

Chiefs proclaim state of cities, schools: Excellent

Audience enjoys business/education links, staff diversity moves

BY DAVE VARGA
STAFF WRITER

Excellent. That was the prognosis rendered by leaders of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Farmington Public Schools.

Officials of those three public services told Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce members about their accomplishments at an annual "state of the cities" breakfast Tuesday at the Costick Center.

After the reports, a few folks in the audience were asked to pick out the message they remembered best.

Ed Hodges of the Boisford General Hospital board of directors focused on the references to business/education partnerships highlighted by Superintendent Bob Maxfield.

Hodges said back in 1987 after Detroit's "civil disturbances" he was working at Michigan Bell when he conceived the idea of businesses working with students to "enrich education and prepare kids for the world of work."

Farmington's school district currently using partnerships with businesses such as TRW, Botsford and others. "How it got to Farmington," Hodges said, "I'm not sure, but I'm very pleased it has."

Attorney Dan Darnell of MacLean, Proppe, MacLean & Darnell in Farmington Hills also pointed to the business/school partnerships as a highlight. Although he admitted they require a lot of work, they're important.

"I am very impressed," Darnell said, "with Farmington Board of Education's involvement with business community. It has long been needed."

A different school-related message caught the ear of Ray Randolph of Randolph Marketing. He was impressed by the district's efforts to hire minority staff to reflect the minority makeup of the district.

"Being a minority and listening to what's being done to actually reflect the community in the district, I think that was exciting," Randolph said.

Hills hits honors

The report by Farmington Hills City Manager Daniel Hobbs focused on a winning year, led by the city police department taking state and national honors for its community policing program. Most importantly, the department saw significant reductions in "major crime categories" in the first three-quarters of last year, Hobbs said.

The fire department's biggest news

was the new 24-hour Fire Station No. 5, which means firefighters are getting to fires faster than before. Chief Rich Marinucci was also elected president of the International Association of Fire Chiefs.

Last year also brought voter approval to a renewed tax for Parks and Recreation and a vote to preserve Woodland Hills Park. Still, Hobbs said, the city's tax rate hasn't risen. "A 'no tax increase' doesn't happen automatically or easily ... It means having to sacrifice some things that we would like to have in order to focus on things we must have ..."

One of those musts, Hobbs said, is the newly installed network of 265 computers for city, police and fire offices. This new technology will help the city better handle, for example, 10,000 recreation program registrations at different locations.

"That's different people, different programs, dealing with refunds, checking to see if classes still have openings, etc. These 10,000 recreation registrations are currently done manually," Hobbs said.

Planning ahead

Downtown Farmington's future is get-

ting two close looks, according to City Manager Frank Lauffhoff.

One is a visioning project asking the community's view of the downtown of the future; the other is a 10-year central business district plan created by the Farmington Downtown Development Authority.

They should give the city a target. "It doesn't mean we're going to get there; it's a direction of travel," Lauffhoff said.

A dozen aesthetic and functional projects lend off the DDA plan, and once the city finishes its visioning project, Lauffhoff said, "The DDA will blend the two together and see where they over-



STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LARSEN

Good message: Tom Bloom of H.A. Smith Lumber applauds during the chamber's State of the Cities breakfast Tuesday morning.

Farmington addresses are popular for business, Lauffhoff noted. Street-level retail space is basically full downtown, and industrial property is 100 percent leased. "This is a prime time to take advantage of or economic climate and

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Life-saving skills, work ethic merit firefighter honors

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER

To hear 1998 VFW and Optimists Club Firefighter of the Year honoree Stephen Biebel tell it, the Farmington Hills Fire Department deserves an award, not him.

"They educated us like you wouldn't believe," he says. "They teach you how to react. Basically, I took what I learned and applied it. And now they give you an award. What a great organization."

But humility isn't the only thing the 37-year-old Biebel has going for him, says his boss at Station 4, District Fire Chief Richard Levine.

Honored jointly Feb. 14 by the VFW and Optimists Club for his career contributions - even though he's only been with the fire department seven years - Biebel is an "extremely reliable person" whose work ethic, says Levine, "is right up at the top."

He's known to co-workers and neighbors as a mechanically-skilled guy who happily makes himself and his abilities as a firefighter, emergency medical services technician, training instructor and even metal fabricator available when needed.

"He does it all. He's the optimum paid-on-call firefighter," says the station's chief.

In the last year, Biebel's earned two life-saving awards. His crucial question - "Did she eat anything recently?" - led to the suctioning of an orange from the throat of an elderly woman who'd stopped breathing. He also is credited with reviving a young woman who had overdosed.

