

A good show So many care about diversity

You've got to hand it to the people who put on that Rainbow Recognition Awards Breakfast Tuesday at the Farmington Hills Activities Center.

A lot of us left feeling good that so many people — more than 200 attended the function — care so deeply about the racial, ethnic and cultural "diversification" of Farmington.

It was a good show and well-received. But, for some, feeling positive about diversity isn't all that easy these days — despite how hard they might applaud speeches about tolerance and brotherhood at some breakfast.

Anyone who reads the papers or watches TV news knows that's been some high-profile crime in the Farmington area involving black and foreign suspects.

Let's be honest: When it comes to crime (big time or small potatoes), people do notice race. They might say they don't, but they do. Are the perpetrators black? Is the victim white? Or is it the other way around? To some suburbanites, it's almost a relief when everyone involved in a crime is white.

Again, in the spirit of being open and honest, we have to say that crime, or fear of crime, in big, bad, black Detroit that filled the suburbs like Farmington Hills with subdivisions and shopping malls and people.

There were too many murders, too many drive-by shootings, too many crack houses, too many carjackings, too many schoolgirl rapes, too many abandoned houses and businesses, too many weed-choked lots.

Just after his 1973 election, Coleman Young, Detroit's first black mayor, told the

crooks and thugs to "hit the road, hit Eight Mile Road!" Problem is, very few crooks and thugs felt compelled to take him up on it.

Members of the taxpaying middle class did, however, and the roads they hit led to the growing, prosperous suburbs in the metropolitan area.

And now is Detroit's crime and violence invading the suburbs? People read the papers and watch the Six O'clock and conclude, yep. Forget diversity, they think, let's check the real estate listings for Milford or points northwest.

Residents across the metropolitan area — including Farmington — have formed diversity task forces to teach tolerance and understanding.

It's a noble undertaking, but too often it comes off as a bunch of white liberals chanting, "Here's race in your face!" and punching your ticket for a long guilt trip. The implication is: "You're white, you live in the suburbs, you must be a racist. Hang your head."

Happily, that doesn't seem to be the case with this mouthful known as the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council.

Their message seems to be that we all have to put aside these stereotypes, such as blacks seeing whites as insensitive racists, and whites seeing blacks as ignorant and violent.

What has to happen — and what will happen if the Multicultural Council keeps up the good work — is that people must come together and realize that we all have fears. But if we communicate, we can overcome them. If we communicate, we can live together and maybe even enjoy knowing each other.

State dodges fine arts issues

State lawmakers are moving 180 degrees in the wrong direction in keeping alive our fine arts, performing arts, cultural heritage and history.

First, the Legislature this fiscal year hacked 26 percent from the budget for arts and cultural funding.

Was it because the money wasn't there? No, for Gov. John Engler is now boasting of signing 21 tax cuts into law, the latest being the single business tax and a one-time income tax cut.

Second, the House, by a heavy bipartisan majority, approved a bill allowing Detroit, counties and groups of counties to form cultural districts and levy up to 1.5 mills of the property tax for 20 years. If the Senate were to approve House Bill 5394 without change, the effect would be to shove the burden of arts and cultural funding off the state and onto local units.

Certainly that eventually could have an impact on a wide range of cultural programs, such as musical groups in Lake Orion, Farmington, Birmingham and Southfield; arts centers in Birmingham and Rochester; and theatrical groups in Clarkston and elsewhere.

The timing is so bad that the bill amounts to a dirty trick on local government. Less than two years ago, voters approved Proposal A to achieve a major cut in property taxes. Now lawmakers are telling us to, to keep arts and culture alive, we must start jacking the hated property tax upward again.

For the metropolitan Detroit region, the timing is worse yet. Much of Oakland County, all of Macomb and suburban Wayne counties last year voted an increase in property taxes to pay for public transportation. Meanwhile, because Oakland Community College's state aid wasn't keeping pace with inflation, let alone preparing for the future, voters last June hiked the property tax again.

Every five years, Oakland voters are asked to renew their parks millage. And while Proposal A helped public schools' operating budgets, schools still must levy taxes for new construction, renovations and equipment.

At some point — probably very soon — voters will again say "Enough!" and reject higher property taxes as a way of meeting needs from which the state is walking away.

Private donations aren't the answer, though philanthropists deserve hearty thanks. Even European nations, with royalty and millionaires, use government as a source of nutrition to keep arts and culture alive.

Business needs to make a profit. It caters to mass markets. Business can operate theme parks like Disney World, but it is ill-suited to preserve our cultural heritage.

HB 5394 contains internal flaws, too.

In setting up cultural districts, it appoints board members on the basis of county commissioner districts — a fair way to run county government but an inefficient way to tap cultural knowledge.

If Oakland County (pop. 1.3 million) and Detroit (pop. less than one million) were to wind up in a single cultural district, HB 5394 would guarantee Detroit the same board representation as Oakland. Clearly that would violate the principle of "one person, one vote," known in the U.S. Constitution as "equal protection of the laws" and in the Michigan Constitution as "equal benefit" of government.

While HB 5394 provides for audits to keep cultural districts honest, it creates still another level of single-purpose government that ordinary citizens can't keep an eye on. How can they be expected to ride herd on the board of directors of a cultural district?

Funding arts and culture on a small scale is the job of municipalities and on any metropolitan scale of state government. Our governor and lawmakers need to make a heroic effort to 1) quit playing politics with tax cuts and 2) find the money for arts and cultural institutions.

