

## Teen Programs

## BIRMINGHAM

Birmingham YMCA. Two Saturdays a month there's a Middle School Night, where for a \$4 fee middle school students can use everything like the workout area, pool, gym, racquetball courts. The next one is scheduled from 8-10:30 p.m., March 15. Also on Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:45-3:45 p.m. and from 6:15-7 p.m. kids can pay \$10 for open basketball. Call 644-9036 for more information.

## BLOOMFIELD HILLS/TWP.

Teen Drop-In for middle schoolers on select Friday nights, 6-9 p.m. at the Farm Activity Building. March 14 is next one. Open to all middle school students living in Bloomfield Hills school district and their guests. \$2 admission fee. DJ or live music, refreshments available for small cost; arcade and video games and outdoor activities appropriate for season. Call 645-4500 for information.

## CLARKSTON

Students, grades 6-8, can participate in activities through the Independence Township Parks and Recreation department on Wednesdays. Future activities include: Whirllyball, March 12 from 2:45 until 6:30. Township escort meets students in school lobby. \$10 fee and preregistration required. Other activities available by calling 625-8223.

## FARMINGTON

Three youth centers are open in the Farmington area. The centers are all open from 2:30 p.m.-5:30 p.m. and cost nothing. Open to students in the Farmington School District, ages 11-15. One is called the William Costack Youth Center and it's in the Farmington Hills activities building on 26500 west 11 Mile Road. That center has a swimming pool, board games, video games, pool tables, ping pong tables, learning center and educational library. The second center is set up in the Farmington YMCA and has same kind of activities on 28100 Farmington Road. Third site is at ice arena and offers ice skating, pool tables, ping pong, etc. Site is at 35500 West 5 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

## LAKE ORION

No youth centers in sight but middle schools pick up the slack with out of ordinary activities. Dragon Days take place twice a month during what would have been half days and students can stay until regular school hours would have ended and participate in gym activities and craft activities. From 12:15 p.m. until 2:10 p.m. Free of charge.

## OXFORD

Middle school-age students can participate in week-long summer camps in Holly. For information, call Oxford Youth Assistance at 628-6710. The Christ The King Church also sponsors a teen event every other Friday night from 9 p.m.-midnight, open to students grades 7-12. The next event is scheduled for March 14. Enjoy music, video games and activities at the church's youth building. Call 628-0038 for more information.

## ROCHESTER

Middle school students can go to The Rec Room at 1800 Livernois Road, between Ave. and Hamlin. Center open from 11 a.m. until 7:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday; 11 a.m.-10 p.m. on Saturday; and 12 p.m.-7 p.m. on Sunday. Without parents, middle school students pay \$10 and can play ping pong, pool tables, floor hockey and video games. Call 650-2504 for more information.

## SOUTHFIELD

Middle school drop-in sites are available in various areas in the city. All are open from 4-9 p.m., Monday through Thursday. One is at the Evergreen Hills Golf Club House behind the library and police station. Offered there are dart boards, air hockey, tennis table and pool tables. Another is in the lower level of the Parks and Recreation building. Offered there are computer and educational games, a large screen TV, movies and videos and books. The third site is in a portion of the library pavilion. There is a refreshment bar there and large picnic tables, magazines, radio, TV and study area. No cost for visits. For information, call the Youth Services Department at 827-0797.

## TROY

The Boys and Girls Club of Troy offers recreational activities for middle school students. For a \$30 annual registration fee, kids can stop in afterschool until 7 p.m. and 10-4 on Saturdays. Activities include basketball, computers, game room, organized activities. Site located at corner of John R and Long Lake Roads. Call 689-1687 for information.

## WEST BLOOMFIELD

Middle school students can surf the Net at the West Bloomfield Library on Wednesday afternoons from 3-5 p.m. free of charge in the computer lab. Call 682-2120 for more information. The West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Department offers preregistered drop-ins in the recreation room for 10-15 year olds on Mondays from 2:30-5 p.m. Preregistration is a must and \$1 fee per person. Parents call to register three days in advance. Have ping pong, air hockey and videos and television. Call 738-2500 for parks and rec dept. information.

## Middle schools

## Readin', writin' and raisin' kids

BY SALLY TATO  
STAFF WRITER

Emily Katz saunters into the living room on a pair of platform sandals that hike her height by at least four inches. The 12-year-old seventh grader borrowed the shoes from a classmate at Warner Middle School in Farmington Hills. She wants to get the same pair and is modeling the shoes for her mom. "Isn't this a cute outfit?" Emily Katz asks while staring at her reflection in a wall of mirrors. Looking back at her is a slim-framed adolescent dressed in a grey sweatshirt, fitted black pants, white sweat socks and patent-leather black platform sandals.

