

Cloverdale school kids savor their fun in the sun

Even though the youngsters who attend Cloverdale Developmental Center have various physical and mental impairments, "they are as unique as you and I," said teacher Ruth Whiteman.

They also enjoy fun, just like any other kid does. With that in mind, Tuesday's annual Field Day at Cloverdale was as typical as possible - featuring cotton candy, face painting, fun-filled games, music (performed by Jeffrey and Michelle Froulx) and ice cream, donated by downtown Farmington's Baskin-Robbins store.

"We've done this every year for the kids," said Whiteman, who has been at Cloverdale since 1973, when the special education facility on Freedom Road opened. "Why should every other school in Farmington have a field day and not us?"

Whiteman added that the field day "gives them (students) so many opportunities and experiences, so many activities. And it helps bring families together."

Cloverdale Principal Roger Martin said the four-hour event is another example of how "we celebrate life, we appreciate each day for what it is."

Martin also looked around the playground and marveled at the estimated 50 family members who came out to help the students have a grand time.

"I think this is the most parent participation we've ever had for field day," said Martin, busy helping Joe Kozma make another batch of sweet, sticky, pink cotton candy. "I look at that as a real positive sign."

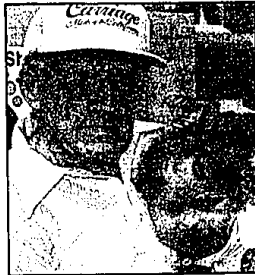
Kozma's great-granddaughter, Brianna Tucker, 3, attends Cloverdale. Brianna, who is restricted to a wheelchair, suffers from multiple disabilities.

Among the parents at the field day was Brianna's mom, Marianne Tucker. She is strongly dedicated to Cloverdale and to the formation of a parent support group. "Parents all have the same issues, chasing therapists..."

According to Tucker, the self-contained community is the best possible place for her daughter and other Cloverdale students to be. Students have a variety of handicaps, everything from blindness to cerebral palsy.

"It's a whole community here," said Tucker, noting that playground and classroom equipment is adapted to meet the needs of the handicapped children. "I never felt comfortable taking Brianna out in public. People are rude, they stare. But this is our own little world, this is where she's comfortable."

"And they (the children) understand a lot more than other people think they do," Whiteman said. Cloverdale opens eyes and minds about folks who



Family ties: Brianna Tucker, 3, of Farmington Hills spends time with her great-grandfather, Joe Kozma of Livonia.

are physically and mentally handicapped.

"People come in and, after they get to know the kids, they don't look at the impairment," Whiteman said. "They look at the kids and they see they all have personalities. They are as unique as you and I."

Tucker and others at Cloverdale obviously reveled at Tuesday's candy-coated diversion. But long-range issues remain, such as the need to repair or replace some of that playground equipment. A silent auction is being organized for early October, at the Longacre House, to help provide funds for new swings, slides and low-to-the-ground merry-go-rounds.

And Whiteman, who said the cost of handicapped-accessible playground equipment is "astronomical," said she hopes some of the Durant lawsuit settlement money being set aside by the district will be earmarked for Cloverdale. The school board recently OK'd a plan to reserve about 20 percent of the \$9.5 million windfall for special projects.

Brianna is one of 85 students between the ages of 3-26 who attended Cloverdale during 1997-98, Whiteman said. Another five classes attend other buildings in the district, including Visions Unlimited, William Grace Elementary School, Warner Middle School and Harrison High School.

Four of the Cloverdale students, all age 26, will graduate at 1 p.m. Thursday, June 25, and perhaps then be placed into a vocational program, as long as that's what their parents desire, Martin emphasized.

Fund-raiser planned

Cloverdale Developmental Center is organizing a Silent Auction to take place 7 p.m. Oct. 2 at Longacre House. Proceeds will go toward purchasing new playground equipment. For information, call Marianne Tucker at 489-3819.

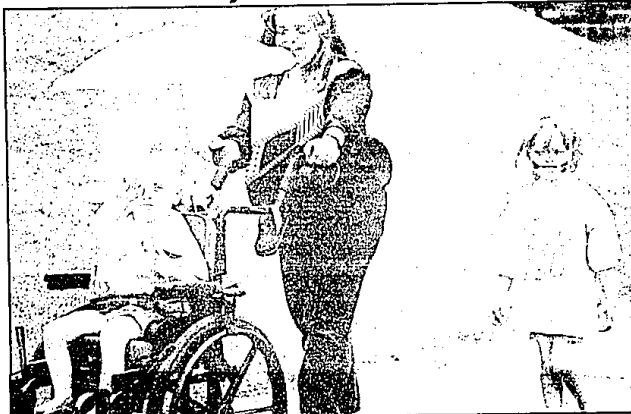
But even youngsters who do not attend Cloverdale or the five auxiliary classrooms were able to get into the Field Day swing.

Samantha Zalac, 8, of Salem Elementary School in the South Lyon district, enjoyed checking out Farmington Public Safety police and fire vehicles parked in front of Cloverdale.

"I found out some stuff about the computer and (video) camera," said Samantha, after spending a few minutes in the police squad car normally used by Officers Dan Potter and Terry Purves. "It's pretty cool. When I grow up, I'm going to be a policewoman."

Jim Dale, of the Farmington Public Safety Department, said badges and coloring books were handed out to the children. They also received an explanation about what the fire truck does.

"We raised the ladder," Dale said. "We've had over 100 kids out here. And we let them put on a fire coat if they wanted to."



Cloverdale outing: Paulette Adrian and her kids, Holly (who is impaired), 3, and Heidi, who is not, enjoy the Cloverdale School field day, which included face-painting, games and music. The special education school is part of the Farmington Public School District.

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Committee to examine crowded court conditions

Improving cramped 47th District Court is the mission of a fledgling planning committee to include officials from the court and cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Farmington City Council members JoAnne McShane and James Mitchell were appointed to the committee during Monday night's meeting.

"We're glad it's getting going," said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff, who also will be part of the 12-member committee.

Officials expect the committee to meet in the near future and start work that could take "up to a year" to complete, culminating in a recommendation, Lauhoff said.

"It's not something new," said Lauhoff about court space concerns. "The building was constructed 20 years ago. The community around us has expanded tremendously. And that's put a tremendous burden on the court."

Among issues to be delved into by the committee will be security and space - corridors are cramped and difficult for spectators and witnesses to make their way in and out.

"It's an overall court operation" that will be examined, Lauhoff said.

Four representatives from Farmington, Farmington Hills, and the 47th District Court will comprise the committee.

Candy's dandy: Shirley Jurek and grandkids Steven, 9 (in chair) and his siblings Keith, 7 and Renee, 4, munch on cotton candy.

