

Clappison insured town kept thriving

John Clappison and other Farmington businessmen helped hatch the idea for a downtown shopping center while having their usual morning coffee at the defunct Farmington Dairy during the late 1950s.

What the insurance man saw when he looked out of the window from his counter stool was an opportunity, one that would be good for Farmington.

In those days, the area where the (Downtown Farmington) center is now was a dump," said Frank Clappison, recalling a key moment in the city's history. "Downtown Farmington was dying and malls were sprouting up everywhere. That group of businessmen got together and said 'We need to do something.'"

led by lifelong Farmington resident John Clappison, who died of cancer Monday at Botsford Hospital at age 78, that group — including Farmington Lumber owner Conrad Sullivan

— founded the Farmington Center Co. and resulting Downtown Farmington Center.

Clappison, who served on Farmington's planning commission and board of review for years, was the driving force behind securing a mortgage and attracting tenants for the mall. It was an accomplishment that stayed with him to the end.

"He had a great deal of pride in the fact that that group of men got together and did that," said Frank Clappison, one of three surviving sons who all live in Farmington or Farmington Hills.

His conceded that selfish motives might have been one of the factors in his father's plans. Having a strong retail anchor in town was viewed as a way to help secure the future of their own businesses. John Clappison took over the Farmington Insurance Agency in 1952 and continued as owner (and later partner

with William Conroy) before retiring in 1985.

Farmington home

But, more than anything, John Clappison dedicated himself to Farmington because it was home. It was where he was born, went to school, played golf (at Glen Oaks) and raised his own family — except for a few years when he and late wife, Helen, relocated to Sault Ste. Marie.

"Dad was born and raised in Farmington," said son David Clappison. "My mother grew up here. This was always home to them. That's why they were so dedicated here. He had a very strong interest in community spirit."

Another important aspect to his father was how he "dealt fair and square with everybody. He was always very honest and that's what he instilled in us."

John Clappison, born July 15, 1919, in Farmington, had many

local links that continued right until his death.

In October 1996, after Helen died, he became active in the Senex socialization program for homebound seniors at the William Costick Activities Center in Farmington Hills, said David Clappison.

"Dad went to the Senex program ... three days a week. Those people were great. The whole Farmington area dad called his home."

Other civic affiliations included: the Farmington Exchange Club, where he was president; Salem United Church of Christ; the Farmington YMCA (honorary chairman); Walnut Creek Country Club; Huron River Hunting & Fishing Club; and Farmington Elks — No. 1986.

"He wanted his (Elks) dues paid this year," David Clappison said.

Farmington City Manager Frank Lauheff, currently vice

president of the Exchange Club, said John Clappison "had a deep, deep caring and concern for the community and that was reflected in the things he did. His imprint will last on downtown for many, many years."

For many Farmington-area residents, Clappison will always be the insurance man. For years, Clappison, later with partner Conroy, ran two-line, bold-typed advertisements in the Farmington Enterprise, imploring potential customers that "John Clappison sells insurance."

Business well-known

During the 1960s and 1970s, even though the business was officially the Farmington Insurance Agency, it was known to many as Clappison-Conroy.

"We still get checks made out to Clappison-Conroy," said Frank Clappison, who now operates the agency with his brothers, David and Robert Clappison,



John Clappison

and a fourth partner, Patrick Donnelly.

Besides his sons, John Clappison is survived by sister-in-law Mary Medlin of Waterford, five grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren.

Visitation is 2-3 p.m. Thursday at Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, 33603 Grand River. Funeral services will be at 11 a.m. Friday at Salem United Church of Christ, 15424 Oakland Avenue. Presiding will be the Rev. John Maki.

Burial will be at Oakwood Cemetery.

Cruise from page A1

Street (behind The Pasta Stop, Page's, etc.) will be roped off for the classic car display. A disc jockey will be set up in the southwest corner of the lot, with loudspeakers projecting the music toward an outdoor patio area just outside the back of The Pasta Stop and Backin Robbins.

Signs will be posted on event nights, letting people know the parking lot will be for classic cars only. Parking for spectators will be available in the municipal lot next to the library and city hall and in the Downtown Farmington Center.

Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss said he didn't foresee the car nights

prompting major headaches for the city — as long as there is a slow buildup the first few Mondays, enabling early glitches to be fixed.

"If it starts out slow and they build on that and learn with each session it will be controllable," Goss said, adding that he thinks the Farmington program will be popular. "Roger is an enthusiast. It'll be good for the entire downtown."

Goss jokingly answered a question about the potential for rowdy crowds, noise and parking chaos. "Put it this way. If things get out of control the police are real close."

Both at the council meeting and earlier this week, Ratkowski stressed that he would do his utmost to make sure nearby

businesses and residents aren't negatively impacted.

"I've got a lot of nice neighbors here," said Ratkowski, standing outside his restaurant, almost in the same spot the outdoor patio will be located. "I want to make sure they're OK with this."

Ratkowski said the classic cars would be driven along Grand River to the display site. "You cruise the Grand to get here."

But he promised the Farmington car nights won't "be the same cruising atmosphere as the Woodward (Dream Cruise). There's too much residential around here. And we don't want that 'burnout' atmosphere, the craziness. Ours will be more of a relaxed display."

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Michigan Inn

16400 J.L. Hudson Drive, Southfield, MI

Mother's Day Brunch

Sunday, May 10, 1998

APPETIZERS

Fresh Sliced Fruit with Popsicle Dressing
Cradle with Southwestern Ranch
Dressing
Domestic & Imported Cheeses with Assorted Water Crackers

SEAFOOD STATION

Pearl & East Shrimp

HOT ENTREE

Scrambled Eggs with Cheddar Cheese
Breakfast Potatoes
Bacon & Sausage
Breakfast Pastry
Rib Tips
Chicken Florentine with Cream Sauce
Pepper Steak
Rice Pilaf
Seasonal Vegetables & Collard Garden

SALAD STATION

Tossed Garden Salad with Assorted Dressings
Chinese Pasta Salad
Stawberry Chicken Salad
Wild Rice & Grape Salad
Jello Salad
Anipasto Salad

PASTA STATION

Linguine Pasta with choice of Marinara & Clam Sauce
Fettuccine with Choice of Garlic, Olive Oil, Scallops, Popcorn Shrimp, Green & Red Pepper, Red Onions, Shallops, Sun Dry Tomatoes, Pinenuts & Parmesan Cheese

CARVING STATION

Tender Top Round of Beef
Porkloin - Cherry Bing Sauce

OMLETTE STATION

Omelettes Cooked to Order - Toppings: Ham, Sausage, Bacon, Mushroom, Onions, Green & Red Pepper, Salsa
Waffles with Blueberry Sauce, Whipped Cream & Warm Maple Syrup

KIDS STATION

Chicken Tender with Honey Mustard Sauce
Cream & Warm Maple Syrup
Nacaroni & Cheese
Fruit Punch

SWEET TABLE

Cheese Cake - House Specialty
Carrot Cake - Baked by our Chef
Assorted Cakes & Pies
Assorted Mini Tarts

PRICES INCLUSIVE

Adults...\$17.95 Seniors...\$14.95
Children (5-11)...\$7.95 Children under 4...FREE

SEATING TIMES • 12:00 p.m. • 1:30 p.m. • 3:00 p.m. • 4:30 p.m.

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