Mom Andi Katz just stares at her daughter, a slight look of disbelief on her face, and points out that Emily can barely walk in the shoes, let alone get her own pair. But if Andi Katz follows her own parenting advice, she probably won't fight too hard against getting her daughter the shoes.

The West Bloomfield mom knows there are other battles to fight, especially when exposure—in school and on television—to drugs, alcohol and sex begins at the elementary school level.

"I think we've forced our children to grow up too fast," Andi Katz said. "I'm not going to fight her over what she's wearing, the underwear issues."

Long-time middle school teacher and parent Ann DeBoer agrees and said she often tells parents to prioritize their list of problems with their kids. Clothes and hair styles, she said, should round

off the bottom of the list.

It's society's lax attitude toward substance abuse, smoking and sex that middle school parents should worry about. Since middle school students are already inundated with puberty, emotional changes and discovery, they are more susceptible to taking the wrong path, DeBoer said. In the past decade, the problem has reached a point that has forced parenting into the classroom and the community.

## Role changes

Middle school teachers don't just impart knowledge anymore, DeBoer said. When DeBoer started teaching in England 15 years ago, all she had to do was teach the subject and make sure her students understood it.

Now she too is on a constant learning curve. Since joining the Birmingham School District almost 10 years ago, DeBoer has had training in drug education, conflict resolution and cultural diversity. She has to stay aware of how to spot these problems in her classroom and know how to handle them when she finds them.

"Right from the beginning of my career, even in England, I've thought that I am teaching people. The people haven't changed, the outside influences have changed," DeBoer said.

Middle school students today, she said, are living in more single-parent homes and double-income families. With less supervision on the homefront,

"The people haven't changed, the outside influences have changed."

Ann DeBoer  
Parent, middle school teacher

DeBoer said schools are picking up the slack with their share of the responsibility of caring for their students.

In addition to offering traditional afterschool extracurricular activities, the Birmingham School District also participates in "teaming" at the middle school level. Teachers from each grade level, 6-8, meet daily with one of the school's three guidance counselors to discuss problems and students.

Acting like a support group, the meetings allow teachers to throw out advice to fellow teachers and file the information away themselves in case the student shows up in their classroom the next semester or school year.

Berkshire seventh-grade counselor Paul Pesick uses the sessions as an opportunity to assist teachers and gather information for his own job. Pesick said personal counseling monopolizes most of his work time. He counsels about 40 seventh graders a week on subjects ranging from problems at home, dealing with divorce, or friendship conflicts.

"I think it's a growing year and these are the years where you establish patterns," Pesick said. "We're helping kids survive in this world."

## Shared responsibility

Communities are also chipping in on the job of raising kids right. With numerous youth activity centers popping up in Oakland County, Farmington Hills area Youth and Family Services Director Todd Lipa is reassured that his community's decision to open three youth centers last year is on track.

Lipa thinks parents, schools and communities have to work together to guide impressionable middle school students toward a productive path.

Youth centers give middle school students an outlet. "It's giving kids an opportunity to come to a place that is drug-free and tobacco free with good role models that come in and great volunteers in an atmosphere where they can watch their self-esteem grow," Lipa said, noting that activities offered at the centers include board games, video games, educational learning centers and computer exercises.

Most youth centers, including those in the Farmington Hills area, are open to students after school and stay open until the evening hours when most parents return home from work.

"These are the hours where kids might make bad decisions," Lipa said. "I think we're all realizing that we have to help. We might have been doing some things in the past that we need to change because it's a different kind of young person out there. Everyone has to work together and pretty much all be on the same page so the message is getting out."



STAFF PHOTO BY LAWRENCE R. MCKEE

Middle school years: Berkshire seventh graders, from left to right, Linda Alecu, Inga Evenchik, Jessica Huston and Marin Hoplamazian contemplate the fate of a stray dog they found that day. The girls are best friends and hang out after school.

## Stray talk fills a typical middle school afternoon

BY SALLY TATO  
STAFF WRITER

The smell of wet dog lingers in Linda's bedroom. She and her friends are too busy fawning over the runaway mutt to worry about his wet paws on the floor, bedspread or his consistent sneezing.

The four best friends rescued Puppy—as they call him—from doom that same afternoon after the four best friends ran off Berkshire Middle School's activity bus at the usual spot on the corner of 13 Mile Road and Rock Creek.

