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IN THE PAPER TODAY

Pay hike: Farmington school board members give Superintendent Bob Maxfield an increase and a contract extension. /A3

COMMUNITY LIFE

70 years later: A Farmington Hills couple talks about their seven decades together — the sense of humor, give and take needed. /B1

SPORTS

Singing the Blues: 20-year-old Brent Johnson of Farmington hopes to earn a spot on the professional hockey roster of the NHL's St. Louis Blues. /C1

Area all-stars: Farmington's Alana Heikkinen and Kristin Siskosky are members of the Observer sports staff's all-area girls softball team. /C1

AT HOME

Imaginative: Found objects get new life in the hands of furniture artist Mitch Ryerson, who turns the everyday to the elegant. /D10

ENTERTAINMENT

Taste and tunes: Michigan Taste-Fest is more than just a world-class smorgasbord. It's a coming together. /E1

INDEX

At Home	D	Service guide	J4
Beliefs & Values	B8-10	Real estate	G7
Calendar	C9	Rentals	H3
Classifieds	F-3	Movie Guide	E8
Crossword	G8	Oakland Digest	A10
Index	G7	Obituaries	A14
Employment	H8	Police, fire calls	A8
		Real Estate	F

Summer school gets job done



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

A four-week Farmington schools summer program to help early elementary students lagging behind in reading and writing is a success on two numeric fronts:

Student test scores improved. As a result, parents are willing to show the district the money.

Families were charged a minimal \$100 fee to enter this year's program in an attempt to keep them committed. Enrollment shot up from 133 students in 1996 to 147 this year in the short-term intervention program, which puts a different spin on

teaching second, third and fourth graders basic skills.

"There have been no absences yet," said Barbara Chorem, director of Assessment, Evaluation and Special Projects.

The extended program is in its second week and runs through July 11 at Gill Elementary.

Farmington schools started its

Summer Extended Learning Program (SELP) in 1995 as a way to push those students who are performing slightly below average over the threshold to above average.

Students are referred by classroom teachers, through the district's Reading Recovery program and by performance on Benchmark

See SUMMER, A4

A true spokes man



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEXLEY

Ready to roll: Donald Nichols of Farmington plans to run and bicycle his way to Florida as a fund-raising thank you note to the March of Dimes, 50 years after he contracted polio and began benefitting from March of Dimes services.

Polio survivor pays back 'Dimes'

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

A Farmington man is going to great lengths — 1,800 miles, to be exact — to raise money for the March of Dimes.

Donald Nichols, a psychology professor at Oakland Community College in Auburn Hills, left yesterday on a month-long trek from Windsor, Canada to Key West, Florida. After spending months training and preparing, the 60-year-old is jogging and biking the entire trip.

"How many 60-year-old men are jogging and biking across America?" asked Nichols. "I think that's what makes it interesting. Why would a senior citizen do this?"

For Nichols, the answer is simple — to thank the organization that helped him walk again.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the year Nichols contracted polio. At age three, he woke up one morning unable to walk. His mother carried him five miles to the hospital.

After Don was diagnosed, the Nichols family moved to southeast Michigan for his corrective

surgery.

"When I was five years old, the March of Dimes started helping me," remembered Nichols. "They paid for all of my braces, the corrective shoes, and later all the crutches and wheelchairs and everything."

Thanks to the March of Dimes, polio didn't ruin Nichols' life. Instead, the professor believes the disease is the reason behind his success.

"It turned out to be a blessing in disguise,"

See DEBT, A2

A&W floats its new HQ into Hills



BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

Is Farmington Hills the new root beer capital of the world?

It could be, as early as fall of this year when A&W Restaurants, Inc. hopes to complete construction of its new world headquarters at 12 Mile and Halsted. The company officially broke ground on the 37,000-square-foot, two-story building Tuesday afternoon.

"As the world headquarters of more than 800 restaurants, A&W is going to be another big name that puts Farmington Hills on the map," said Maria Esposito, president of the Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce. "The chamber is excited to welcome such an established and respected business into our boundaries."

A chamber representative joined Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi, City Manager Dan Hobbs and members of the Hills city council for chili dogs and trademark A&W root beer at the ground breaking ceremony, where Vagnozzi and Sidney Feltenstein, A&W chairman, president and CEO, posed with shiny new shovels at the site.

"Who better to throw dirt than a politician?" quipped Vagnozzi.

Currently based out of Livonia, A&W is the oldest franchise restaurant chain in the U.S. Since Feltenstein and a group of investors acquired the company in 1994, the company has entered a new era of success, opening 139 stores in 1996 and another 200 planned for this year. It's a trend Feltenstein hopes A&W will continue in its new home.

"(Farmington Hills) is a beautiful community, and it's the right section of the city we want to be in," he said. "It's certainly been very business-friendly in dealing with planning boards. They've demonstrated that they want us here."

As for reasons behind the move, Feltenstein said

See A&W, A4

Too honest?

Harrison alum returned \$100,000

BY DARRELL CLEM
STAFF WRITER

Craig Alcantara found \$100,560 in crisp \$20 bills, only to end up \$220 poorer.

Some say this 29-year-old Westland man is too honest for his own good.

Driving to a pizzeria he manages, Alcantara recently stopped his car on busy I-75 in Lincoln Park and joined other motorists in scooping up money spilling from the back of an armored truck that hit a pothole.

"People were picking up money all over the place," he said. "Within 10 seconds I had both hands full of money."

He tried to approach an armored truck

driver who walked by.

"I honestly would have been the first to help him," said Alcantara, a former Farmington-area resident and 1988 Harrison High School graduate.

But the driver shrugged him off, so he went back to work.

Unlike other money-grabbers, however, Alcantara quit picking up loose bills and turned his attention to a thick, plastic bag that contained \$100,000 — neatly stacked in five bricks of \$20,000 each.

Added to \$660 in loose bills he retrieved, Alcantara drove away in his 1993 Metro Geo a much richer man on the evening of May 27.

See HONEST, A4



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOWLEY

Doing right: Craig Alcantara, his wife, Kim, and 3-month-old daughter, Marissa, show the many responses they received after he returned the money.

Summer Fun slip-up

The correct date of the Summer Fun Series installment at the Civic Theatre is Wednesday, July 2 — not a day later as was printed on the fliers. That day, Clothes Encounters will present Doug Scheer, performing the hysterical history lesson "Uncle Sam's American Freedom Show" at 10:30 a.m. and noon.

Don't overheat

According to Botsford Hospital, there are better ways to beat the summer heat than staring wistfully at a melting ice cube.

Faking it easy may be the best advice, said

FARMINGTON FOCUS

Ronald Lagerfeld, department chairman of Botsford's Emergency Center, Lagerfeld treats numerous cases of heat-related injuries each summer.

"Overexertion during summer's hottest days means you're courting trouble, particularly heat stroke," he said.

Heat stroke is a severe and sometimes fatal condition that results when the body fails to regulate its temperature. Warning signs include a

lessening or lack of sweating, body temperature above 105 degrees, hot and dry skin, and headaches or disorientation.

To keep heat stroke away, Lagerfeld suggests drinking plenty of liquids, avoiding alcohol and long exposure to the sun, and to be particularly careful if you are taking medication.

Sounds of Motown

The Farmington DDA and Dubin Optometric will present "Horizon," performing Motown sights and sounds at 7:30 p.m. Friday at the downtown Farmington gazebo next to the Village Commons on Grand River just east of School Road.