

## Open and honest Bomb incident well-handled

There was a bomb scare at Farmington's Longacre Elementary School the other day. Maybe you read about it in Monday's Observer.

Not to worry. There was no explosion, no injuries, no fear or hysteria. In fact, the "bomb" turned out to be nothing more than a 3-inch block of wood with a computer battery attached and a bunch of wires sticking out.

Apparently, Longacre's "bomber" was 11-year-old boy out to impress his chums. Oh, the ideas some kids (and adults, too) do pick up by watching television.

All's well that ends well, we guess. Hopefully, dad and mom will sit down with this inventive lad for a serious talk, and that'll be that. Let's not even think about charging him.

While breathing easy (and maybe even chuckling a bit) at the conclusion of this matter, we'd like to applaud school officials — especially Longacre Principal William Smith — over their handling of it.

First of all, despite the boy's young age and the improbable-looking device, officials took the bomb threat seriously and notified Farmington police. You ask: How could they do otherwise? Oh, you'd be surprised what some people will do to cover up what they see as an embarrassing incident.

And this probably would have been easy enough to hide away. Probably only five or six kids knew about the fake bomb. However, officials chose to be open and honest and right up front.

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Principal Smith covered all the bases (and the district's posterior as well) in a most informative letter to Longacre parents.

trict's posterior as well) in a most informative letter to Longacre parents.

"My experience as a principal indicates that parents prefer to hear basic facts of a school-related incident from a principal, teacher or similar school official," Smith told the parents. "Direct communications are vital to parents and keep rumors from spreading."

Smith continued: "As unfortunate as it was, the incident can become a learning experience for our students. I will visit with upper elementary students to discuss the dangers and disruptions of such pranks and foolish activities. Classroom teachers in early elementary grades will talk with our younger students about safety issues in general, and remind them about the need to be careful around fire, flammables, and other dangerous objects."

Kids do learn more than just their A-B-Cs in school, and that's as it should be.

Hey, school officials did right this time, but it was an easy call. As we said, there was a happy ending and no blame could be attached to the school establishment. Let's hope that the spirit of "direct communications" continues throughout the Farmington District, even if we probably should make that a "when" the situation is a bit more embarrassing to school officials.

## Check OU charter application

Some interesting — and fundamental — questions surround the first application for a charter school through Oakland University. But it looks like OU and its Public School Academy Application Review Committee are approaching them with appropriate deliberation.

The Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency (OLHSA) last week surprised a number of officials by filing the first application for a charter school through OU. The agency hopes to be part of a trade-oriented academy — eventually with campuses in Pontiac, Hazel Park, Detroit and Taylor — to teach inner-city youngsters the skills needed for high paying careers in the auto and building and trades industries.

OLHSA executive director Robert Conway insists, "The academy will give OLHSA an opportunity to increase its capacity to assist low-income residents to self-sufficiency."

That is a lofty and noble goal, of course. We believe OLHSA is within its range of responsibility in making its proposal. OU, in turn, is within its purview in reviewing this application and exploring the issue of charter schools.

But that doesn't mean we — nor the general public for that matter — should back away from asking constructive questions.

For example, what about duplication? The General Motors Academy already has an innovative school designed for students seeking careers within the auto industry. Oakland Community College, to cite another, also has programs aimed at engineers, drafters and designers. How well does the OLHSA initiative mesh with existing institutions.

What about existing apprenticeship programs within the building trades? Are they

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Robert Conway  
OLHSA executive director

adequate to meet the needs of the industry now, as well as careers in the 21st century? Are they flexible enough to help inner-city students achieve career goals? Does the OLHSA initiative supplement these programs, or compete with them?

What about OLHSA itself as an educational entity? How will it succeed, even with the assistance of OU, where other programs fall short? Is OLHSA biting off more than it can chew? These questions should not be asked only of OLHSA, but of every entity that proposes a charter school.

Part of the answer may lie in the very concept of charter schools. Are charter schools designed to fill a void? Are they designed to meet a need that is somehow not being met?