They intended to head home that rainy Wednesday afternoon after another day after volleyball practice—a quick walk down Rock Creek road, then a left onto Northgate, a turn down Pleasant Trail which connects to Rumbling and then finally to the street Linda lives on, Webster.

But the sound of barking dogs caught the girls' attention. An alternate route was suggested by Marin, a dog lover and math aficionado, who wanted to pass the playing pooches.

"Can we go down to the left?"

The girls changed direction and headed down Bainbridge to see what the commotion was all about. It was just a couple of leashed dogs chasing each other on a front lawn. The third dog, an unleashed graying black mutt with matted fur and a muddled tail, interested the girls more.

## AN AFTERNOON IN THE LIFE

Puppy followed them a few yards before Linda reached down and picked him up. She carried him for a block and then attached him to a makeshift leash she concocted from a purple telephone-cord key ring that hung from her book bag. Puppy stayed put, trotting alongside the girls until they reached Linda's house. That's when he broke free from the leash and took off toward Southfield Road.

## Adolescent decisions

The girls didn't contemplate the danger of following Puppy into two lanes of traffic just before dusk. There was no one to answer to at the time. Their parents weren't around. Linda's weren't even home yet, and their teachers were a few miles away, wrapping up their work days.

Marin screamed Linda's name, afraid Puppy was going to end up dead on the five-lane street that under traffic going at least 40 m.p.h. on any given day. A beeping horn forced Puppy to turn back and elude the girls as he scrambled in a circle in a medical center parking lot just houses away from Linda's.

When Linda finally captured Puppy again, the girls made the quick jaunt back to her house and headed straight to Linda's upstairs bedroom.

There that they waited for Linda's parents to return

home. Her mom Rodica is still at work but expected back before 6 p.m. Her dad stopped home for a few minutes just after the girls walked in but had to head back out to do some shopping and pick up Linda's older brother.

So the girls are left alone to play with Puppy and determine his fate.

Linda is set on keeping him. The 13-year-old already has two English guinea pigs, a golden hamster and two rats that sit in cages in a hallway outside her bedroom.

Marin seems more practical and continues to call the number on Puppy's collar. It connects her to Oakland County Animal Control but the office is already closed and none of the girls want to report the runaway to the police.

"This is not an emergency," Linda says. The girls, all seventh graders at Berkshire, nod in agreement.

Linda gets Puppy on her bed while Marin keeps calling the phone number to see if she can get a human voice. The other two girls share the bed space with Linda, Puppy and a giant stuffed teddy bear kin to the kind seen at carnivals. They talk about how they fed Puppy scraps of bologna, ham, sausage and RITZ Bits so he wouldn't get hungry.

## Adolescent thoughts

Soon the conversation spins

"You're only supposed to be in love with teachers when you're in college because they're not that much older."

Afternoon teen talk

toward boys and the girls are gathered on the bed, taking turns cooing to Puppy but spending more time conversing about that days happenings and who likes who.

"He was absent today."

"You're only supposed to be in love with teachers when you're in college because they're not that much older."

"He said I love you," but I know he didn't mean it.

Puppy meanwhile has jumped from the bed and is making a lonely trek around the room, sniffing at whatever he spots on the carpet. He wanders toward the desk where a word processor is perched and then heads toward the hutch and nightstand; one holds a baby doll, the other a romance novel.

The girls are still talking, one interrupting the other, while they fiddle with their hair and clothes, pushing loose ends behind their ears and twiddling with clasps on a pair of black denim overalls.

The conversation dwindles occasionally when someone gets uncomfortable with the topic but picks up quickly following what seems to be a question that everyone already knows the answer to.

"You were there when she said that when we were walk-

ing out of language arts class weren't you?"

They were all there and if they weren't, a rush of voices would chime in to fill in the missing gaps.

The girls notice Puppy occasionally and Linda runs downstairs to bring up a Styrofoam bowl of water but Puppy shuns it and seems to take seconds fiddle for now to the conversation at hand.

He habitually walks to the closed bedroom door and looks up. But it's unlikely he's eyeing the posters and paraphernalia taped onto the wood-stained door. He's probably looking for a way out and some more food.

But a group of middle school girls are controlling the situation for now.

With little animal care experience—and even less life experience—they wait until Linda's mom gets home and for their moms to follow. They're too young to drive home and walking in the dark isn't feasible or safe.

Spending a couple hours at Linda's house after school isn't anything new, nor is the conversation.

The most exciting thing about that afternoon was finding and capturing Puppy. And he's just curled up in a corner, forgotten for now.