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THE WEEK AHEAD

SUNDAY

Nursing laws: A new grassroots coalition for improving nursing homes, ACTION, hosts speaker state Rep. Andrew Raczkowski at 2 p.m. today, March 15, at the Farmington Community Library.

MONDAY

Meeting day: Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils meet today, March 16, at their city halls. The former gathers at 8 p.m., the latter at 7:30 p.m.

TUESDAY

Talking equity: Women's History Month brings out a free program called "Equity for Women" at 1 p.m. March 17 at Oakland Community College's Room 4009 in the J Building.

WEDNESDAY

Looking back: History buffs don't have far to go. The "Gov. Warner Mansion ... Home of Farmington History" is open for tours from 1-5 p.m. today, March 18.

INDEX

Arts & Leisure/C1
Autos/A1
Cable column/B7
Classified/D,E,H-J
Class. Index/E4
Crossword/E6
Health/D4
Honor roll/B3
Jobs/H1
Malls/C8
Movies/C4
Obituaries/B7
Police, fire/A5
Real Estate/E1
Service Guide/J4
Sports & Rec/D1
Taste/E1

Farmington's cigarette sting snares only 2

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER
Only two of 23 Farmington businesses were caught selling cigarettes to an underage decoy last week as part of the city's first-ever tobacco sting, said Public Safety Director Gary Goss.

"That's not even 10 percent ... to be honest with you, I thought we'd catch more," said Goss, who said the recent Call to Action Summit by Farmington Families in Action spearheaded the sting.

Farmington Hills police also conducted a similar exercise recently, with about 20 of 60 businesses issued citations.

In the sting, a 15-year-old Farmington Hills resident visited the 23 businesses Tuesday and Thursday evenings, asking to buy a pack of cigarettes at each location.

Employees at Benner's Amoco gas station at 32410 Grand River and the Kmart at Grand River and Halsted were ticketed and face a maximum state penalty of 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine. Goss said the businesses themselves were not issued citations.

"Interestingly enough," Goss continued, "Kmart just had a meeting with all their employees" about not selling tobacco to minors and asking for identification from any customer who looks under age 30 wanting to purchase cigarettes or other

Please see 4TH, A4

Police on school buses for busts

Farmington school bus drivers see hundreds of drivers break the law every day by passing buses with flashers on. Farmington Hills police will be riding on some buses to catch the scofflaws.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Motorists in Farmington Hills beware: The yellow school bus with its red flashers on may not only have smiling children on board but also a license plate number-taking police officer.

Starting Monday, a Hills police officer will ride on selected Farmington

Public School bus routes to monitor the number of vehicles that illegally drive around the vehicle when it's stopped.

"It's very frightening when you're a bus driver and see a car coming and you know it's not going to stop," said Julie Teddy, Farmington Public Schools Transportation supervisor who was also a school bus driver. "Especially

when you have young children ... and you're not sure how they're going to react to the situation."

Officers will take down license plate numbers and a ticket mailed to the registered vehicle owner. Fines are up to \$135 for passing a school bus with its red flashers on.

Bus drivers write down license plate numbers and report offenders to police, who send tickets to owners.

Last year, Farmington Hills police sent 110 tickets to motorists for passing school buses. The number of offenders is much higher, according to a sur-

vey of district bus drivers.

A poll of 74 drivers said there are up to 327 incidents a day. Such reckless driving is a potential harm to the 9,000 children who ride district buses everyday.

"We're appalled by that of course, which led us to implement this program," said Lt. Dennis Green of the Farmington Hills police Traffic Bureau.

Bus drivers are typically busy making sure kids get on and off safely while stopped. They're not always able to

Please see BUSES, A4



Ground breaking fun: Juniors Justin Celko, Kim Hickey, Casey Lowe and Matt Temkin take pictures and heckle their friend, Steve Economy, who participated in the groundbreaking at Farmington High School

STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEBRIZ

Portables, parking lots ready to move

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Don't look now, but the long-discussed bond issue projects are starting to happen.

Construction workers are in the process of moving portable classroom units at Farmington and North high schools and Dunckel Middle School, to clear space for major additions that will go up over the next two years.

And, possibly as soon as Monday, the parking lot behind Dunckel will be torn apart. Principal Pamela O'Malley said a new cafeteria eventually will be built there.

Further evidence that last fall's \$93.1 million bond issue is moving toward reality are various groundbreaking ceremonies such as last Tuesday's at Farmington High

Please see MOVING, A5

Thieves with keys

Expert touts need for tough hiring process to reduce employee theft

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Internal theft is the worm in the fruit of any business. Once found, the damage is irreversible and the seed unrecoverable.

