

Short takes

On beauty, mud, summer fests

Some short comments on items in and around the Farmingtons:

■ Reporters and editors at this newspaper have been chastised by the Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills Scholarship Pageant folks for leaving out the word "scholarship" in our stories, or referring to it as a beauty contest. We'll be more diligent on the capitalized version of title, since the next competition is coming up.

But, come on. This is a beauty and talent contest that rewards beauty and talent with the opportunity to win a scholarship. It's a step toward the Miss Michigan and Miss USA contest that can really "make" a woman's educational and financial future. And so much of it is only about beauty. After all, this is a contest where bathing suits — one or two pieces, if you please — are still part of the competition. So don't be ashamed of calling the contest what it is.

■ As we near primary season, it's worth stating that we're expecting clean campaigns this fall — focusing on what the incumbents

have done in office or what the challengers plan to do. We expect to avoid the innuendo, off-the-record suggestions and personal attacks that sometimes plague these local races. Such mudslinging was completely avoided in the most recent school board election and we expect as much in the county and state elections coming up. We also expect candidates and their campaigners to keep their hands off their opponents' signs and avoid other such shenanigans. Stick to issues and facts and voters will be best served.

■ As we take stock of our Farmington area summer festivals, reports of the Farmington Hills 25th birthday bash and fireworks have been very positive, despite some rain and threatening weather Saturday. We agree with the city folks and organizing committee — fireworks celebrations can be a fun, cohesive community event. This one-time experience should help launch future fireworks displays.

And speaking of festivals, look for another rip-roaring good time at next week's Founders Festival — provided Mother Nature cooperates.

Farsighted leaders merit thanks

When you applaud the Detroit Symphony Orchestra July 1 at Kensington Metropark's Maple Beach, or "ooohh" at fireworks on the Fourth of July, we hope you'll also honor the farsighted public servants who made the setting possible.

This year is the 50th anniversary of Kensington, the first of 13 Huron-Clinton Metroparks, and one of Michigan's most popular recreation places. Each year Kensington draws 2.5 million visitors, more than the Detroit Tigers draw when they win a World Series.

The story begins in the 1930s, when federal officials identified hundreds of thousands of acres of land for public recreation. The old Michigan Conservation Department acquired some for hunting, fishing and camping. A long list of professors, park specialists and political leaders formed the five-county Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority in 1940-41. HCMA won tax support from voters to acquire other tracts.

What is now Kensington Metropark, north of I-96 freeway on the border of Oakland and Livingston counties, was owned by a Detroit labor leader named Joseph Labadie (1860-1933). He had a summer cottage near the current Nature Center. His brothers made silent movies there with such titles as "The Three Bad Men," "Then Came the Woman" and "The Rich Slave."

Labadie, a printer and a founder of the Michigan Federation of Labor, had a dream of providing summer cottages, cheap, to families of the working poor, according to his granddaughter and biographer Carlotta Anderson. In a way, his dream came true. HCMA acquired the land from his children.

Fortunately, HCMA didn't trust "market forces" to develop condominiums, infest the lake with Jet Skis and speedboats, and block the flow of nature with fences. HCMA built a dam on the Huron River south of old Grand

River Avenue,

turning the

60-acre Kent

Lake and a

huge wet-

lands into

1,200-acre

Kent Lake

and a 4,300-

acre day-use park.

The name "Kensington" comes from a plat-

ted but unbuilt town of the 1830s that strad-

ded old Grand River Avenue west of the Huron

River. The local "wildcat" bank went belly-up

in the Jackson Depression, but old Oakland

County maps still show the town.

Today Kensington Metropark has 700 acres

of nature study area, two beaches, two boat

launches, hiking trails, a paddlewheel boat

called the "Island Queen," an 18-hole golf

course, eight miles of paved bike-hike trails, an

interpretive farm, picnic grounds and vast

tracts of tree-shaded grounds for quiet reflec-

tion.

The first superintendent, David Laidlaw,

went on to head the entire Metroparks pro-

gram and is retired in North Carolina. His suc-

cessor, Charles Damm, retired in 1986 and is

in Farmington. Dick Shaffer, current superin-

tendent, is only the third person to hold the job.

Kensington's Nature Center programs have

a following of their own. As our nature colum-

nist Tim Nowicki reported a month ago, Wild-

wing Lake, on the west side of Kensington, will

be the site of a hacking box for young ospreys, a

fish-eating species of eagle.

Many wise leaders are helping to save the

sanity of civilization by saving parks like Ken-

sington from civilization. In a sense, they are

Founding Fathers (and Mothers) who didn't let

the marketplace do its costly thing. We are

richer for their foresight.



LETTERS

Be fair to Sorrows

I wish to comment on your story in the June 21 paper about the child with spina bifida not being allowed to register at Our Lady of Sorrows.

I think your reporter gave an unfair view of the situation. I certainly agree with Monsignor Hurley. It's too bad for the child. I certainly am not privy to all of the ramifications, but our school does not get any dollars, as the public school does to handle handicapped students. We are not equipped to do so. And I'm pretty sure our liability insurance would not cover any harm that would come to any regular student fooling around on a homemade ramp, or with the child's mother carrying him down the stairs in a wheelchair.

