

Branching out:
Ana Krawec
and her 2-year-
old son
Nicholas of
Farmington
Hills take in the
"greenery" of a
new holiday
season.



Holiday hum

Hills tree lighting hails Santa, song

At the corner of Orchard Lake and 11 Mile roads, the holidays are ushered in with a wail of a good time.

The wailing noise, of course, is the siren atop of the Farmington Hills Fire truck that escorts Santa Claus to city hall.

But the joyous sounds only begin there.

Children squeal with glee as the red-suited one takes their Christmas orders, adults "ooh" and "aah" as the holiday tree is set alight, and carolers serenade the masses with festive songs.

The annual tree-lighting ceremony started four years ago with only a handful of revelers. Some 250 people turned out for this year's event Nov. 26.

"It grows each year," said Eric Wurmlinger, assistant director of Parks and Recreation. "More people are bringing their children."

"It's our way to kick off the holidays. It's a low key but exciting way to get the season going."

Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi welcomed officials and residents alike. He summoned as many children as he could to the stage to join him in welcoming the star attraction.

Santa Claus and a trail of children headed back to the warmth of city hall where refreshments were served.

Then St. Nicholas took careful note of their Christmas gift wishes.



Vocal turnout: Stinging cold weather couldn't diminish the combined voices of carolers.

Check it off: Amy Hallochak, 3, of Farmington Hills musters the courage to share her wishes to Santa at Farmington Hills tree-lighting ceremony. Santa arrived by Farmington Hills Fire Department truck.

Builder balks as council reconsiders agreement

BY WILLIAM COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

It could be back to the drawing board on an agreement to accelerate construction of a house on Geraldine Street in Farmington Hills.

The Farmington Hills City Council had offered a \$10,000 incentive if Optimum Development would finish building a house that had been left unfinished over a disagreement as to whether it could have a basement.

Frank Hobrecht, representing Optimum, told the council at the Dec. 2 meeting that the date for final completion, when a certificate of occupancy would be issued, was too early. The city attorney had set June 1, 1997.

"When we started this process, it was October," Hobrecht said. "We've already seen six inches of snow."

Hobrecht said he would like the date pushed to August and would ask for more money to speed completion.

Work on the house had started after the city issued a building

■ 'The more you speak, the more concerns I have.'

Terry Sever
—councilman, Farmington Hills

permit based on a site plan submitted by Optimum in June of 1995.

The site plan failed to show that the house was actually located in a 100-year flood plain. The city withdrew the building permit on the partially completed house pending the purchase of expensive flood plain insurance or the submission of a new site plan that would not have a basement below grade.

After discussing the builder's plight at an Oct. 21 meeting, the council authorized City Attorney John Donohue to allow a change to the structure, eliminating a basement, and paying the builder the \$10,000 to complete it on time and rid the neighborhood of a target for vandals while alleviating concerns of neighbors.

City attorney John Donohue said that if the date were the only issue, the city council could direct him to change it to a later date.

Hobrecht said he was disappointed with both the sum and the date, and asked for flexibility.

Councilman Jerry Ellis said that date could be changed.

"I was the one who asked for the date," Ellis said. "You said you could complete it by the end of the year. What is a good date? We just want some sort of closure."

But as the discussion continued, it became clear that there was more than the date of completion in question.

"The more you speak, the more concerns I have," said Councilman Terry Sever. "The date is no problem. But if we have more issues, I think we need to have an executive session."

Donohue said he would report back to the council and suggest a date for a closed meeting to discuss the situation.

Look out for bridge work during summer months

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Motorists won't be whistling the tune from the film, "The Bridge on the River Kwai," while traveling through the Farmington Road and M-5 intersection this summer.

Traffic back-ups may result as decks on both the westbound and eastbound bridges will be replaced. The Michigan Department of Transportation will put the \$1.4 million project out for bid in April with construction to follow.

"We expect it to be a summer project," said Roger Safford, area director of MDOT Project Development.

Substructure repairs and painting will also be done on both bridges. The M-5/Farmington overpass deck replacement is one several bridge repairs MDOT has planned.

Others are:

■ M-5/Orchard Lake Road and M-5/Grand River connector bridges. Decks on both bridges will likely be replaced, Safford said. Structure repairs and

painting are also planned.

"The Orchard Lake bridge is on a curve. Our new bridge standards call for a different slope on the bridges," Safford said. "We still have to determine the full scope of the project." Bids for the \$1.9 million project go out in July or August with construction to begin in 1998.

■ I-96/under Farmington Road bridge repairs. Farmington Hills city officials have requested the \$750,000 project be finished by September 1997 under an expedited construction schedule. "We feel confident we can do that," Safford said.

MDOT inspects 1,500 bridges in Southeast Michigan every two years. When a bridge deck falls below a certain rating, inspectors recommend replacement and repairs.

Farmington city officials are pleased with the news of the M-5/Farmington Road bridge repair and replacement.

"The concrete is crumbling," City Manager Frank Lauhoff said. "There has been emergency repairs done on the bridge in the past. We're very happy to see this done."



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