Biebel, who stops and renders aid wherever it's needed, once saved a neighbor's son when he calmly took over for the distraught father after the man had pulled the non-breathing boy from their backyard pool.

Besides the life-saving awards, he's also won two unit citations, certificates of merit and appreciation and many citizens' letters of commendation.

"He's a very personable individual who deals very well with the public," says Deputy Fire

Chief Pete Baldwin. "He has a very good 'bedside manner,' if you will."



Stephen Biebel

A n d Levine can rely on Biebel for good information at emergencies: "He has a real good handle on what needs to be done."

With the department since 1990, Biebel continued as a paid-on-call even after becoming full-time in '96 - one of 14 of the department's 26 careerists to do so.

Thus, he's available 24 hours a day, says Levine, who's known Biebel since '90. "When the beepers go off, he's there."

And when Station 4 got its new ladder truck, Biebel used his pre-firefighter, metal-fabricator training to build a long tool drawer on rollers for easy access from either side of the truck.

Now a sergeant, Biebel has been a training officer for two years "and he does a very thorough and excellent job with that," says Levine.

He's also completed his fire inspector's training and has volunteered as a department representative on the Western Wayne County Hazardous Incident Response Team.

Biebel "has taken every opportunity to contribute," says Deputy Chief Pete Baldwin. "He works very hard. It's not just a job to him. He's very dedicated to the organization and being a part of its ongoing improvement."

Biebel, married and father to a five-year-old daughter, says his job is "very rewarding."

His late father, Ed, a Detroit firefighter, "always used to tell me, 'It's a clean living, and as much as you can apply yourself, it's not a bad way to go.'"

It's called "the most dangerous profession in the world," Biebel says, "but when it comes right down to it, the only danger is when you put yourself into danger."

Police host 'internal theft' seminar

The Farmington Hills Police Department will sponsor a seminar for area businesses on "Internal Theft" from 9-11 a.m. Wednesday, March 11, at the William Costick Center on 11 Mile in Farmington Hills.

Speaking will be Jose Ortiz, an expert on the subject. Continental breakfast will be served, and registration at 8:30 a.m. For reservations call Juliet McGlinch at 473-9637 by March 1.

Smart pet contest

Is your pet a four-legged Einstein? Here's your chance to show off your pet's brilliance,

and be eligible for a first prize worth \$500, while helping a good cause at the same time. The Michigan Humane Society and the Farmington Hills Pet Supplies "Plus" store are inviting all dog and cat owners to enter their furry friends in the second annual "Smartest Pet In Detroit" contest.

Simply submit a short (2 minutes or less) VHS tape that shows why your dog or cat is the smartest animal around, and drop it off at any Detroit-area Pet Supplies store by 5 p.m. Sunday, March 8.

The contest's top three winners will also appear on the Michigan Humane Society's PETelethon, which runs from noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, March 15 on UPN TV-50.

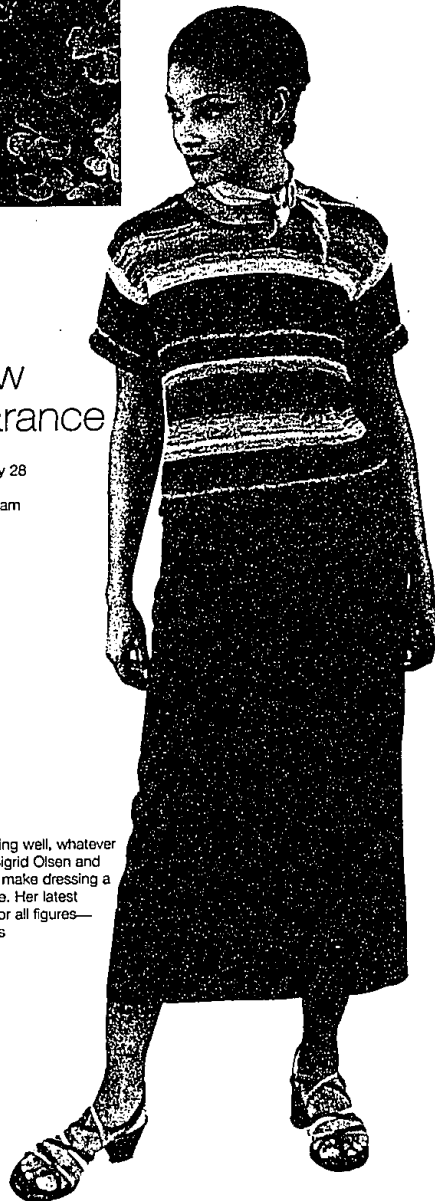
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