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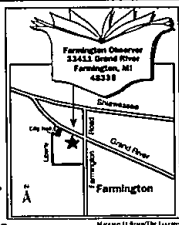
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The Farmington Observer



Animals rule

Hills' free Family Night nearly a sellout

By WILLIAM CUNYANT
STAFF WRITER

There was a play about animals, there were some real, exotic animals, and even balloons made to look like animals at the fourth annual Family Night Jan. 14 at the Costco Center.

But that wasn't all. Perhaps the largest number of children and their parents ever took part in the event, designed to give a mid-winter family night out for anyone interested in com-

ing to the Center on 11 Mile east of Middlebelt.

"We added a third swimming session because we sold out both sessions last year," said Herman Smith, who organized the entertainment. "We've already sold out the 6:30 (p.m.) and 7:30 (p.m.) sessions and we only have a few left for the last session."

The auditorium was packed, as September Productions performed a children's favorite, "Charlotte's Web."

But there were some kids, like Rachel, 6, and Paul Knorp, 8, who were enjoying using plaster molds of dinosaurs and other animals at the "make it and take it" crafts area.

"This is great, if I can get it to come out of the mold," quipped their mother Kathy Knorp. Mike Clark of Savannah Exotics in Livonia brought some of his more unusual animals.

"Glop" the Galapagos tortoise could live to be 600, despite all the attention. An albino hedgehog, a blue tongue skink from Australia, a Kinkajou from South America, a Moroccan uromastix, a bird eating tarantula and a hissing cockroach (yuck!) were on hand - sometimes literally - to entertain and educate the kids.

A new twist this year were the balloons made by members of the Spitzer

family for kids. Jamen Spitzer blew into the tubular balloons, made a few twists and turns and produced snakes, swords and the most popular item - a flower.

"As soon as we started, they were lining up," he said of the youngsters. The family also performed magic, comedy and juggling.

The fun began at 6:30 p.m. and ended at 9:30 p.m. on a snowy night that didn't keep the kids away. The City of Farmington Hills hosted the free event.



PHOTO BY BILL HANSEN
Kid stuff: Balloon hats, above, were the rage for Paige Davis, 4, and Ruth Andrea Grove, 4. At left, Deborah Smith and her daughter, Juliana, 2, enjoy the pool.



SRO: Children filled the auditorium for all performances, including this showing of the old favorite "Charlotte's Web."

Alcohol called factor in fatal Hills crash

Michigan State Police say alcohol played a role in the death of a Milford woman early Saturday morning in Farmington Hills.

Dana Buckner, 22, died from injuries after the black 1995 Ford Thunderbird she was driving slid off of eastbound I-696 just west of Halsted at 1:40 a.m.

Police said the driver apparently lost control and the car slid sideways, crashed through a protective guard rail and into the inside of the guard rail on the

other side of the median.

Although the passenger air bag deployed, the passenger side door was knocked into the vehicle, amputating the leg of passenger James Edward Herron II, 26, of Clinton Township.

Farmington Hills firefighters had to use extrication equipment to cut the roof off of the car to get the man to Botsford General Hospital where he was listed in stable condition Tuesday afternoon. Buckner was taken to Botsford where she was pronounced

dead early Saturday morning.

Police said the conditions were snowy and the car had to be traveling at a high rate of speed to ram through the reinforced steel guard rails.

The driver had consumed alcohol and was not wearing a seat belt, police said, although results of the blood alcohol level are not yet available from the police crime lab.

No other vehicles were involved and the accident remains under investigation.

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