

Principal who set the pace for Gill School to step down

When Gill Elementary School principal Mike Duff walks out of the building after his last day on the job next month, he very well might have to fight off teachers, parents and even youngsters who don't want him to go.

"The parents are upset that he's leaving," said office assistant Barb Wild. "Very upset."

Both Wild and school secretary Lynn Green said the principal's caring and honest approach to students, parents and the task at hand has a lot to do with the reaction to his pending retirement.

But the 55-year-old Duff is doing just that, retiring, walking away from the place where he nurtured a year-round "school within a school" since 1992-93. Taking over the school - and year-round program - will be Gayle Zimmerer, who is currently principal at Alameda Early Childhood Center.

"The timing is right," said Duff, concluding a 30-year career in education that began as a teacher in Waterford schools. "You kind of want to retire when things are OK. And I do feel that things are in place, and that I've accomplished what I set out to do. Most of it, anyway."



Groundbreaking: As principal at Gill Elementary, Mike Duff inspired the type of parental involvement that led them to build a playground area.

Duff, a Farmington Hills resident who is leaving Gill after 11 1/2 years at the helm, plans on spending more time with his wife, Sharon, children Sarah and John (both Farmington High

School grade) and doing educational consulting work. Of course, there'll be more time for things like golf, not to mention a "honey-do list that's about a year long," he joked.

'Anytime I have a summer of a day, I'll go down to the kindergarten class and get 25 leg hugs. And that says it all.'

*Mike Duff
—Gill principal*

"What I want to do is shift gears," Duff said. "This isn't 'kick back and sleep in' time. That's not the kind of person I am. But I want to reduce the pace in my life. I want to slow down ... but not stop."

Probably nothing defined his Farmington stay as much as his involvement in Gill's Year-Round School, which began as a three-year pilot program that is now in its sixth year with no end in sight. About 25 percent of Gill students are in the year-round program.

Duff was one of the members of the committee that studied the subject, leading to its implementation. He said he was the only district administrator seriously interested in the concept, and was selected to "pilot" the program.

In the six years since, nothing has happened to change his mind about the value of year-round instruction. Two reasons: Kids don't lose what they just learned, which happens after a three-month summer break; There's less need for review after school starts up again in the fall.

Plus, Duff insisted, the mainstream school calendar is outdated. "We've been on the agrarian school calendar for 200 years and kids aren't working in the fields in the summer anymore. And that's the reason we went on that (calendar). It just doesn't make sense."

Duff said it was "very gratifying" how the Gill community took to the concept, noting that the program needs to have a building to call its own rather than sharing space with a traditional elementary school program.

The year-round program, based around a cycle of 45 days in school and 10 days out, apparently is drawing positive reaction. According to Gill's Wild, parents are inquiring (via the

Internet) from all over the United States about the school within a school.

"They want to know about Gill," Wild said. "They say it's highly recommended and they want to come here. I think that's basically Mike Duff."

Another highlight of his stay at Gill, the principal noted, was the 1992 construction of the Kids Kingdom community playground.

"It was a marvelous community event."

Aside from the building of playgrounds, Duff said an important role for any elementary school principal is building strong young minds. It is why he doesn't regret never trying to move up to the helm of a middle school or high school.

"I always felt that my qualities match the kids at this level," he said. "The beginning years, the ability to establish some benchmarks for kids ... This is the age of kids that are still eager to learn and be excited about school."

"Anytime I have a summer of a day, I'll go down to the kindergarten class and get 25 leg hugs. And that says it all."

Shop seeks to add wine to complement cigar line

The recent late-evening success of Starbucks Coffee will have a spillover effect if Cigar Emporium owner Tom Petros has anything to do with it.

Make that Cigar & Wine Emporium.

On Monday night, Petros asked for, and received, full support from the Farmington City Council concerning his quest to sell specially packaged beers and "high-end" wines from his Downtown Farmington Center business at 33185 Grand River.

"People go for good coffee and they go for good cigars and fine wines," said Petros, after leaving Monday's meeting.

If the Michigan Liquor Control Commission approves Petros' bid for a specially-designed merchant license, he will soon begin the process of remodeling his business - doubling its size, from 1,050 to 2,100 square feet. Petros already leased the now vacant storefront that would be incorporated into his existing store, which sells cigars and tobacco products.

And, seeing the steady number of customers hanging out at Starbucks at 10 p.m. on some nights, Petros told the council he plans on expanding his own business hours.

Actually, Petros said, the idea for adding beer and wine to his store began before Starbucks was even a candidate to come to the center. But after the national coffee chain opened, Petros felt even better about his plan.

"That encouraged me more when Starbucks opened," Farmington City Manager

Frank Laubhoff said Petros should have no problem obtaining the license. "I would suspect that Lansing is going to issue that permit immediately."

