

Miracles flow

Donors honor injured teens during Red Cross blood drive

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

"Miracles happen," was the message on two large, white placards in the lobby at Farmington Hills Fire Station No. 5, where Friday's American Red Cross blood drive took place.

And late Friday afternoon, some of the donors and volunteers at the Orchard Lake-11 Mile station had the chance to see a walking, breathing miracle. One of two injured youngsters that the blood drive was honoring, Farmington High School student Melissa Garr, stopped by the fire station with her mother, Susan Garr, to say hello — and thanks.

"I read the story about Melissa in the paper and realized there was a need," said Farmington Hills resident Kathryn Fecher, snacking on fruit juice and cookies after donating early Friday afternoon.

Fecher left the station before Melissa visited. But she was still excited to hear that the teen

would be making an appearance. "I think it is great that she'll be here."

Another donor happy to give a pint of blood was Carl Gaiser of Farmington Hills. "I donate anyway, but this is a special effort."

The second injured teen being honored with the blood drive, 15-year-old Mark Nebus, was released last week from St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Ann Arbor, where he had been recovering from traumatic brain injuries sustained in a November automobile accident. His father is Farmington Hills police Commander Chuck Nebus.

Melissa, who went into a lengthy coma after being struck on the head by a fallen tree branch in July, in a freakish roadside accident, is expected to be released Wednesday from St. Joseph Mercy, said her father, Farmington Hills Fire Lt. Michael Garr. But Melissa will need to spend time in a to-be-determined health facility before being able to come home, Garr said Friday.

"We're negotiating with Health Alliance Plan" to find a suitable place for Melissa to continue her recovery, he added. The teen is continuing physical, speech and occupational therapy.

A similar blood drive honoring Melissa took place in September, when her recovery was iffy, at best. That day, 187

pints were collected, which helped nearly 600 patients. On Friday, around the halfway point, about 100 people had already donated. Among them were Lt. Garr, Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer and a law-enforcement colleague — West Bloomfield Police Chief Ronald Cronin.

Some of the Red Cross volunteers worked both of the blood drives, including Evelyn Cohen.

"In September, Melissa was still in a coma," said Cohen, who taught biology in the Clarenceville School District (which includes a portion of Farmington Hills) from 1957-90. "I don't even think she was doing hand signaling."

Friday's blood drive, Cohen said, is a gift of life, for both of them (Melissa and Mark).

Red Cross volunteer Carolyn Spangenberg called it "wonderful" that Melissa would be stopping by.

"I was here at the last one," Spangenberg said. "When she wasn't doing well. It's so wonderful that she's now doing so well." Efforts such as Friday's are always crucial, even more so at this time of year, said Red Cross donor representative Dinne Risko during an earlier interview.

"There will be no blood on the shelves because there are no drives on January 1st and there's only one scheduled for New Year's Eve, and we don't have a day's supply of blood," Risko said.

Bea & Bagel donated food for nurses and volunteer workers at the drive, while Great Harvest Bread Co. provided cookies to donors.



Helping the cause: Volunteer Gen Townsend of Farmington Hills reads packets for donors during Friday's blood drive.



STAFF PHOTO BY JEFF KIMBLE



Guest of honor: Melissa Garr (above), paid a special visit late Friday afternoon to the Farmington Hills Fire Station No. 5, where the American Red Cross held a blood drive in honor of both her and Mark Nebus. Left, Dave Walsh of Farmington Hills donates while nurse Susan Keomany explains paperwork.

Eating it up, even at \$6 a cookie

Cookie design business is sweet success for couple

BY GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

"If you would have told me five years ago that I would be making cookies I would have said you were crazy," Connie Carlson said.

She spoke amidst baskets of cookies of all shapes, sizes, colors and designs as the sweet smell of cooking dough drifted from the back room. A lot has happened to Connie in the past five years, including a stay at the Cookie College in Texas.

Now, Connie and husband Tom operate two Cookie by Design stores in Oakland County. One in Rochester Hills and one in West Bloomfield at 14 Mile and Farmington.

Cookies by Design is kind of like an edible flower shop except that it offers decorative baskets and bouquets of cookies baked on the premises.

The cookies are made in a wide variety of designs. There are Star of David cookies for bar mitzvahs, poinsettia cookies, animal shaped cookies, cookie menorahs for Hanukkah and little figures of all types.

Cookie bouquets can be designed for graduates, weddings, birthdays, holidays and any other occasion.

"We have standard designs, like baby bouquets and get wells," said Scott Carlson who helps manage the West Bloomfield outlet. "We can put any



STAFF PHOTO BY TOM HOFFMEYER

Designers: Connie Carlson and son Scott offer hundreds of patterns at Cookies by Design in West Bloomfield, near the Farmington Hills limit.

message on the cookies. We even can do specialized designs like company logos."

