer James Graham, the father of nine, arrived in present-day Rochester on March 17, 1817 — the first permanent non-Indian settlers in Oakland County.

The historic arrival comes to mind on the heels of Oakland County's 175th anniversary celebration Nov. 14, when the 80-year-old county courthouse bell was rededicated.

Of all the bands of settlers who made the rough, slow march into Oakland County in the early 1800s, the Gabriels were "the most venturesome of them all," reads the narrative in the "History of Oakland County: 1817-1877."

Of Scottish-Irish ancestry, Graham was born in 1749. When he came to America, he sold himself, as was customary, into service to a New York City physician, to pay for the overseas trip.

When the term of his service ended, the American Revolutionary War was raging. So in 1771, Graham enlisted as a soldier and served one year.

He then made Pennsylvania his home. In 1810, married and with children, he moved to Canada. Six years later, he crossed the Detroit River with several family members. The voyage was aboard a raft with five cows and three pigs swimming alongside.

In Detroit, Graham worked as a wood cutter but yearned to leave the "big city" of 1,700 residents. Graham was a good friend of the Indians and it was from them he learned of the oak-covered hills north of Detroit.

But he was stymied by a lack of passable routes through southern Oakland County's swamps. That was country an early surveyor called a "low, wet land with a very thick growth of underbrush, intermixed with very bad marshes — a poor, barren, sandy land."

His restlessness revived, Graham set out with his then extended family in 1817, taking the old French Road along the Detroit River and Lake St. Clair to Mount Clemens.

The journey took three weeks, but Graham was bent on reaching the Indians. He had told him of a navigable inland route along the River and Horse (changed to the Clinton River in 1854) to the land of hills and oaks.

In 1818, Graham's sons, Benjamin and Alexander, followed that route to a point just west of present-day Rochester. The brothers liked what they saw, then returned to Macomb County for other family members.

The next spring, Graham, son Alexander and son-in-law Christopher Hartough and their



BOB SKLAR

wives came back to the land of the oaks.

In 1817, Alexander built the first house in Oakland County — a log cabin. In 1818, his son, James, was born — the first non-Indian child born in Oakland County. His wife chose to call the new settlement Rochester after her hometown in New York. In 1823, the Gabriels had started the first school in Oakland County.

In 1820, the county was home to 69 families. By 1825, the population hit 1,362. It reached 4,910 by 1830.

Joining the Gabriels as Oakland County trailblazers were Farmington's Fred Warner (who returned to his dairy farm, cheese factories and banking interests in Oakland County after serving as Michigan's first three-term governor from 1905 to 1911), Birmingham's John W. Hunter (whose 1822 house still stands at Maple and Southfield roads), Franklin's Dillencoe Stoughton (who built the county's first brick house in 1829), Commerce's James Hoyt (the county's third doctor by 1840), and Lathrup's Louise Lathrup (whose land purchases in the 1920s set the future city's boundaries within Southfield Township).

Others included Orchard Lake brothers Henry Clay Ward (a business tycoon) and Willis Ward (a land preservationist), Southfield's Hiram Rust (who started a tannery in 1830), Bloomfield Township's William Morris (who became Oakland County's first sheriff in 1820) and West Bloomfield's Daniel Benjamin (elected the township's first supervisor in 1834).

Also Oxford's Elbridge G. Deming (who became the town's first postmaster in 1833), Clarkston's Linus Jaycox (the village's first settler in 1820), Lake Orion's Stephen Seely (who opened the Lake Orion Hotel in 1874), Troy's Riley Crooks (who heated Troy's first town meeting in 1827), Springfield's John C. Davis (whose 1859 gristmill had a fall of 16 feet, the highest in Oakland County) and Postle's Moses Warner (who beat an incumbent to become Michigan's first governor from Oakland County in 1858).

Bob Sklar is managing editor of our Oakland County editions.

## The Farmington Observer

TOM BAEZ, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 810-477-5450

ROBERT SKLAR, MANAGING EDITOR, FARMINGTON OBSERVER, 810-901-2563

ROBERT KAMPF, RETAIL ADVERTISING MANAGER, FARMINGTON OBSERVER, 810-901-2501

MARY SCOTT, MANAGER OF CIRCULATION, FARMINGTON OBSERVER, 810-901-2548

JOHN REDDY, VICE-PRESIDENT, PUBLISHER, FARMINGTON OBSERVER, 810-901-2561

JANE SILVERSTEIN, ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER, 810-901-2555

STEVEN K. PORE, GENERAL MANAGER, OBSERVER & ECENTRIC NEWSPAPERS, 810-953-2252

SUBURBAN COMMUNICATIONS CORPORATION

PHILIP POWERS, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

RODOLPH ANGLIM, PRESIDENT

Our Mission: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then backing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Powers