Which is why Claudia Alexander of The Grand Court assisted living center in Farmington Hills said it's company policy to do criminal background checks on potential employees. A smiling face and an impeccable resume are not enough.

"You can't imagine the incredibly intelligent people who walk in ... who have a criminal history," Alexander said.

Alexander was one of 90 people who attended a seminar on the topic, "Internal Theft: A Prelude to Going Out of Business," Wednesday sponsored by the Farmington Hills Police Crime Prevention Department. Heads-up hiring practices, such as those employed by The Grand Court, are what prevents potential theft problems, said Jose Ortiz, a security expert who spoke at the seminar in the William Costick Activities Center.

Internal theft - which can involve CEOs to shipping clerks - can debilitate employee morale, tarnish corporate images and siphon profits. All that spells destruction for a company, especially a fledgling one.

"It's like a guided missile going into that business," said Ortiz, Schoastak

■ You can't imagine the incredibly intelligent people who walk in ... who have a criminal history.

Claudia Alexander
—director, Grand Court

Brothers and Company Security and Loss Prevention director.

Internal theft is not limited to stealing cash, either. Acts can include stolen computer lists that are later sold to competitors, credit card fraud, bogus merchandise returns and misplaced stock.

Tell-tale signs are typically seen in the bottom line.

An inventory loss of between 1.5-2 percent is acceptable. When there is a loss of 3-5 percent, "You have someone stealing from you," Ortiz said.

Training employees properly is one key. A mission statement - spelling out that it is illegal to steal - is also important, Ortiz said. "Employees like to know their limits," he added.

When there is an incident, an employer should act fast and document a prosecutable case. A haphazard approach leaves a company open to a lawsuit, Ortiz said.

"When an internal theft becomes obvious, it's too late," he said. "They've

Please see THEFTS, A4



Sitting empty: The parking lot behind the American Legion building will no longer be used for driver's training.

STAFF PHOTO BY SHARON LEBRIZ

Driver's training classes out at American Legion's parking lot

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The place where trucks, buses and cars rumbled through a driver's training course in the parking lot behind American Legion Groves-Walker Post 346 could easily be seen from Mark Ottewell's front porch.

Ottewell on Tuesday pretty much echoed the sentiment of about a dozen other residents in the neighborhood - including his mother - who attended Monday's Farmington Planning Commission public hearing.

Commissioners unanimously rejected the American Legion's request for a special exception use permit, needed to enable driver's license testing in the parking lot to continue. It had begun in August.

"There are big somis back there," said Ottewell, looking toward the south end of the lot, on the other side of Sherwood. "It gets really noisy at all times of the day."

The planning commission denial

Please see PARKING LOT, A4

Preventing poisonings

Farmington Fire Marshal Joe Schornack reminds the community that Poison Prevention Week is today through Saturday, March 21. He provided the Farmington Observer with a list of safety tips from the Safety Council for Southeast Michigan.

Some of the tips are as follows:

- Do not store toxic products or medicine in the ammo area as food.
- Always take the prescribed dosage of medication. And throw away unused prescriptions.
- Always wear eyeglasses to read labels. It also doesn't hurt to turn on a light, too.
- Keep cleaning compounds and pesticides in their original containers while using, and do not leave containers open for even "just a minute" while children are present.
- Along those same lines, always keep household

FARMINGTON FOCUS

chemical products in clear view when using.

- Avoid taking medicine in front of children and never refer to it as "sandy." Instead, teach them the dangers of unknown substances.
- Be aware of the possible harmful effects medicine may have if mixed with other medications, alcohol, caffeine or nicotine.

Still working

Longtime Farmington Hills businessman Richard Pleak was honored at the Botsford Inn Friday, recognizing his 80th birthday and his 50 years in business, the last 30 of which have been in Farmington

Hills.

Pleak started Progressive Undercoating with two partners in Detroit in 1947. He moved to Farmington Hills in 1967 when he joined the Auto One franchise. Today, Pleak runs Auto Ameristar on 29775 Grand River - reportedly, still showing up bright and early for work every Monday through Saturday.

Blooming good

Members of the Farmington Garden Club harvested many ribbons at the flower show last week at the Pontiac Silverdome.

Taking ribbons and special awards were Eileen Abbott, Kay Blakney, Kay Briggs, Jan Dolan, Gloria Minnebo and Rose Smitka. Members of the club's Junior Gardeners also won ribbons. They are Amber Hall, Genna Gilme Ashley West and siblings Amanda, Brandon and Danielle Barjus.

