

Observer captures 2 national awards

Suburban Newspapers of America has honored the Farmington Observer with two awards in the SNA's 1997 Editorial Contest.

The honors were among the 24 captured by the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers in the annual contest which judged entries based on the newspaper's circulation class.

Farmington reporter Tim Smith's "Back to School" series on Farmington Public Schools took second place in the category of Best Coverage of Local Education/School District. Photos were by Bryan Mitchell.

The series included coverage of a school district workshop to rev up the teaching staff, a check of the bus fleet, a pre-start of school picnic for staffers and Smith's on-the-scene reporting of the first day of school for a new principal and how she responded to parental complaints of an overcrowded classroom at William Grace Elementary.

Smith's reporting along with an editorial endorsement on the Farmington School District's second try at passing a bond issue to expand and improve facilities collected third-place honors for Best Local Election Coverage for the Farmington paper.

Other O&E award winners that are regularly part of the Farmington Observer include:

- The O&E's Business & Finance section edited by Margaret O'Brien captured third-place recognition.
- Columnist Judith Doner Berne took third place for Best Column Writing.



Tim Smith

Hills employee has Wright stuff

By LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

There's the cynical, burned out, back-biting workplace depicted in Dilbert cartoons and countless TV sitcoms.

Then, there is the office world in which Pam Wright flourishes.

There, the only teeth gnashing is likely to be on one of the cookies she's baked. If someone is sniffing behind a co-worker's back, it's usually to take a whiff of the flower bouquet she's clipped from the garden.

Wright's fast track career goal is to keep her feet moving right where she is. When it comes to having the ideal job, "I'm there," she said.

Such zeal led to the secretary in the Farmington Hills city manager's office being named outstanding employee of the year. Wright was honored with other workers before Farmington Hills City Council Jan. 12.

"Half the job is the people you work with," said Wright, who has been with the city for 20 years. "The other half is the 80,000 people you serve."

In her tenure, Wright started as a fill-in employee answering phones when there was an ice

storm in 1978. She continued to work on temporary basis while her three children were in elementary school.

Previously, she taught business education in Berkley schools and was a secretary at Ford Motor Co. She'd deferred any thoughts of returning to full-time work, but stepped in when the city manager's position opened 1 1/2 years ago.

The arrangement works out fine. Wright carools with her husband and daughter daily.

Her husband, George, is a religious education teacher at Mercy High where her daughter, Katie, is also a sophomore. Her oldest daughter, Colleen, attended Mercy and, coincidentally, had her father as a teacher.

The Farmington resident firmly believes the teachings of positive thinking. She'll ingest a reading from philosopher Norman Vincent Peale or the Bible to start her day.

She typically clips an inspiring quote from political or religious to share with coworkers.

Her favorite is one from Mother Teresa who said, "We are not asked to do great things; only small things with great love."

The little things are what peo-



STAFF PHOTO BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Year's best:
Pam Wright, secretary in the Farmington Hills city manager's office, often takes flowers to work.

ple who work with Wright notice most.

"The best way to describe Pam is the way she answers the phone, 'Hello this is Pam; How can I can I help you?'" said Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi. "We really appreciate that kind of attitude."

Her boss, City Manager Daniel Hobbs, is no less glowing.

"Pam is a continual ray of sunshine in our workday," Hobbs said. "She is the model to others of being cheerful and upbeat."

Wright shares the warm ray of compliments with others, whom she refers to as a "great team."

Her job allows her to see the inside of what's happening city wide. She also delights in fielding calls - even the angry ones - from residents and finding them the right person to talk with.

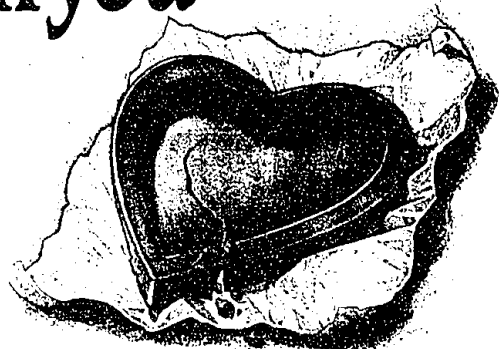
No matter what the situation, she said the formula is simple: Be friendly, helpful and always keep a smile.

"Sometimes that's all it takes," she said.

Other outstanding Farmington Hills employees honored were: Edward Gardiner, Planning & Community Development; Paul Ignash, Public Services Department/Public Works; Walter Karolak, Public Services Department/Engineering; Marianne Osikowicz, Police Department; Sheryl Smartt, City Clerk's Office; Mary Jo Stemple, Central Services; and David Tietmeyer, Video Production.

Farmington Hills' Public Safety Officers of the Year were: William Maffessoli, police officer, and Michael Kish, fire department inspector.

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