

Keep rolling

Ban shouldn't end teens' role here

Now that skateboards can no longer roll downtown, the debate — if there really was one — over the ban has also ground to a halt.

Much can still be learned from this exercise. Yes, the Farmington City Council banned skateboarding downtown, following in line with similar ordinances in Royal Oak and Birmingham.

And yes, that means any teen caught performing skateboard stunts on the central business district's sidewalks or curbs will be warned and then fined anywhere from \$25 to \$100.

The issue shouldn't end there. Those who make the laws should recognize that these youngsters with baggy jeans, chains dangling and hats worn backwards have a place in town, too.

Their sport or hobby isn't exactly Pop Warner football or bantam hockey, but it deserves an adequate platform. Likewise, teens should be more aware how their behavior and that of their peers affect others around them.

That's why it was encouraging to hear city officials talk about possibly forming a task force to look into finding a suitable — and now legal — place for skateboarders to practice.

Our fear when this ordinance was rolled out was that skateboarders were an easy target: For the most part, they are teens whose style of dress and nocturnal nature isn't befitting the cover of "Boy's Life."

It wouldn't be a stretch to conclude some business owners and customers are uncomfortable and perhaps even intimidated by these teens and their boards. The city would never want, say, in-line skating banned downtown even though it can be just as dangerous



STAFF PHOTO BY BRADON LEMMONS

A place to roll: Teenagers made a case for someplace to skateboard in town before Farmington council members banned the boards downtown. Vandalism since then shouldn't end the potential to find a place for skateboarders in town.

or disruptive to pedestrians. That's because adults enjoy that sport, whereas skateboarding is strictly a teen thing.

Of course, acts of vandalism like those reported last week after the ban was approved only help fuel the hooligan stereotype that folks pin onto skateboarders. Those offenders should be dealt with and made to pay for damages.

But let's separate acts of destruction, which should be dealt with directly, from the activity of skateboarding. Not all skateboarders are vandals.

Such behavior is not in line with those skateboard enthusiasts who spoke before city council. Those teens are to be commended for their conviction and courage.

It's difficult enough for a well-spoken adult to go before an audience that includes public officials, yet members of this group did so eloquently and politely.

Talks between these teens and adults shouldn't dead end with an ordinance; that should be only a jumping-off point.

Press ensures integrity in court

Honorable judges in courts throughout the land, please take note.

This is just a reminder, as gentle as we can make it: Courts are public property and the public needs to know, has every right to know, the details of the cases decided therein.

Therefore, court proceedings should not be closed to the public or the press, which "acts as a segment of the public in guaranteeing the openness and integrity" of the judicial system.

The words are those of Blair Moody Jr., State Supreme Court justice, who in 1980 wrote the high court's opinion that a judge may close criminal proceedings to the public only under extraordinary circumstances when no other alternatives exist to protect the rights of the accused.

"It is important that citizens be free to observe court proceedings to insure a sense of confidence in the judicial process," Moody's opinion continued.

And just how do the majority of citizens observe? Through words and pictures provided by the media, print and electronic, of course. We are the eyes and ears of the public.

In the late 1980s, the Michigan Supreme



Court modified its long-standing rule against cameras in court. Justice James H. Brickley was a promoter of the change.

We reiterate the high court's opinions — and stress the visual aspect — at this time in light of a decision Feb. 13 by James P. Sheehy, veteran judge of the 52-3 District Court in Rochester Hills.

Sheehy said "no way" to cameras and tape recorders at the preliminary examination of a Rochester Hills teen charged with first-degree murder in the shotgun slaying of his younger sister.

The high-profile case had attracted the expected crowd of media-types from the Detroit-area newspapers and radio and TV stations. The judge's decision didn't raise many eyebrows; he seldom allows cameras in his courtroom.

Sheehy said his decisions about cameras have been based on a need to keep decorum in the courtroom and a lack of space.

Granted, most local courtrooms are small. How about pool setup — one still and one TV camera. It's better than nothing.

And let's make sure that, when cameras are allowed, the rules are followed so that decorum is maintained.

The Supreme Court has spoken on open courts and cameras. It's important for the courts and the press to work together to implement the finding.

872 students were enrolled in kindergarten.

25 YEARS AGO — FEB. 28, 1973

The Farmington Community Center was preparing to launch its annual fund drive, an attempt to raise \$26,000 in voluntary contributions to supplement the \$132,000 annual budget. The center's budget included no tax money, with revenue from tuition, rental fees and other events.

2 YEARS AGO — FEB. 26, 1995

A public hearing was planned on an oil drilling proposal by Westbay Exploration Company in the southwest corner of Farmington Hills.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

40 YEARS AGO — FEB. 27, 1958 (ENTERPRISE) Farmington School officials said they were planning for the future — and the need to build and equip more elementary schools — by asking voters for a \$1.5 million bond issue next month. Even as voters mulled that increase, school construction was in progress using \$4 million in bonds.

authorized only one year earlier. To point out the growing need, Superintendent G. V. Harrison noted that 182 students were expected to graduate that year (1957) while

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What was your most memorable moment from the Olympics?