Charter schools — and their potential impact on public education — are a growing controversy. Advocates insist they will enhance the existing school system, while opponents contend charter schools are merely private schools trying to lure public funds. State Rep. Maxine Berman, D-Southfield, went so far as to insist that charter schools are a back-door approach to parochialism.

In the face of such a confrontational climate, OU and the general public must be analytical, not just trailblazing, when it comes to a charter school teaming up with a public university.



ARKIE HUDKINS

### LETTERS

#### A special thanks

I was disappointed that the Farmington Observer did not cover "Public Schools Michigan's Choice" at the Oakland Intermediate School District on Nov. 29.

All 28 school districts participated with exhibits of the exciting things going on in our public schools. Farmington Public Schools were well represented by students showing what our district is doing in curriculum areas.

A special thanks to the Farmington School Board, the administration, the Farmington teachers, parents, students and supporters of public education who were among the 3,000 who attended this important event.

Marian McCracken, Farmington

#### Hills mayor speaks

I am with humility and a sense of purpose that I begin my term as the first elected mayor in the history of Farmington Hills.

I will be forever grateful for the support given to me by the voters of Farmington Hills. I hope to conduct myself in office to justify that vote of confidence.

I was fortunate that during the election campaign I was able to meet and talk to many of you on your porches or in your houses.

In those conversations you made it clear that you are generally satisfied with the direction our city is taking but that you want improvements in some areas such as density of development, traffic and roads and public safety.

Members of council and I have heard you loud and clear. There is agreement among the council that improving traffic must be a priority goal.

On the density front, we are in the process of upgrading zoning classifications upon the request of the residents in such areas as Howard Road while our planning commission is in the final stages of revising the master plan.

You indicated how concerned you were with police and fire services when you overwhelmingly approved the public safety millage. At the Nov. 27 city council meeting, we started the process of implementing the promised first year goals of the public safety plan so we will be able to go forward as soon as the new money becomes available on July 1, 1996.

At the same time we will continue to provide the services you have supported in the past — parks and recreation, senior programs, zoning enforcement, snow removal, road maintenance, sidewalks and bike paths, trash

pickup and recycling, plus many others.

During my eight years on city council, including one as mayor in 1991, I worked to improve the opportunities for residents to become more directly involved in city government.

We have made much progress in this area — televising of council meetings and other important events, allowing call-in telephone questions during council meetings, seeking citizen input in changes affecting the various neighborhoods and in many other areas.

I promised during the recent campaign to expand citizen involvement with city government. Therefore, I will propose that we meet regularly with individual homeowners and their neighborhood associations as well as added consultation with the Council of Homeowners Association.

I will also try, with the help of council, to involve more new people on our boards and commissions and other advisory committees. In that regard, I am asking that residents who are interested in being considered for service on one of our boards or commissions to submit an application so that your name can be on the list when vacancies occur.

Shakespeare once wrote: "What is a city, but its people." I will modify that quote to say: "What is the city of Farmington Hills, but its people."

Working together and with your help we can achieve our goals. Thank you.

Aldo Vagnozzi, mayor,  
Farmington Hills

#### 'But darn close'

As you know, I have been an ardent supporter of public education — especially as provided by the Farmington School District.

Both of my children have received excellent educations in the district (as did my wife and I in Oak Park and Detroit, respectively) and have gone on (as we did) to the University of Michigan.

I have been dismayed by the demagoguery exhibited by various politicians — most notably Gov. Engler — in pursuit of their agenda to dismantle public education.

American public education — just as America — is not perfect but it's darn close (given its size and responsibilities) and getting better.

Your paper does an excellent job of reporting the good things about education. However, more detailed research might help restore well-deserved confidence in public education.

David L. Haron, Farmington Hills

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

What's on your mind?



"I'm looking for some golf books. Golf is my sport."  
Bill Rosenthal  
Farmington Hills



"How I'm going to get this English project finished."  
Maureen DeesRoches  
Farmington



"I have to go grocery shopping after this."  
Debra Hirschfeld  
Novi



"Christmas shopping, hoping to get it done."  
Carol Leskey  
Farmington Hills

We asked this question at the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library.

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— Philip Power