

# COMMUNITY LIFE

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PATRICIA ALSAPACH

## New elementary reading program must stress phonics

Let's set the record straight. Farmington Public Schools want to buy a new language arts curriculum for K-6.

That's good. We need a complete reading, spelling, writing, and penmanship program that ensures our children obtain basic skills and knowledge.

However, there are two problems that need to be addressed.

The first problem concerns the misrepresentation of the current language arts program. Farmington is currently using the HBJ reading series published by Harcourt Brace. The U.S. Department of Education rated this whole language program zero on a scale of zero to six for explicit phonics. After years of denying the importance of systematic phonics, the district is now saying that they have always taught phonics!

I've kept every K-3 assignment sent home from school. There are perhaps 15 practice sheets that could be considered phonetic, but that's not enough to encompass a comprehensive phonics program. In 1991, the district gave parents a chart that named all of the parts of Farmington's whole language program. Of the 15 items listed, phonics wasn't even mentioned. Until recently, no district employee would even go on record admitting the value of systematic phonics.

Let's use our critical thinking skills. The HBJ

See

## Course boosts teens' confidence

■ A local instructor offers the Dale Carnegie program to teenagers.



BY MARY RODRIQUE  
STAFF WRITER

No matter the age, people can always use more self-esteem.

That belief is the basis for the career Sue Dahlmann has created as a Dale Carnegie instructor in the Farmington area, and as the only teacher to offer a Dale Carnegie class for teens locally.

The former schoolteacher with 25 years experience in elementary education went through a personal metamorphosis following an automobile accident that left her with a closed head injury, years of recovery work, and finally, reprioritizing her career goals.

"Dale Carnegie put my whole life back together again," said Dahlmann, of West Bloomfield.

Many are familiar with the Dale Carnegie program and its application for business and professional workers, but Dahlmann has expanded her classes to include teenagers. Young and old blend together in her courses.

"There's really no age when you're sharing with your heart," she said.

She tells the story of a twelve year old girl who recently completed her course.

"She needed to be a bit more outgoing. On her way to the graduation (which follows the 12 week course), her mom said she was nervous. As they drove up, the girl saw her friend, Pat, in the parking lot. She asked her mom if she could walk into the building with her friend. Of course, her mom agreed. Then she proceeded to watch her daughter run to catch up with Pat, a 60 year

old lady carrying a casserole dish." Dahlmann's last class had 19 teens and 19 adult students. The blending of ages has worked well together.

"With self esteem, teens can create their own life," said Dahlmann. "They can reach out, not be shy or hold back. So many young people are afraid to take a risk, to say hello, to raise a hand in class."

Dahlmann's class gave one 12-year-old boy the confidence to mail a script he wrote to a Hollywood producer. Another boy got the courage to contact his birth mother, which led to a reunion with his biological family.

"There is a lot of healing going on in these classes," said Dahlmann. "For kids, this is a safe, loving environment."

The 12-week Dale Carnegie course meets one night a week. Dahlmann's class meets on Thursdays from 6:30 to 10:30 p.m. in the West Acres Community Center. There is a free orientation tonight. Another free session on Thursday, March 6, is also available.

"There is such a need for kids to have something," she said. "Life beats up on you. There is a need to renew the spirit inside, choose a lot of positive thinking."

"I love kids. There is nothing more special than having them believe in themselves. It gives kids a whole new look at their parents, too."

Kathy Tosoian of Farmington Hills was at a career crossroads when she discovered Sue Dahlmann and the Dale Carnegie program a few years back.

"I had a teaching and a real estate background, but I wasn't thrilled with either," said Tosoian. "The kids were in school full-time. I began listening to motivational speakers on tape. That led me to a

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STAFF PHOTO BY SARAH LEMLEY

Winning friends: Sue Dahlmann and Kathy Tosoian with Linsey Misch and Jenny Tosoian, who both completed Dahlmann's class for teens.

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