

# Settled in

## Immigrants share their experiences

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

The immigrant experience is a tug-of-war of emotions, say those who know.

Sadness of leaving home and a familiar culture often clashes with the excitement and fear of settling in a new environment.

Nine panelists came from various parts of the world, but shared similar memories at a forum Thursday sponsored by the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council. Participants included immigrants who came here during The Depression to those who have arrived in the last couple of years.

Immigration is prevalent in the Farmington area.

Some 62 different languages are represented in the Farmington Public Schools, which serves 1,450 bilingual students. In the past year, 400 new students have arrived.

A lack of English heightens the isolation for those who come here, they said.

"When I got on the bus I was scared," said Florian Hornish, a Power Middle School student who came to Farmington Hills from Germany with his family two years ago. "Everyone was speaking English. I didn't understand anything. I didn't know how to ask, 'Can I sit here or there?'"

Added Reiko Suzuki who moved to Farmington Hills from Japan two years ago: "I was frightened when the phone would ring. If it was an American, I might not be able to communicate ... it might lead to a disaster."

Many praised Farmington Public Schools' English as a Second Language program for helping them make the transition.

Another difficult aspect is

assimilating into the American way of life. Immigrants often feel torn between two cultures, Farmington schools Bilingual Director Samir Haddad said.

They wonder if adopting a new way of life means they will have to shed their previous cultural. Some go as far as to change their names.

"Others become comfortable who they are by representing two cultures," Haddad said.

For Suzuki whose husband was transferred by his company in Japan, there is also the realization her family will eventually return to their native country.

Her son also attends Japanese school Saturdays to keep pace with the educational system there.

"This makes it a disadvantage for children to learn English," Suzuki said.

Many arrive on a permanent basis with hope of a better future.

Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi, who spent the first eight years in Italy, followed his father to the U.S. who worked in West Virginia and Pennsylvania coal mines.

Vagnozzi was a U.S. citizen at birth because his dad served in the U.S. Army during World War I. Vagnozzi, who knew little English when he arrived, has taken part in the Civil Rights Movement and became mayor of a prosperous suburban city.

"I've been blessed by the whole experience," Vagnozzi said.

Harrison High student and political refugee from Azerbaijan, Dmitriy Pogozov summed up aspirations of U.S. immigrants past and present.

"My goal is to complete my education and go to college and get a good job and support my family," Pogozov said.



**Cultural Immersion:** German-born Elke Hille talks about her involving herself with her downtown Farmington neighbors. She and her son Florian Hornish spoke about the difficulty adjusting to a new way of life during a forum sponsored by the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council Thursday.



**Different perspectives:** Audience member Ed Hodges, of Farmington Hills, far left, talks about how as a fourth-generation American he feels less welcomed than immigrants, simply because of his heritage. Oakland Community College student Saba Yaldo, near left, explains what it's like emigrating to the U.S. from Iraq.

STAFF PHOTOS BY SHARON LEMLEY

# Agreement paves way for house construction

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills and a developer are headed toward an agreement in a dispute that has stalled the construction of a house in a flood plain.

The Farmington Hills City Council authorized City Attorney John Donohue to pursue a settlement with Optimum Development that would allow the completion of a house on Geraldine.

The city will pay the developer \$10,000 to help compensate for the added construction costs of filling in a proposed basement on the house in order to comply with requirements for a structure built on a 100-year flood plain.

The builder will have to meet several other requirements including making sure the fill material is the right type.

The project started out well enough when the developer submitted a site plan in June of 1995 of the house. The plans did not include the location of the flood plain, but were approved by the city.

However, when the city realized that the partially completed house would be in a flood plain, it withdrew its permit pending either the purchase of expensive flood insurance or a new site plan.

Last month, Frank Hoberich of Optimum asked the council to reconsider granting the permit. Many neighbors also complained that the unfinished house was a danger and a target for vandals.

Citing past flooding problems, and the cost of repairs or prevention, the city rejected that idea.

The agreement would allow the completion of the house, which would alleviate problems for the builder and neighbors.

Council members were concerned that the builder finish the structure as soon as possible.

"People in that neighborhood have been waiting for that house to be completed," said Councilman Jerry Ellis, adding that he would like to set a completion date.

Donohue said that could pose problems because if the builder breached his contract, the city and neighbors could be back in the same fix.

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett said with the need for re-inspections and structural changes, a time limit might not be practical.

"He's a builder," she said. "He's got a lot invested and a sufficient incentive to finish this."

In other action, the council:

- Honored Senior Adult Supervisor Loretta Conway and Video Production Supervisor Dave Tietmeyer for their award-winning productions.

Conway's Senior Messenger program was named the best senior issues program by the Montage Access Award program.

Tietmeyer's documentary of the Rouge River, "Headwaters — the Lifeline of a River," won a "Telly" award, which is a national competition.

Set 6 p.m. Monday, Nov. 18 as the time for a study session on the Youth and Families Program, and 7:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 2 and Monday, Dec. 16, as the dates for the December regular meetings.

Approved transmittal of the 1996-97 through 2001-02 capital expenditure projections and suggested schedule for development of the next capital improvements plan.

The schedule calls for meeting this and next month with city staff, have study sessions on January and February of 1997, a planning commission public hearing in March and consideration by the city council later in March.



## WARM FEEL-COOL PRICE

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## AGENDAS

Below are highlights from the agendas of meetings this week. All meetings are open to the public.

**Farmington Hills City Council**

City Hall, 474-6115

Regular meeting

Council chambers

7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 18

Agenda items include:

- Michigan Stand for Children presentation by Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills Annette Hohl.

- Consideration of determination of special assessment district for water main installation for Ardmore Drive from 13 Mile to Firwood and notice of intent to issue bonds.

- Consideration of rezoning request from light-industrial to general business district for 25000 Haggerty Road.

- Consideration of appointments to boards and commissions.

- Consideration of appointment of Mayor Pro Tem.

- Consideration of scheduling a joint Farmington Board of Education/City of Farmington meeting Feb. 11, 1997.

- Consideration of establishing a Youth & Families Center at the Farmington Hills Ice Arena.

- Consideration of approval of resolution to minimize construction time for the rehabilitation of the Farmington Road bridge at

I-695.

**Farmington City Council**

City Hall, 474-5500

8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 18

Agenda items include:

- Introduction of state Rep. Andrew Raczowski, R-Farmington Hills.

- Presentation of tribute tree proposal by Beautification Commission.

- Presentation of GIS system by Orchard, Hiltz and McCliment, Inc.

- Consideration of resolution regarding Legionella outbreak.

- Consider purchase of city manager vehicle.

- Consider purchase of public safety administrative vehicle.