

Testing the water

High school hockey worth a shot



Hey, hey, Hockeytown; Farmington Public Schools is adding a high school hockey team. School board members approved a new pay-to-play high school hockey team Tuesday. It's something parents and students had requested, and with good reason. Hockey is a rigorous sport that can bring out the passions of competition, teamwork and sportsmanship both in players and fans like few other sports. For confirmation, just look down at "the Joe" and our NHL champion Detroit Red Wings.

Hockey is huge in the Farmington area, with estimates of about 1,000 players based at the city's own rink on Eight Mile through the Farmington Hills Hockey Association. Another new, private two-rink skating facility is also in the works. That kind of popularity is something proponents hope to capture for the good of the school district, with the possibility of adding separate teams for each high school if the program is judged a success based on budget and interest.

To play competitive hockey - whether in a house league, on a travel team or for high school - is costly, both in dollars and the investment of time, since finding ice time for practices and games often pushes youngsters late into the night hours.

Setting up a combined high school team in Farmington will allow 20 players (chosen based on skill level from the district's three high schools) to pay \$750 per season and play 24 games, according to the proposal. Cost to the district is budgeted at only \$7,000 - which covers the coaches' pay. The plan will allow the district to catch up to neighboring dis-

tricts, many of whom already offer high school hockey teams or are committed to begin next season.

For high school students with heavy homework schedules, the benefits of the high school proposal over the FHHA include fewer games, holding games and practices at earlier hours. It should also be noted that hockey is as safe or safer than baseball and football and that fighting, just as in these sports, isn't tolerated at the prep level.

There is one important drawback to the hockey proposal: This pay-to-play proposal sets a precedent for requiring a fee for district athletic competition and that very idea runs contrary to our nation's system of publicly financed, public education provided for students of all economic backgrounds.

Hockey is, however, acknowledged to be a very expensive sport, and the idea would have been dropped like a frozen puck if supporters had asked the district to pay the full freight on the hockey program. It's just too costly and others could argue that the community already offers hockey through the FHHA. The proponents have known from the start that pay-to-play is the only way it'll work - and even that includes a large amount of money being raised through donations and fund-raising. In addition, the district should require that players who want to play and have the ability to earn a spot on the team but cannot afford the \$750 fee should find booster club support or some money available to help make up part or all of the fee.

Given the groundswell of interest and support this hockey proposal has behind it, the school board's interest in testing the water now is a good idea.

We need a local phone company

What southeastern Michigan needs is a good, local telephone company. What it has is Chicago-based Ameritech striving to be a telecommunications behemoth.

After raising its public coin phone rate 40 percent - from 25 cents to 35 - Ameritech decided to use its telephone business to subsidize other endeavors. It wooed cable television customers with coupons with a face value of up to \$120 that could be redeemed toward home telephone service. So slick did Ameritech's marketers get that they didn't call them coupons; they called them "Ameritech Checks."

Now, it is standard procedure that every part of a business be a profit center. If the telephone portion of the Ameritech is to redeem cable customers' coupons, it follows that other phone customers must pick up the slack.

It was too much for even the Michigan Public Service Commission, which has tended to be the willing tool of the companies it is supposed to regulate.

MPSC on Dec. 19 issued a cease and desist order against Ameritech under the Michigan Telecommunications Act. Ironically, Ameritech was nailed for violating a law its own lobbyists had drafted.

The best comment came from the group that filed the complaint, the Michigan Cable Telecommunications Association. Said Executive Director Colleen McNamara: "When we first made Ameritech aware they were in violation of the law, they should have pulled the plug on this promotion. Instead they actually increased their efforts."

"They developed a 'catch me if you can' attitude, but you can't run in front of the law forever," McNamara said.

Ohio's Public Utilities Commission nailed Ameritech for a similar practice.

The local phone company hasn't hesitated to leap into the long-distance business, too. The sequence of events:

A federal court in Texas on Dec. 31 granted

two regional "baby Bells," SBC and US West, clearance to enter the \$80 billion long-distance calling market. William Kennard, chair of the Federal Communications Commission, immediately announced FCC will appeal to the higher courts.

Ameritech wasn't part of the Texas case. Without waiting for the appeal to be decided, Ameritech on Jan. 5 filed a motion to be included in the Texas lawsuit. Before the copying machine had cooled, Ameritech was soliciting southeastern Michigan customers to use the Ameritech Calling Card for all local, long distance and international calls.

"Put this card in your wallet and throw away your other calling cards," it said.

(It's a messy operation. You have to dial 11 Ameritech numbers, the 11 digits of the number you're calling, and the 14 digits of your home telephone and "pin" number - 36 digits in all.)

Now, the last we heard, long-distance companies were fighting Ameritech's entry into their market because Ameritech has refused to open its local market to competitors.

Telephone customers can get tough competition between AT&T, Sprint, MCI and a host of smaller companies. The market neither requires nor needs Ameritech's presence.