And while they're at it, they should 3) move the cultural council out of the Department of Commerce, where Engler put it, and back in to the Office of Management and Budget where former Govs. Milliken and Blanchard more properly placed it.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Why is it important to have ethnic, cultural and racial diversity in your community?

We asked this question at the inaugural Rainbow Recognition Awards Breakfast Tuesday morning in Farmington Hills.



Barbara Johnson
Farmington Hills



Patricia Jean-Louis
Farmington Hills



Marina Lemberg
Farmington Hills



Carl Gipper
Farmington Hills

LETTERS

They're available

To: Members of the Council Homeowners Associations in Farmington Hills.

On behalf of the city council and administrative staff, I am pleased to announce that each one of us is available to meet with and speak to subdivision and condominium associations upon request.

As your elected officials and city's administrative personnel, we want to reach out to neighborhood associations and establish a greater presence within our community and with our citizenry.

We would be available to meet for annual or semi-annual meetings of your individual associations or at regular monthly board meetings.

As mayor, I would be most happy to accept invitations to meet with neighborhood groups. Our city manager and his staff will also be available and depending upon your needs or particular areas of interest, arrangements could be made for the police chief, fire chief, public services director, etc. to meet with groups.

To arrange for someone to participate in one of your meetings, contact the city manager's office at 473-9501. We will be happy to assist you and look forward to establishing an even better rapport with the citizens of our community.

Aldo Vagnozzi,
Mayor, Farmington Hills

Be forgiving

The Christmas season has always been a beautiful and meaningful time of year for my family and me.

Whether or not Christmas itself is celebrated, the beauty and liveliness of the season soars and mostly everyone's spirit of generosity and kindness is ignited.

I personally look forward to each new year with renewed ambition to achieve previously defeated goals and also never before attempted resolutions. A main thought of mine this year is to be more tolerant and forgiving to my fellow person, knowing that until I accomplish perfection in myself, I should "go light on others."

How angry and disillusioned I felt just a few hours ago, not even a week after New Year's Day, when I drove up my driveway and realized one of our lighted Christmas reindeer was missing. I was furious! I felt violated!

My first thought was "how can the culprit live with him/herself? But, of course, we all know most thieves are not tormented by guilty consciences, but in fact, feel the winner that "has gotten away with the crime."

It's not the reindeer; it's not the money. It's the faith that people want and need to place in each other, but the fear and vulnerability that by doing so, people will steal from you literally (as in this case) or worse, rob you of your passion to believe in others.

Yes, tomorrow I will report this incident to the

Farmington Hills Police, and yes, next holiday season my husband will secure the reindeer better.

However, the ambivalence of my "forgiving" resolution contrasted by this experience is just a bit confusing.

I saved a quote I read last year (regarding the torture of a pig), and maybe this is the answer: to be forgiving and tolerant to others, but to remember: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

My resolution for this year will be to attempt to discover that thin but very important line between the two.

Judy Keels, Farmington Hills

Bias showing

I am writing to you in regards to the article "Book Bags Banned in Classrooms," printed in the Dec. 25 Farmington Observer.

I am a former Warner Middle School student, now in my second year at Harrison High, and felt the article concerning the banning of book bags at the middle school was biased and unprofessionally done.

First of all, the part of the article concerning the "back strain that can develop from carrying a book bag," may in itself be true, but I would like to know which is better carrying text books, binders, and folders together in a bag on your back, or lugging all of the above in your arms with the weight causing you to lean over?

Although reporter Larry O'Connor did his research, I felt the "back strain" thing was completely overdone; especially when Dr. Russell was asked about her purse.

Second of all, the main reason book packs are used is because of their timeliness and easiness. I would like to hear Dr. Russell's advice on how her students should go from class to their lockers and back to class in all of five minutes, because the student can't carry more than two books at a time.

I know that I for one was unable to do this without having to keep running to your locker to retrieve forgotten homework.

I mean no disrespect to Mr. O'Connor, but I do feel that if he had wanted to write a news story on the banning of book bags he should have done all of his homework.

There was no mention of how the students or the teachers feel about this new code. There is only Dr. Russell voicing her concerns about "back strain."

I feel that the new "No Book Bag" law was put into effect for deeper reason than that of "back strain" and I as a reporter would not have stopped when the Warner principal denied that there was one and put the blame onto clutter around the classrooms.

Although the article can't be reprinted, I do feel that a follow-up article is needed and my above questions answered.

Jennifer Fogel, Farmington Hills

The Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power

MEMORY LANE

This was the week's news from years gone by as reported in the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise:

■ **40 years ago — Jan. 19, 1950 (Enterprise)**
About 150 friends and neighbors of Harry N. McCracken, retiring Farmington Township Clerk, jammed the Botaford Inn to pay tribute to the 90-year-old McCracken, a public servant for half a century.

Joanne DeNies of Farmington was named news editor of the University of Detroit's campus newspaper, The Varsity News.

Short item: "Leisure time is the finished product of greater efficiency."

■ **10 years ago — Jan. 16, 1980 (Observer)**

Farmington Hills police received two calls about unidentified flying objects in the Westwood area. When police arrived, however, the UFOs were gone.

Tracy Solomon scored well in four events to help Harrison beat Southfield-Lathrup in girls gymnastics.

■ **1 year ago — Jan. 15, 1989 (Observer)**

A \$4.4 million miscalculation caused a judge to negate labor contracts between the Farmington Public Schools and three unions.

Like most of southern Michigan, the Farmington area was smothered in fog on Jan. 12.