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IN THE PAPER TODAY

Making way: Plans to ease traffic congestion at M51/Grand River mean the demolition of a furniture store on one corner./A2

COMMUNITY LIFE



Serving time: Volunteers really drive the Farmington area Meals on Wheels program. Above, Edith Greshover of Farmington Hills welcomes her meal./B1

AT HOME

Speaking English: A designer explains how the English style of decor can be anyone's cup of tea, as it features a sense of history as well as fun./D8

ENTERTAINMENT

Music: The annual St. Patrick's Day Irish Fest at Westland's Hellenic Center features 60 musicians and dancers./E1

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Few appeal rates - review boards bored

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER

'It was almost spooky last week.'

Dean Babb
-assessor,
Farmington Hills

Proposal A's cap on property-tax increases is making members of boards of assessment-review in the Farmingtons this year feel like the Maytag washing machine repairman in the TV commercials. They're lonely.

"This is my 26th board of review" including those in other cities, said Dean Babb, Farmington Hills assessor, "and I don't ever remember it being this light."

He was referring to the roughly 100 appeals from residential and business-property owners scheduled before the board during its Monday-through-Wednesday session.

"It's incredibly light... with the exception of the 1992 assessment freeze, it's the lightest I've had."

Babb's counterpart, Assessor John G. Sailer of the City of Farmington, said only about 18 were scheduled there, down from 71 last year.

He even created a chart showing a huge, but steady, decline in appeals - a more than 75 percent drop just since 1993, when

Please see REVIEW, A2

To Russia with ... American music

Harrison band readies for journey

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The Harrison High School auditorium stage is a long way from Tchaikovsky Hall in Russia. But junior clarinet player Jonathan Bjorklund can't wait until he can say he played the affecting "Pines of Rome" in both places.

He only has to wait until June.

Bjorklund and 61 classmates in Harrison's Symphony Band and Select Chamber Ensemble, director Mark Phillips and 23 parents are gearing up for a once-in-a-lifetime trek to Moscow and St. Petersburg June 13-24. While there, they will take part in a unique cultural exchange program, at the invitation of the Ministry of Culture, Russian Federation. They also will perform in some of Russia's hallowed musical venues.

Following a recent rehearsal of "Pines of Rome" at Harrison, several students and Phillips gushed about the opportunity to play in another country, where symphonic music is revered and not ignored.

"I think it's really amazing," said senior flutist Christine McLean. "It's a unique opportunity we wouldn't have otherwise. I'll have the chance to play in music halls and places that are pretty famous."

Bjorklund was in complete agreement. "I'm really excited. Almost nobody gets to do this."

Junior Scott Precop, who plays the bass and contra alto, clarinet, said he's looking forward to meeting people

Please see BAND, A4



Giving direction: Mark Phillips, instrumental music director at Harrison High School, leads the symphony band during a rehearsal.



Getting the sound: Junior Scott Precop on alto contra bass clarinet and senior Jamie Swartz on bassoon perform during a rehearsal for the trip to Russia.

Judge Marla Parker puts bid for 2nd term in drive

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER

Calling her first term on the bench "a very rewarding experience," 47th District Court Judge Marla E. Parker has decided to seek re-election in November.

A campaign-kickoff reception for Parker, who was the district court magistrate before being elected judge in 1992, will be 5:30-7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 24, at Glen Oaks Country Club, 30500 W. 13 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

Tickets at \$100 each will be sold at the door or can be purchased in advance by calling (248) 661-2684.

The 47th District Court serves both Farmington and Farmington Hills and Parker shares an annual docket of 40,000 civil and criminal cases with Judge Frederick L. Harris. The two preside over civil suits up to \$25,000, traffic and criminal cases in the Farmingtons and preliminary examinations in felony cases.



Judge Marla Parker

Parker, named in January to a two-year term as the 47th's chief judge, won her seat by defeating John McDonald in a spirited 1992 campaign. She said she won't know until the May 12 filing deadline "what any opposing candidate might do, but I feel one should be prepared - and I will be."

In seeking a new six-year term, Parker said it is both "an honor and a very rewarding experience to make a difference in a community" by serving on its judiciary "and I would like to continue to make a difference every day."

She said she feels the distinction between being a judge and being an attorney is, "I have the opportunity to make a greater difference. I have a chance to do what I think is right, which is different from being an advocate" for only one side in a legal action.

Told she has gained a reputation in some quarters as a judge who hands out stiff sentences to criminals with a smile, Parker chuckled.

"In each case, I try to impose a sentence to make a difference - to punish the guilty for what they have done wrong, to rehabilitate them and to get the message to others in the community" that such criminal activity "is wrong." Sentences also are designed "to

Please see BID, A4

It's for the birds

Chris Gardner, owner of Gardner's Nature Designs and weekly columnist of "For the Birds," shows how easy it is for homeowners to create an inviting habitat for birds in their own yard.

The program includes slides, handout materials and an opportunity to ask questions, and takes place 7:30 p.m. Thursday, March 19, at Wild Birds Unlimited. The store is at 29405 W. 12 Mile Road and Middlebelt in the Rainbow Square shopping plaza. The program is free of charge but reservations

FARMINGTON FOCUS

tions are required. Seating is limited. Reservations can be made by calling (248) 471-7334.

GOP gathering

U.S. Sen. Spencer Abraham will be the keynote speaker at the Farmington Area Republican Club's

FARMINGTON'S FAVORITES

People who live or work in Farmington or Farmington Hills are invited to help choose Farmington's Favorites with one vote each. Please fill out the entire form to ensure your vote is counted. Address and phone number will be kept confidential.

BEST
BAGEL

■ Nomination for best place to get a bagel:

■ Tell us why:

■ Favorite flavor:

■ Person nominating:

■ Address:

■ City:

■ Where you work:

■ Daytime phone:

To fax in your vote:

471-9122

To mail in your vote:

Farmington Observer

33411 Grand River

Farmington, MI 48335

Deadline:

Wednesday, March 24

5 p.m.

Pick
your
faves

We're looking for Farmington's Favorites - a new feature where readers select the best things in town.

This month, we're asking readers to tell us who makes the best bagel in either Farm-

ington or Farmington Hills.

Then, we'll report the results and tell you about the winning bagel maker. Remember, one vote per person who lives or works here. Bon appetit!

- Dave Vargo, editor

annual dinner at the Longacre House, 24705 Farmington Road, Farmington Hills.

Tickets are \$34.95 a person, with cocktails at 6:30 p.m. and dinner at 7:30 p.m. featuring hors d'oeuvres, sweets and cash bar. For tickets, call 477-8404.

Blood drive

First Presbyterian Church of Farmington, 11 Mile and Farmington roads, will have a blood drive 2-8 p.m. Monday, March 16. Call Bill Zimmerman at (313) 625-9226 to make an appointment.

