

Stub it out

Effort to end kids' smoking laudable

Smoking is bad. We know that. Yet an increasing number of teens continue to light up as a new generation of smokers is born. This is alarming at the national and local level.

Farmington Hills police decided to put the heat on retailers who sell cigarettes to minors. The department's first-ever sting netted 20 offenders. Two decoys, a teenage girl and boy, went into gas stations, party stores and pharmacies in attempt to buy cigarettes.

In nearly two-thirds of the cases, they were sold the smokes without question or identification. It's against the law to sell cigarettes to minors. Offenders were ticketed and had to appear in 47th District Court.

Police Chief Bill Dwyer reiterated this exercise is not designed to entrap retailers, but to make them knuckle down on employees and heighten awareness to the seriousness of the problem. Dwyer vows there'll be other stings, which are similar to ones the department conducts to monitor alcohol sales to minors.

Booze sales to decoys have declined. We suspect cigarette sales to minors will diminish, too. As one retailer put it, it's just not worth it.

Farmington Public Safety and Hills police officials met with 47th District Court judges Marla Parker and Fred Harris to talk about taking the crackdown on underage smoking a step further.

One idea being considered involves making the offense a civil infraction for minors who are caught smoking. Penalties could include fines to community service where the offender

is made to work in a nursing home, hospice or long-term care facility. That way, kids will see firsthand the ravages that smoking causes. They're looking at other alternatives, too.

Police can, and already do, ticket minors caught smoking. Last year, the Farmington Public Safety Department wrote 71 tickets for minors in possession of tobacco, which is misdemeanor under state law.

On Jan. 1, Farmington Public Safety started diverting those tickets to Farmington Youth Assistance, which works with the child directly. If the kid follows the program, which includes smoking cessation, the tickets are dismissed.

Otherwise, the citations are sent through to the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, which is busy adjudicating more serious juvenile offenses.

Police officers don't have the time to go on search and destroy missions to eradicate underage smoking. That's why alternative means — such as periodic stings — are far more effective.

Likewise, the Farmington Public Schools district must continue its vigorous health education programs on the subject.

Such efforts by police, school and court officials are commendable. They underscore the need to stub out minors' smoking, which experts believe is often a gateway to other drug use.

Our children need a future that doesn't include an ashtray.

SEMCOC maintains vital role

If you look at a multi-colored map of southeastern Michigan, you see seven counties and some 400 municipal governments, not to mention scores of school districts.

Politically, local officials view their governments as independent territories with little relationship to each other.

But in fact, those 400-plus municipalities — ranging from large urbanized cities to small villages and rural townships — are linked together by a series of geographical, historical and social factors.

An excellent example is the Rouge River and its three branches — left over from the Ice Age. But that geographical history links western Wayne County and southern Oakland County when it comes to flooding problems as well as recreational and transportation potential.

All this comes to mind with the 30th anniversary this year of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments, which was born in controversy and has matured into a responsive organization helping plan the present and future of the sprawling region.

Regionalism was born with a 1964 federal highway act that required metropolitan areas to do multi-county planning in order to obtain highway money. This region's response was TALUS (Transportation and Land Use Study).

The Metropolitan Fund Inc., a private non-profit regional affairs organization, was a key player and through money and staffing it created SEMCOC.

Initially, SEMCOC was viewed by many local officials as "big brother government" in a move to supersede the responsibilities of local officials.

Those fears never materialized. Over the years, SEMCOC has provided more information and cooperation to local officials as well

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as a voice on how the region should approach long-range, mutual problems.

Some of the problems facing the region in 1968 when the organization was formed are still with us today. But at least officials on all levels of government are better equipped to study the problems, analyze information, discuss alternatives and come up with an action plan.

When a motorist struggles in a traffic jam while trying to commute from Farmington or Farmington Hills to Troy, the person isn't thinking "locally." The motorist wants a solution to the traffic gridlock — and SEMCOC, working with the county road commissions and state transportation department, is in a position to help.

With the recent flooding in many communities following heavy rain, SEMCOC has the ability to work with drain commissioners and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in coming up with plans to alleviate the problem.

Although SEMCOC has less success in slowing down the urban sprawl of non-connected subdivisions across seven counties, the organization's accomplishments far outweigh its failures.

In reflecting on the history of SEMCOC, the Observer hopes that the four million-plus residents in the region appreciate its efforts. In the long run, SEMCOC has clearly been a major factor in improving the quality of life for everyone in the region.

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

40 YEARS AGO — MARCH 13, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

By a slim 114-vote margin, Farmington Township School District residents passed a \$1.5 million bond issue. Money authorized by the bond issue will be used to build two elementary schools, a district service building and to buy more land for future school sites.

Two Farmington High wrestlers Jim Marsh and Donald Margherini, qualified for the state tournament after their achievements in the regional finals at Berkley's Anderson Junior High School.