Ameritech is into home phones, business phones, car phones, cell phones and pagers. It also is fighting a lawsuit by bail bond companies angry at paying for Yellow Pages ads when Ameritech no longer puts directories in pay phone booths, where most people who need bail bonds call from.

What southeastern Michigan needs is a good, local telephone company that will do its core business well. It doesn't need the catch-me-if-you-can tactics of Ameritech's army of lawyers and lobbyists.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

40 YEARS AGO - JAN. 23, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

The Greater Farmington Chamber of Commerce unveiled its new slogan to promote trading at home and working together: "Think Farmington - Buy Farmington - Be Farmington."

Farmington City Council members unanimously approved a rezoning of a lot of Bel-Aire Subdivision to allow a new bowling

alley after the owners volunteered to restrict the use to bowling for the next five years.

25 YEARS AGO - JAN. 24, 1973

A hearing was scheduled for a \$3 million, 14-acre shopping center to be anchored by Kmart at Halsted and Grand River.

2 YEARS AGO - JAN. 22, 1996

An appeals court decision gave a Farmington Hills church the right to open its doors for the homeless, ruling that religious freedom was the issue rather than zoning.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What act of kindness have you done for someone recently?



Eric Rosenberg
fourth grade



Caryn Blaszcak
third grade



Shelly Robertson
fourth grade



Danny Dayner
second grade

We asked this question at Beechview Elementary where students are practicing acts of kindness.

LETTERS

Kudos to Richard

I want to thank the Farmington Observer and Tim Richard for their excellent coverage of state government.

For those of us who strongly support public schools, it is wonderful to find the Observer covering meetings of the Michigan State School Board as well as most recently the report on Paul DeWeese and Teach Michigan.

According to your article, Paul DeWeese has announced his resignation as chair of Teach Michigan. He also states that the petition drive to amend the state constitution to allow vouchers and parochialism "is really not anywhere."

And yet ... DeWeese's December fund-raising letter asks members to sign a petition supporting district, charter, independent, faith-based and home schools and to attend an Educational Summit in Detroit on Jan. 31 dealing with "parental choice."

Marian McCracken
Farmington

Injustice to florist

As a resident of Farmington since 1955 and as a customer of the Farmington Center Florist, I am appalled that they are being forced out of "their home" and made to move to another location in the Downtown Center. I have known Linda and her mother since they opened their shop almost 28 years ago. I am at a loss to understand why a newcomer should be given priority and cannot lease another location in the center. It seems to me that a long-standing Farmington business should have the option of whether to re-locate or remain in their current location, and certainly have the consideration of the Farmington City Council. I guess it's the same old story, greed instead of loyalty to a business that has brought revenue to our city for many years. I will remain a loyal customer of the Farmington Center Florist in spite of this injustice and I wish them well.

Pat Thoresen
Farmington

Commissioner commended

As a veteran observer of many a Planning Commission and City Council meeting, I heard something last month that made me sit up, take notice, and cheer. During the Dec. 18 Planning Commission public hearing, Commissioner (David) Haron threw down the gauntlet before a proponent. He was tired of having proposals placed before the Planning Commission in which information required by ordinances was either omitted or inappropriately scattered throughout the proposal.

The Planning Commission and City Council make decisions for the residents that are often

legally binding. However, unlike a court setting, the "discovery" stage is spelled out through our ordinances.

When a proposal is inadequately prepared and presented several things happen. A great deal of time is wasted, frustration grows, and the danger of making bad decisions increases. Non-compliance with the details of ordinances forces repeated reviews by the Engineering Department, the Planning Department, and causes duplication of Vilcan Leman and Associates reports and appearances. Tabling of issues results in repeated hearings before the Planning Commission and City Council; it is a waste of time, money, and energy. Worst of all, the residents are forced to endure behavior that they would not tolerate at their place of business.

This resident commends Commissioner Haron for pointing out what others have observed or felt for some time; valuable resources are being wasted when proposals are presented which fail to comply with the spirit and details of Farmington Hills ordinances.

Fran Valley
Farmington Hills

Longacre House mistake

A small misconception needs correction. Willie Payne plans two programs at the Longacre House on Feb. 1. The information about the program stated that the Longacre House was on the Underground Railroad. The house itself was not in existence before or during the Civil War at the time the Underground Railroad was significant.

The Civil War was over in 1865 and the portion of the Longacre House built by Palmer Sherman was c. 1867, two years after the Civil War.

During the Civil War, Palmer Sherman and his family lived in the little white Greek Revival house that now stands in the service area of Heritage Park and can be seen from the Longacre grounds. The house originally stood in the current driveway of the Longacre property.

At the time Palmer Sherman ran a farm there were barns to the south of the current house.

It was in those days that runaway slaves were given shelter.

The Longacre property probably was used on the Underground Railroad when Palmer Sherman was asked to aid Nathan Power in his humanities work as conductor on the Underground Railroad.

The penalties for helping were so great that anyone who aided escapees was a hero.

Farmington has a history of high moral standards and concern for the less fortunate.

Ruth Mochlman
Farmington Hills

Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power