



YMCA whoops it up to open new additions

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Family YMCA celebrated its new expansion and renovation with an officially-designated "YMCA Day" Saturday.

Public officials and residents turned out for the Y's Open House and a chance to see the facility's new additions. Led by volunteer guides through the huge center, they viewed old standbys (the Wellness Center), just-finished products (the Aerobic Room) and works-in-progress (the Kid Zone).

"We're still not planning to have everything done until the end of the month," said Gary Jonna, chairman of the Board of Directors, "but we've got it polished up for the opening today."

Leading a group of visitors, which included 11th District Representative Joe Knollenberg, Jonna cracked jokes and pointed out improvements.

"We don't have the Jane Fonda posters on the wall yet," he said, leading the group through the sparkling Aerobic Room.

Even the unfinished parts of the tour looked impressive, like the spidery, fluorescent Kid Zone and the 86-degree handicapped-accessible pool.

There were other improvements, too.

"The daycare center is huge and gorgeous," said Norene Yuskowatz, who teaches aquatic aerobics. "They made the old multi-purpose room larger, too. ... It's so cool."

The purple-and-green-themed

open house was another chance for the YMCA to introduce people to its UFO concept of Unique Family Opportunities. The program offers families a chance to arrive together but use the center's separate facilities for exercise and relaxation.

The staff still faces many long nights before everything is complete.

"Kevin (Bush, executive director) has literally been sleeping here," said Mandi Skeegan, community relations director. "He's very much invested in making sure this project comes together and reflects the needs of the community."

Even as the expansion is completed, the Metropolitan Detroit YMCA, of which the Farmington center is a branch, is making big plans for the future.

"We'll be involved when the two new stadiums start being built downtown," Skeegan said. "Our land is in the way. During the selling-off of that land, we'll say, 'We want to be involved.' That's going to be really good. It will reposition the whole organization."

The Farmington Family YMCA will also hold a casual dress buffet dinner to celebrate the dedication of the center's expansion. The cost is \$40 per person, and will go toward buying a van for the new Youth Center programs.

"It's to invite everyone in the community who was significantly involved in the construction," Skeegan said.



Uplifting encounter: YMCA worker Virginia Kenney fills up a helium balloon for Georg Agal, 8, at the open house Saturday to celebrate the Y's building additions.



Official chat: YMCA Board Chairman Gary Jonna, Farmington Mayor Jo Anne McShane, and U.S. Rep. Joe Knollenberg discuss the new facilities at the remodeled Farmington Y.

PHOTOS BY TOM HOFFMAYER

Council taps into buying computers for youth center

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

The Farmington Hills City Council is trying to inject a measure of caution into a program that has done a lot in a short time.

The council voted 5-1, with Councilwoman Cheryl Oliverio opposed and Councilman Jon Grant absent, to lease computers for the city's youth program at its Oct. 14 meeting.

Even though the cost is coming from grant money for the city's decentralized youth program, council members want to spend wisely and take a look at a lot of issues in the program.

The city had budgeted \$35,896 for two years to lease 12 computers for the program that provides recreation, study and other after school activities for middle-school students. Oliverio, who has supported the program, said she wanted to take a closer look at the necessity for the computers, the possibility of using used city computers, the need for the money in other areas such as transportation, and concerns about teens accessing the Internet.

"We as a city are going to buy a lot of (computer) equipment (as part of a technology upgrade). Let's use the equipment we have now, and update it."

"If it is feasible, we could use the money for transportation, and other things for the center," Oliverio said, adding that some students haven't taken part in the program because they can't get a ride home when it ends at 5:30 p.m.

"Things are happening so fast with the youth program, we don't have a handle on what's going on."

Mike Lasley, who handles purchasing for the city, said he would not know how much it would cost to upgrade the city's old computers until the new systems were in place, sometime in March. He said after two years the city can pay \$1 to pay off the computers.

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett agreed there should be a study session concerning the overall program. But she did not want to hold up the computer installation.

"I don't mind holding up connection to Internet," Barnett said in answer to concerns over liability for the city if students are on the computer link. "I'm concerned we're holding up control over learning as a hostage."

Program Director Todd Lipa said that on a given day, 20-25 students were doing homework and could use the computers. He said six were planned for use at

the Costick Center, where the teen program is currently up and running. The other six would be used at the YMCA or the Ice Arena, depending on when they become a part of the program and whether the YMCA will have computers available.

Assistant City Manager Steve Brock said the lease agreement could be amended to allow the city to lease the six computers for the Costick Center and delay the rest of the computers for up to 90 days, when they could be used at one of the other centers.

Oliverio said she feared that if the program grows too big, another parks and recreation millage may not be approved or other foundation money might not be sufficient to maintain it at the current level.

"My fear has been that if the program is so big and we're funding it ourselves, if there are cuts, transportation and other more important needs might be cut."

Lasley said the lease could be staggered to include six computers now and six later.

The council voted to approve the lease for six computers and approve the other six pending a report on the ice arena and YMCA's readiness. The council also plans to schedule a study session for the overall program.

Hills council to have town meeting Oct. 23

Farmington Hills City Council will have its third in a series of community meetings 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 23, at St. Alexander Church Social Hall. The meeting is open to the public.

The agenda for the meeting on Oct. 23 will include a review of the traffic study and improve-

ments on Eight Mile Road, the Grand River Corridor project, discussion of cellular towers, and an update on the public safety millage and plans for police and fire service changes.

Speakers will include Public Services Director Thomas Binsell, Police Chief William Dwyer, and Fire Chief Richard

Marinucci. Several police officers assigned to the southeast section of the city will also be present.

The mayor and members of city council will conduct a question and answer session as part of the meeting.

St. Alexander Church is at 27835 Shilawasse, between Inkster and Middlebelt roads.

Great Pumpkin Adventure planned Oct. 24-25

The Great Pumpkin Adventure — sponsored by the Farmington Area Community Women — takes place Thursday and Friday, Oct. 24-25, at the Longacre House, 24705 Farmington Road. Times for the program are 4-5 p.m., 5-6 p.m., and 6-7 p.m. The program is for children age 5 and younger and features an hour with the Great Pumpkin and


his friends. Crafts, snacks and story time are also planned. Children can wear their costumes.

All children must be accompanied by an adult. Instant photos with the Great Pumpkin are available for \$2 each.


Admission is \$6 a child. Reservations are required and can be made by calling 477-8404.

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