

Officials clarify youth program's role

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Now that it has an innovative and successful decentralized youth program, Farmington Hills wants to make sure the operation is nurtured and well-managed.

That was the idea behind a Farmington Hills City Council study session Nov. 18. And council members were taking nothing for granted, even making sure they were on the same page when it came to terms.

The term "at risk" children had been used in the city's juvenile justice grant application when describing the group the program was targeting.

"As a mother, I wouldn't send my kids to a program with that label," said Councilwoman Nancy Bates.

Bates had made children and family issues a priority during her term as mayor in 1993. The city's Commission on Children, Youth and Families was created by that city council.

The commission's work led to the city successfully applying for a three-year, \$385,000 grant that required the city to chip in \$200,000, which came from its park and recreation millage.

Bates and other council members agreed that the decentralized youth program is designed for children from 10-15, which is an at-risk age for exposure to drugs, alcohol and crime.

The program, which currently operates at the William Costick Center on 11 Mile, will eventually serve middle school students after school at a minimum of three sites.

Assistant City Manager Steve Brock said the term "at risk" had been used in applying for the grant, but was not required in any other way.

"We don't need it for advertising," he said.

The program, which is open to all Farmington and Farmington Hills middle schoolers and could be expanded to include some Walled Lake and Clarencerville students, includes many recreation and learning activities at no charge to the children.

Councilwoman Vicki Barnett said she was not concerned about the use of the term. She said providing an unstructured place for children with problems to mix with successful students would help both groups and would keep the most at risk kids from turning away and taking part in undesirable behavior.

"If you don't give them any options for different lifestyles, they're not going to make good choices," Barnett said.

Todd Lips, the program's director, said he asks school counselors to refer kids to the program, goes into the schools and tries to involve that student who are borderline in the program.

"I try to find out what might get them there, find their hot button of interest," he said.

Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said from what he'd seen the program had been successful at helping the borderline kids.

"The kids in the program at risk rise to the level," he said. Councilman Terry Sever said he preferred that the program would continue to "get kids involved that otherwise would be a menace to society."

"I have a concern that we not drift too far and just simply be a day care program," Sever said.

Farmington City Manager Frank Lauff, who attended the session, said his city has transferred transportation credits and will begin paying a proportional

share to the program, just as it does for the court, library and other services shared by the cities.

The Hills council also talked about keeping the role of the city council; city Commission on Children, Youth and Families; and the Farmington Hills Community Foundation for Children, Youth and Families separate in the public's mind.

The commission serves as an advisory body to the city council. The foundation raises money for issues involving children, youth and families and has been actively raising money to help make up the anticipated funding gap when the grant money runs out.

By that time, the city would be using some money from another parks and recreational millage, if it were to pass, along with foundation money to pay for the program.

"They (foundation) have made a commitment to supplement those grand funds after the three year period," Brock said.

City Manager Dan Hobbs said the foundation's tentative proposal to give \$130,000 a year toward the program's operation was a large commitment.

"Those are big bucks," he said. "Are they going to be in a position?"

Bates said support of the program was part of the foundation's mission statement.

Richard Dagunno, chairman of the Commission on Children, Youth and Families, said the foundation's board, of which is also a member, plans to raise as much as it can for the program.

"The sky's the limit as far as the foundation's ability to raise funds," he said, adding that the dramatic increase in money from the foundation's Cornucopia Ball

has made that assessment possible.

Dagunno said now that people can contribute to the foundation as a tax-exempt body, it can attract a lot of financial support. But he said the foundation was not intended to be the program's sole support.

"We don't know how much we can raise each year," he said. "Right now we're looking to our minimal objective with is to provide the difference of the grant money (about \$130,000 when the grant ends)."

Councilman Jerry Ellis, who was chairman of the city's parks and recreation commission before being elected, said the difference was "a natural blur."

"I have no problem reconciling this with the millage, which has a whole bed sheet of things," he said. "People want to make those (tax deductible) contributions. They will vote for the millage for totally different reasons."

The council also discussed the role of the YMCA, which will be one of the sites serving students; and the school district, which has provided transportation and other resources.

At the regular meeting, which followed the study session, the city council unanimously approved using part of the upstairs at the Farmington Hills Ice Arena as one of the program's sites.

The space, which had originally been planned for a restaurant, can be easily and inexpensively converted, Brock said.

It is a good location for Power Middle School students and has the advantage of a ready-made recreational activity.

In addition computers for study and word processing can be installed there.

That site could be ready for use by early 1997.

CPAs cook up holiday benefit

Local CPAs will be putting on their chef hats again this year for a holiday cause.

Morel Sheplew Weinstein, PLC, a CPA and consulting firm in Farmington Hills, will close the office at 12:30 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 9, and bring out their cookie cutters to help the Karmann Cancer Institute in their second Holiday Cookie Walk.

Last year the CPAs made more than 1,200 cookies. "With all of our practice from last year we are hoping to make over 1,600 cookies this year," said managing member Steve Maltzman. "As unusual as it is for a CPA firm to bake cookies, we felt it was a 'sweet' way to give back to the

community." Again this year, Chef Joseph Doganlian, of Joseph's French Pastry Shoppe in Grosse Pointe, has volunteered his time and expertise and will be assisting the novice bakers in his shop. The volunteers have been asked to bring in their favorite cookie recipe to share on Monday, and the best of the best will be used.

The Holiday Cookie Walk is scheduled for Wednesday, Dec. 18, 1-3 p.m. at the Prentiss Center, 110 E. Warren, Detroit, in the Detroit Medical Center. All sales of cookies will benefit the Karmann Center Institute.

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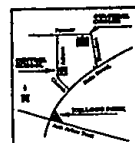
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Winter concert promises 'Songs of Good Cheer'

The Farmington Community Chorus will present its 17th-annual winter concert - "Songs of Good Cheer" - at 8 p.m. Thursday-Friday, Dec. 19-20, at Farmington High School, 32000 Shawwassee, west of Orchard Lake Road.

This year's performances will be on Thursday and Friday, a departure from past years.

Traditional holiday favorites, as well as contemporary seasonal selections, will be performed by the 80-voice chorus under the direction of Steven SeGraves. Piano and keyboard accompaniment will be provided by Susan Garr.

The Perfect Blend, a select group made up of 16 voices, will also perform. Solos, duets, and small ensembles will compete the

evening's program. The winter concert always includes an audience carol sing and a visit from Santa Claus for the younger members of the audience.

In past years, these concerts have been sold out. Tickets are available from any chorus member or from the Farmington Department of Special Services. For tickets, call Harry Doerr at 788-5322.

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