The store's location meets city building and health regulations and an investigation by the public safety department found no reason to object to the bid.

According to Petros, work on the \$50,000 transformation would begin as soon as the go-ahead is received from Lansing. A SDA license would give Petros permission to sell the beer and wine, but for off-premises use only.

Meanwhile, the name change already is in the works; he provided council members with examples of possible storefront signs.

Although local approval is not necessary, getting the council's backing is considered an important step. Laubhoff and other officials think Petros has a winning concept.

"It's another business that you don't find all over," Laubhoff said after the meeting. "There aren't many specialty wine or imported beer stores around."

"It fits a need and it fits a niche," too. And that's what downtown is looking for - specialty kind of destination businesses and quality stores."

Laubhoff envisions the Cigar & Wine Emporium feeding off the success of Starbucks and other neighboring businesses in the Downtown Farmington Center. "You've got Starbucks, delis, jewelry stores ... it's a great location."

Festival on Saturday will bring visitors down to earth

EarthFest '98, which celebrates and educates people about the environment, takes place 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 9, at the William Costick Center.

Admission is free to the event, which is geared toward children and families. The first 11 people will receive a free paper yard waste bag.

In an effort to help people reuse and recycle, residents may bring their old telephone books and take part in the event's annual "telephone book toss."

People are also asked to bring used clothing. Goodwill Industries will have a trailer with

staff members to collect used clothing and give receipts.

Other highlights of EarthFest '98 include:

■ Free prizes will be awarded, including a mulching mower courtesy of Weingartz.

■ Performances by Waste Management's Cycler the Robot.

■ Trash-to-treasure contests.

■ Displays by Friends of the Rouge, Farmington area naturalists and recycling exhibits.

Sponsors of the event are Waste Management, city of Farmington Hills, RRASOC, Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit and Weingartz of Farmington Hills.

Global Releaf takes root in Hills subdivision on May 16

The city of Farmington Hills, along with the Chelsea Crossing Homeowners Association and the Farmington Hills Beautification Committee, is sponsoring a project Global Releaf on 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 16.

The event will take place at the Chelsea Crossing subdivision at 13 Mile and Halsted.

The project will allow for the planting of 20 red oak trees, provided by the Global Releaf organization and Chelsea Crossing, within the subdivision.

The city of Farmington Hills will provide shrubs, day lilies,

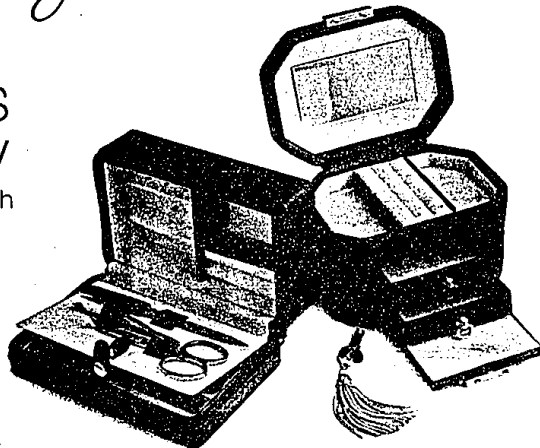
lawn and mulch to be installed by the city's contractor, Tom's Landscaping. In addition, the Farmington Hills Division of Public Works will dig the holes for the planting of the trees.

Global Releaf is a program financed by the Detroit Edison Foundation with a mission to replant the urban forest and educate the public about planting trees.

The program accomplishes this goal by providing trees and half of the planting costs to interested subdivisions.

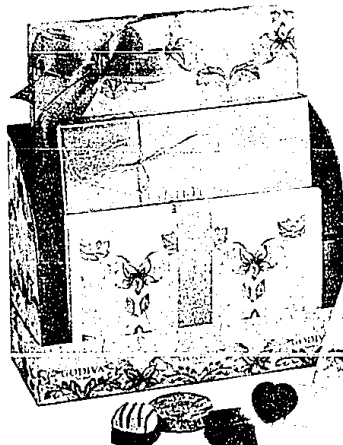
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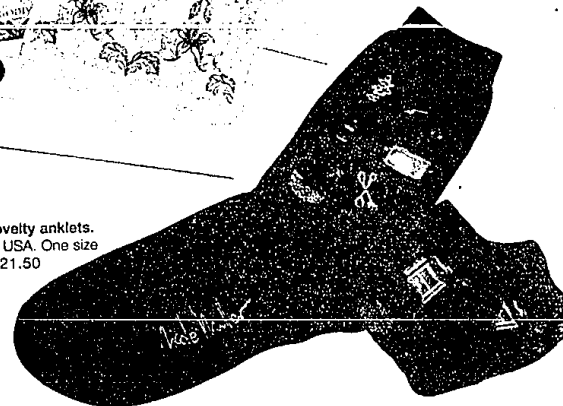


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