25 YEARS AGO — MARCH 14, 1973

A storm sewer for the triangle section

between Eight Mile, Grand River and the Farmington city limits was authorized by the Farmington Township Board. It is the second section of the master drainage plan, which will provide drainage for the entire township.

An advertisement announced the re-grand opening for the Burger King restaurant on 32704 Grand River March 17-18. People would have a chance to meet his royal majesty The Burger King at the event.

2 YEARS AGO — MARCH 14, 1996

State Sen. David Honigman's announcement he wouldn't seek re-election because of health problems shocked few but inspired speculation as to who would seek the seat.

Farmington Hills police ruled a fire at Warner Middle School was an arson after finding gasoline at the scene.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

If you had an extra hour in the day, how would you spend it?



"Relax. I like making teddy bears. When I make them, I relax."
Deb Watson
Farmington



"I could use an hour. I would spend that time working on clocks or loafing (relaxing)."
Perry Swartz
Farmington Hills



"The first thing I'd do is nap. The second is catch up on laundry. The third thing is relax."
Barbara Horigan
Gains
Hamburg



"Probably clean my house, walk my dog, do my laundry, sleep."
Cheryl Fearon
Walled Lake

We asked this question in the Village Mall in downtown Farmington.

LETTERS

Move games up a level

First of all, I would like to say that I enjoy your paper very much. You and your staff are doing a great job.

I am 13 years old, and I go to school at Power Middle School in Farmington Hills. I am writing to you about something that I feel very strongly about. I think that middle school sports teams in the state of Michigan should be able to travel to other districts for their games as high school sports teams do.

Right now, we are only able to play schools from our own district. That is great, but why not go to the next level and play teams from other districts?

I think that playing in other districts would be a great experience for middle school athletes.

Right now, we only have four middle schools in the Farmington Public School District. Therefore, we only have games with each school twice, which makes for only six games for an entire season. If we played in other districts, it would make for a longer season, and it would be much more competitive.

Now the question comes up: How would we pay for this? What we could do is put on a fund-raiser for the sports teams, and we could raise money for bus drivers that way. For example, we could sell chocolate bars for maybe a dollar a piece. If all of the teams did that successfully, we would have enough money to pay the bus drivers for taking us to our games.

I believe that most students and their parents would agree with me that this is a good idea and would be an interesting learning experience for middle school students. It would also help us prepare for the competitive atmosphere that is around us in high school sports.

Ryan Kosinski
Power Middle School

Billboards cause blight

We are very fortunate in the Farmington/Farmington Hills area to have good sign controls which minimize visual blight. However, in some nearby communities and along our major highways, billboards continue to increase in size and number. Citizens who would like to protect the beauty of our state should be aware of two bills in the Michigan legislature which are positive steps toward accomplishing this goal.

SB 445 (The Scenic Michigan Initiative) will amend the Highway Advertising Act to ban double-decker billboards, increasing permit fees to eliminate the taxpayer subsidy (more than \$200,000 annually) and allow county governments to regulate billboards. This is a moderate proposal that is facing major opposition.

State Sen. Loren Bennett, D-Canton, also thinks that Michigan has had enough visual pollution. His bill (SB 341) calls for the elimination of the advertisement of tobacco products on billboards in Michigan.

We believe that these bills would help Michigan citizens stand up against the billboard industry and its disregard for the state's scenic beauty. In our state where the second leading industry is tourism, we believe billboards should not be allowed to obstruct our scenic heritage and natural beauty. We also think, from a financial and environmental standpoint, the state cannot afford to allow billboards to dominate our roadside.

Pam and George Wright
Farmington

Lights out

Who are these 250 survey respondents that by implication speak for three-quarters of the Farmington School District ("75 percent turn on to football field lights," March 5)? I doubt they live near one of those fields, as do we and many others. Farmington High, for one, is surrounded on three sides by residential streets.

Here is a survey of my own: 1) Does anyone really, really think their lives will change in any appreciable way, or their happiness be enhanced enough, to compensate for the suffering this project would inflict on those living near these athletic fields? Yes, suffering, from trying to live ordinary, peaceful lives in the glare of lights, the blare of noise, the sea of traffic and people going to and from football and soccer games, track meets, band performances and pep rallies; and 2) Is anyone not moving into the Farmington district because we're "the only Oakland County public school district without lighted football fields"?

Night football might promote school spirit, but it would be death to the spirit at home. However, most people do not live near high schools, and no doubt the majority will win. What we're really asking is that the members of this community, including the members of the school board, observe the Golden Rule, and do unto others as they would have others do unto them.

Anne R. Sennish
Farmington

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. Or they can be faxed to (248) 477-9722.

Farmington Observer

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

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— Philip Power