Be fair. Get all the facts. This is not just an economic issue either. I suspect a full-time aide would have to be hired to move this child from room to room and to take him to the restroom and lunchroom. Public schools have the resources to do this. Private schools don't. Sad but true.

Nell Young
Farmington

No room at the Inn

Your story on the Kornacki family's effort to enroll their son, Greg, in Our Lady of Sorrows School is one that cries to the heavens for justice.

However, while waiting for the spirit to enlighten Monsignor Hurley, the Farmington community can and must take strong and proper action.

First, a respectful but forceful message must be sent to the Archbishop of Detroit by all those concerned over this obvious injustice.

Also, any number of volunteer efforts to assist the Kornacki family in their cause would surely be productive.

Finally, a reminder that the ultimate Shepherd of the Our Lady of Sorrows parish was all-inclusive in His work to keep ALL the flock — both young and old — both weak and strong — within His love and protection.

Sadly, Monsignor Hurley has acted with the icy indifference of that Bethlehem innkeeper who told a certain carpenter and his betrothed that there was no room in his inn.

The Koch family
The Dalley family
The DiZazzo family
Farmington Hills

Get Year 2000 answers now

On Thursday, June 18, Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi scheduled and chaired a meeting of the City of Farmington Hills Citizens Council on Detroit Edison which was attended by several representatives of Detroit Edison,

residents and members of the committee. Hard questions were put to Detroit Edison, residents and committee members. Vagnozzi and City Manager Dan Hobbs demanded more accountability, infrastructure reinvestment and better performance.

One question I asked Detroit Edison's representatives provoked a very bothersome response as it was evasive and sounded like a politician doing the "side step." The question was what progress Detroit Edison had made toward correcting the Year 2000 problem with its computer system.

The nation's power utilities told a Senate panel last Friday that they are working to solve the millennium computer problem. But they can't guarantee the lights won't go out on Jan. 1, 2000.

January is usually a very cold month in Michigan. If there is going to be a power outage, are we to expect hours, days, weeks or months? I found Detroit Edison to be evasive on the answer saying they had people "working on it." That's not good enough. If there is going to be a significant interruption of power, people should have enough time to prepare for it.

An informal survey last week in Washington D.C. by a Senate panel of 10 of the nation's largest utilities serving 50 million people found that none has complete contingency plans in case their computers fail because of the Year 2000 problem.

One utility didn't know how many lines of computer code it had, making it impossible to know how difficult or time-consuming its problem will be to solve with fewer than 18 months remaining.

"We're no longer at the point of asking whether or not there will be any power disruptions, but we are now forced to ask how severe the disruptions are going to be," said Sen. Chris Dodd, D-Conn.

I urge the city government to put Detroit Edison's feet to the fire and demand to know how much actual progress has been made towards correcting this problem, and obtain some guarantees or contingency plans. If this event results in a prolonged service interruption, the results could be catastrophic without proper contingency planning by local government.

Ronald Oliverio
Farmington Hills

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Keep service authority's top goal

The only thing clear as Oakland County heads toward a mental health authority with a managed care system is that those who are ill need to be served well.

What may seem to be obvious to some may be overlooked someday, if proper safeguards aren't included in the proposal for an authority. That authority will govern care for the 13,000 Oakland County residents who need care.

Currently those people are served by the Community Mental Health Board, which was developed while responsibility for the mentally ill began to shift from the state to local communities. The 12-member CMHB board is appointed by the elected county board of commissioners, and 90 percent of the funding is from the state, with the remainder from the county.

Reaction to the CMHB board has been mixed in its lengthy existence. Some complain that CMHB employees don't listen to concerns, but a probe into actual cases is veiled by the right to privacy that exists for the mentally ill.

CMHB now operates with a \$150 million budget with full management of care for consumers. Recently, the board itself "agreed in principle" to transfer its responsibilities to an authority. But criticism of the CMHB board is not the motivation behind the call for a mental health authority, and it's important to seek the real reason.

Indeed, the call doesn't necessarily herald a promise of improvement but, for consumers and advocates, it represents a number of threats.

First, funding from the state is expected to

dry up one day. County officials worry that care for the mentally ill would drain its coffers, perhaps at the expense of other programs or services. An authority would act as a buffer between the county budget and mental health care costs. The authority would be forced to request funds from the county — and ultimately the general public — if money from the state were cut off.

Sure 13,000 people with mental illnesses represents a large group with many advocates. But with the stigma attached to mental illness that still exists — and the county's concern over a possible financial drain — it's questionable whether the needed funding would be approved.

Second, safeguards for quality of care and accountability, ensured by elected representatives such as the county board of commissioners, may be lacking in the proposal and need to be built into any authority.

Third, managed care, in which only predetermined health care professionals and practices may be sought out, is likely to force changes in how care is delivered. The transition must be better handled than when places, like Lafayette Clinic in Detroit, were closed by the state.

A mental health authority is likely to be slow in coming, as the issues are complex and controversial. What needs to be determined is how an authority will better serve consumers. Who is in charge, whether it's a department operated by the county or a semi-independent authority, money must not be the bottom line.

There are faces behind that 13,000 number.

Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power