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Metrobank, royal court team for needy

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Reigning Miss Farmington-Farmington Hills Jennifer Hoemke, and her court, are proving that community service is as comfortable as a warm pair of socks.

Or mittens.

Hoemke, first runner-up Amanda Wasvary and second runner-up Tamara Teets helped kick off the first annual Sock and Mitten Drive Tuesday morning at the main branch of Metrobank in Farmington Hills. Representatives from Farmington Area Goodfellows and Metrobank were also on hand as Hoemke, Wasvary and Teets hung up actual socks and mittens onto an in-lobby Christmas tree.

According to Ginny Morris, executive director of the newly renamed Greater Farmington Scholarship Program, "All of the stuff that is donated stays in the Farmington and Farmington Hills area."

Items must be new, but they don't need to be wrapped. The Farmington Area Goodfellows will collect whatever is donated between now and Christmas and distribute to needy area families. Socks and mittens aren't the only items being accepted. People can also drop in and drop off new scarves and hats.

"The bank just wants to be involved and give to the community," said Rebecca Perzanowski, marketing assistant for Metrobank.

The items that Hoemke and company hung onto the tree were later taken down, Perzanowski said, and were placed into a box located next to the tree.

As of Thursday, the box was starting to fill up nicely.

Perzanowski said the main branch, at Grand River-Halsted, was the only Metrobank in the area doing the sock and mitten drive. But the effort could rotate to the two other Metrobanks in future years.

Meanwhile, another holiday endeavor involving Metrobank and the Goodfellows is coming to a close. The annual toy drive concludes on Tuesday at all three bank branches in Farmington and Farmington Hills. The toy drive is co-sponsored by the Goodfellows and Farmington Area Community Women.

On Thursday at the main branch, there were just a few remaining construction paper mittens and bells on the tree, each identifying a child needing a gift. A couple of the bells asked for wrapping paper, bows, tape, ribbons and/or name tags to be brought in for a needy family.

The participating branches of Metrobank are on Grand River at Halsted, Grand River east of Farmington Road and 12 Mile between Drake and Farmington roads.

Store from page A1

they were making what was likely their last visit to the market where prices were marked down 20 percent. A few customers picked up a few bulbs of straw offered for free in front of the store.

"It's too bad," said Elsie Wosch of Farmington Hills. "It's a shame," added Marion Duplesie, also of Farmington Hills.

Employees felt a similar grief. William Jones helped an elderly woman walk from the store by pushing a shopping cart. Jones, 78, who lives in Detroit, will move to Cattleman's Oak Park store.

"The customers don't like it; business was bad or something," said Jones before saying goodbye to another employee who will join him at the Oak Park location.

Al Schultz, 65, believes the Legionnaires' outbreak was a major factor in the closing.

"I think they got a damn dirty job," said Schultz, who joined Cattleman's after "retiring" from Kroger. "They are damn good people to work for. It's a good store; it's a good business."

Store officials weren't denying the Farmington store was a special place. A pair of workers who met there even decided to hold their wedding in the market.

"We would've loved to have that store be successful," Rohtbart said. "The customer base has been loyal, but it wasn't large enough."

Art from page A1

aged to conquer a few professions along the way, too.

She owned her public relations firm, building it up from a kitchen table top dream to a seven-staff operation with national clients. Michigan Consolidated Gas recruited her as an organizational consultant.

She also practiced business law, earning her juris doctorate at Wayne State University in the evening while she psycho-analyzed patients during the day.

She used to commute daily by motorcycle to Western Michigan University daily in order to achieve a master's degree in Counseling and Personnel. She also has her private pilot's license.

"I guess what all this says is that I'm interested in learning," she said.

During the next months, LePla-Perry will be busy leaving about the community. She wants to meet people and solicit their ideas about cultural arts.

Her office number - 473-9583 - is connected to a pager. "Even though (the job is) part-time, I think about it full-time," she said.

LePla-Perry even passed out programs at the city's holiday lighting ceremony at city hall just so she could talk to folks.

By her count, the area has 24 cultural arts groups. That doesn't include assorted artisans and musicians who perfect their muse privately.

"There's a lot of energy and there are a lot of people involved in the arts here in Farmington and Farmington Hills," said Hills City Manager Daniel Hobbs. "She's not going to substitute what's out there; She is going to enhance it."

Her bosses see LePla-Perry writing grants and knocking on doors to get money from foundations if necessary. "She has some wonderful contacts in the Detroit arts community," Hobbs said.

Business and the arts are not mutually exclusive, LePla-Perry said. Research shows for every dollar spent on arts events, another \$2.25 is spent on goods and services.

Another three-year study done by the National Assembly of Local Arts Agencies revealed non-profit arts is a \$36.8 billion industry in the U.S., which creates jobs and generates revenue for local, state and federal governments.

"What that says to me is that my assessment and recommendation is a focus on how cultural arts will be good for the businesses and economies of both cities," LePla-Perry said.

The economy didn't prompt her to take a part-time job; a lifelong pursuit and love of art did.

LePla-Perry accepted a buyout from Mich Con so she could spend more time with her 11-year-old daughter. Then, she saw an ad for the cultural arts position in a local newspaper.

The ideal candidate was someone with a strong arts background with an equal amount business savvy, who was willing to work part time. "She was definitely qualified in all those areas," Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff said.

LePla-Perry is revved up but focused.

"I embrace life," she said. "I believe in the power of the mind and the human spirit."

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