"When Tara Lipinski won the gold medal. She had a lot of enthusiasm on her face and it showed."

Kristin Wimmer
Farmington



"The moguls. They have to be balanced, coordinated, flexible, all in one."

Christi Doot
Farmington



"When the Czech Republic beat Russia. I had heard on NPR (inaccurately) that morning that Russia had won."

Fran Zakalik
Farmington Hills



"The most exciting was to see Hermann Maier crash and then go on to win gold."

Simon Zakalik
Farmington Hills

PAC-king it on

After reading Rep. Raczkowski's guest editorial about voter apathy several weeks ago, I began to think, "What a wonderful editorial. It encourages people to get active and make political change happen for themselves."

Then I began to think about the real reason for voter apathy: cynicism. For as long as I can remember, some politicians have promised to change the ills of government then once elected, profit from the very things they promised to change. Some have even had the audacity to adorn and exaggerate their pasts to get elected.

Unfortunately, Rep. Raczkowski is no different. In 1986, he bragged, "I fought for my country during the Gulf War."

It was later revealed he never went to the Gulf but was an Army Reservist stationed in Ft. Benning, Ga. He even lied about having a master's degree from Central Michigan University. Rep. Raczkowski also promised not to take campaign contributions from special interest groups by saying "I don't believe politicians should be bought and sold. I pledge I will not take PAC money or I will not seek re-election."

While assuring the public in July of 1996, he would not be bought and sold, he had already received \$6,000 from special interest groups. Andrew Raczkowski continued to accept money from these groups even as he was preparing his first legislative update last spring saying, "I continue my policy of not allowing lobbyists to buy me lunch."

According to his annual campaign finance report for 1997, he allowed them to do more than just buy him lunch. Roughly 90 percent of the contributions to his campaign account came from special interest groups. Examples like these are the reason why people are cynical of political promises and politicians; politicians, who feel compelled to exploit the dryness of our souls and pander to our fears of government and society then profit by the very things they claim to oppose. There is nothing wrong with accepting money from various PACs to finance costly political campaigns. The problem is the hypocrisy of saying you oppose the evils of special interest groups while they quietly slip cash into your pocket.

The late speaker of the House, Sam Rayburn, said "Any man who deceives the voters during a political campaign, will certainly deceive them after being elected." We, the people may have failed to listen to Sam Rayburn's warning, but we have learned the lesson the hard way.

Stephen Dibert
Farmington Hills

A challenge on drug rehab

There is no drug rehabilitation in the Oakland County jail. No drug user sent to

Oakland County jail for drug use, marijuana or other, has ever been rehabilitated from their addiction in this jail, not one single person. So why keep sending these people to jail? They spend some time in jail, get released, probably lose their jobs if they had one, are charged \$65 a day for their keep, get a black mark on their records which helps prevent them from obtaining employment, go back out on the streets with no or underemployment, no chance of rehabilitation, steal to continue their addiction, then return to jail. Our laws regarding drug use do nothing except continue the path of a never-ending circle leading nowhere.

Drug users are mentally ill persons, not when they started using drugs, but the addiction makes them mentally ill. Do mentally ill persons need to be sent to jail, or should they be sentenced to treatment where they will receive counseling and medication? I am fully aware of the Farmington Area Counseling Centers and Advisory Council on Middlebelt and on Orchard Lake roads to where the 47th District Court judges order various types of offenders for counseling and rehabilitation. The problem is, as noble, well-meaning and valiant as the efforts for this type treatment certainly is, it just does not work, with the tiny exception of a relatively few.

Anyone who has had to deal with the problems of persons or relatives who are mentally ill knows that counseling alone almost never works. But it does work in conjunction with medication, psychiatrists and highly-educated case workers. And I repeat: Drug use causes mental illness.

I know that our 47th District Court judges, probation officers, police Chief William Dwyer, City Manager Daniel Hobbs, Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi and the entire Farmington Hills city council have serious concerns regarding the problem of drug use. Therefore, I hereby challenge these individuals to get together and begin to try to find another path which can better help resolve the problem. We know from long experience what is being done now just does not work, so why not make the effort to try something different?

Kenneth Kemp
Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Letters can be faxed to (248) 477-9722. Or, they can be emailed to dvarga@oe.hometown.com.net

Farmington Observer

DAVE VARGA, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450
SUSAN ROSEN, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149
HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118
KATHY HIRSCHFIELD, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 248-901-2501
LARRY GIGER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234
BARBARA M. DISHMON, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252
RICK FIORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JOHN REDDY, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD AGNINIAN, PRESIDENT
Our Mission: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power