All the cookies are designed and made at the store and only natural ingredients with no preservatives are used, Connie said. Recently the store began using all kosher ingredients.

The standard cookie basket comes with seven cookies at a cost of \$6 a cookie. "But we do any size," Scott said.

While \$6 might seem like a lot for a cookie, consider that these are not merely baked dough. Each cookie is hand crafted with brilliant colors and intricate designs. Most resemble wall plaques.

"One woman shellacs them," Scott said. "She uses them for a centerpiece."

Many people say the cookies are too good to eat, Scott said. But those who do indulge speak highly of them.

"My whole family loves them," said Karen Blumberg of West Bloomfield. "We've been giving

them as gifts. And they taste great," she said.

The Cookies by Design in West Bloomfield opened last February. The Carlsons have operated their Rochester Hills store for more than three years and it proved to be so successful they branched to the second outlet.

As word spread about the cookies, business has been growing.

"About 80 percent of our business is done over the phone," Connie said. The store can deliver orders nearly anywhere, just like florists.

In fact, Connie said the store competes directly with florists, including having the same holiday rushes for orders.

The stores have been so successful the Carlsons are planning to open another store, possibly in Southfield. The West Bloomfield outlet employs about 15 full and part-time staffers.

Connie brought the family into the business. "I wanted to start a business," she said.

But she didn't know what kind. She was introduced to Cookies by Design when she bought a gift of some cookies for a friend.

"I thought it was the neatest thing," she said.

She learned that Cookies by Design is a national franchise operation. Not only did the company provide the basics to get started it sent Connie and her daughter-in-law to the company's Cookie College in Texas for a two-week course on cooking making and selling.

Even Nikki VanStrien, 8, pitches in, working behind the counter helping her mom when she's not munching on the stock.

"I like the gingerbread," she said.

Month honors board members

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

It's not always a glamorous job, being a school board member. But someone has to do it.

These often unheralded elected officials will get their due throughout January, during School Board Recognition Month. Districts throughout Michigan, including Farmington, are toasting board members for the jobs they do — volunteering to spend long hours toiling away for very small sums. This year's theme is "School Board Members: Shaping Our Children's Futures."

In Farmington, the school board will be honored during a reception prior to Tuesday's 7:30 p.m. regular meeting at the Lewis Schulman Administration Building. The reception, scheduled for 7:15 p.m., will feature student presentations from Farmington High School, Harrison High School, East Middle School, Power Middle School, Beechview and Forest elementary. In addition, representatives from the district's Special Olympics program, headquartered out of the Farmington Training Center, will recognize the school board.

According to Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield, the men and women who make up school boards tend to not get the credit they deserve.

"It's as important a form of

stewardship as there is," Maxfield said. "... Recognizing it once a year is something we ought to be doing once a month."

The role of a school board often is lost among the general public, which rarely come out to the polls to decide candidate elections, he noted. Only millages and bond issue elections tend to stir voter interest.

"It tends to be really under-regarded," Maxfield said, "and yet the wonderfully amazing thing is we tend to get wonderful people running for it. So, it's a mixed bag. There's a lack of (public) awareness and yet good people come forward."

The current Farmington school board consists of President Linda Enberg, Vice President Cathy Webb, Secretary Priscilla Brouillette, Treasurer Joe Svoke, and trustees Jack Inch, Bobbie Feldman and Frank Reid.

Enberg said Tuesday's reception is "kind of a nice surprise. We serve on the school board because we love children and care about this community. We certainly don't serve to be recognized. But it's nice to get a pat on the back once in a while for what we do."

Board members' contributions aren't lost on some residents interviewed at the Farmington Public Library on Tuesday.

"Good," said Nancy Vessell, when told the school board

members were being honored. "I have one child in Farmington schools and one who already graduated. We have been real happy with the education they got."

Denise Milne said school boards "should be honored, definitely. I think they do their best."

But one parent who won't be celebrating school boards is Ted Gruke.

He remains critical of the Farmington district several years after pulling his son out of Hillside Elementary School. And, said Gruke, school board members must accept responsibility for a good portion of that criticism because their decisions have such an impact on the direction a district takes.

"The curriculum is a failure," Gruke said. "They don't teach the basics."

Gruke yanked his son out of Hillside after his kindergarten year, and enrolled him into a private school, after he and his wife took a closer look at education at the school.

Asked about Gruke's criticism, Enberg said "I don't see it that way. My children received a wonderful education here and the majority of comments I get are that other parents feel the same way."

But Enberg said parents have every right to "make decisions they think are right for their family."

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