

Inside move

Brock deserving choice as manager

What took Farmington Hills City Council members about 30 weeks to decide last time only took about 30 minutes this time as they appointed Steve Brock the new city manager.

Council members, having learned the costs and perils of national searches, only had to nod to the person sitting at the table with them during a recent study session.

City trustees made a wise choice. Brock has proven himself a capable, hard working individual who has done yeoman's work in recent months as interim special services director.

He's taken on projects such as the Commission on Children, Youth and Families and most recently the 25th Anniversary Celebration, and made them happen.

Council is comfortable with Brock because he is a known commodity. He learned as an assistant to former City Manager Bill Costick, who is revered in city hall and has the activities center named in his honor. Brock has the respect of city workers and knows the inner-workings of its departments.

With a one-year contract, though, council members are rewarding Brock for his exemplary service while maintaining an escape hatch if their decision turns out to be hasty. After six months, council will review Brock's performance and consider extending his contract.

By then, council should have something to judge him on. In those 182 days, Brock will

have likely hired a special services director not to mention a dependable replacement for him in his old job as assistant city manager.

As for Brock's predecessor, Dan Hobbs, we wish him well in his new position as city manager of West Covina, Calif. His short tenure here will be but a blip on this city's history.

On Hobbs' watch, the city ran smoothly and professionally. He is credited for adding the positions of cultural arts coordinator and economic development director and brought an outside, if not global, perspective to running city affairs.

Yet Hobbs never seemed settled here. The trip to Japan - with the blessing of council members - at the start of his tenure perhaps set the tone. His interviewing for the Boulder, Colo. city manager's job a few months ago only confirmed his restlessness.

Hobbs' perceived aloofness perhaps didn't endear him in all circles, either. Such detachment is understandable, though. With the capricious nature of some elected bodies, a city manager's longevity is comparable to that of a New York Yankees manager. One need to look no further to the controversy surrounding the attempted firing of Southfield City Manager Bob Bobb.

Undoubtedly, Hobbs has learned one thing: It's difficult to succeed someone as city manager who already has a building named after him.

Credit for modifying lifer law

The Michigan Legislature did a relatively good job in modifying the so-called "650 drug lifer" law in the closing days of its 1998 session. Those who worked for the change hereby earn our praise.

For years, it was known not only as the toughest law in the nation but as a cruel law that exacted harsher punishments than many murders. Some thought it should be considered "cruel and unusual punishment," a violation of the U.S. Constitution, but the nation's highest court left it to the state's discretion.

From 1978-98, the law mandated - no judicial discretion - life in prison with no hope of parole for anyone caught with 650 grams (2.2 pounds) of a controlled substance. It was aimed at drug "kingspins," to use the police lobby's term, but didn't catch many. It took no account of the fact that many in the drug scene are young, dumb and likely to outgrow their behavior patterns after 15 years.

The new and improved law says: Penalty is 20 years to life, at the judge's discretion.

Current convicts are eligible for parole after 15 years if they have cooperated with the prosecutor. (A prosecutor could abuse his or her discretion, unfortunately.)

Current lifers with no other convictions for serious crimes are eligible for parole after 17 1/2 years; 20 years if they have been repeat offenders.

The parole board must consider whether the convict played key role in the trade, whether the offense involved children 17 or younger, or committed the offense in a "drug-free zone" around a school.

The Senate voted 26-9 for improvement. Sen. Bob Geake, R-Northville, had the courage and wisdom to vote yes.

Sadly, Sens. Loren Bennett, R-Canton, and George Z. Hart, D-Dearborn, continued to support the cruel law by voting against reform.

The House voted 66-31 for reform. Voting yes were Tom Kelly, D-Wayne, and Eileen DeHart, D-Westland.

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Sticking with the hardliners and voting no were Bob Brown, D-Dearborn Heights, Gerald Law, R-Plymouth, and Deborah Whyman, R-Canton. Lyn Bankes, R-Redford, was absent, the equivalent of a negative vote.

The vote was prominently reported in this newspaper. So far, however, no one has made it a primary campaign issue. Perhaps that's good. We have heard no demagoguery saying that a yes vote was a "vote for drugs," or "a vote against crime victims," or other such nonsense.

Getting much credit for fighting for the reform is Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-Union Lake, who opposed the prevailing emotions of her Oakland County base. The Senate had passed a bill that it billed as a modification of the 650-lifer law, but actually it gave too much power to police and prosecutors in deciding on paroles. Dobb amended it in the right direction.

So Geake, Kelly and DeHart deserve praise for bucking the propensity of legislators to sit up at night and invent new crimes and harsher punishments.

As Portia, in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, explained:

*"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven*

... It bleaseth him that gives and him that takes.

"Tis mightiest in the mightiest."

Or as the Bible, in Micah, advises us:

"What doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly and to love mercy ...?"

Andrew Raczowski raced to first place in the Republican primary for the 37th District House of Representative seat, beating Farmington Public Schools trustee Cathleen Webb, Farmington Hills Councilman Terry Seaver and businesswoman Linda Jelloucoeur. Webb, who raised \$37,000 for the campaign, pondered having a write-in campaign.

Attorney Jerry Ellis cruised to an easy victory over neighborhood activist Masilo Kurzej in the race to fill the Farmington Hills council term of Aldo Vagnotti, who had been elected as mayor.

Police officers from four communities joined forces to arrest three men involved in the armed hold-up at Comerica Bank branch Branch on Grand River and Middlebelt.

Face of gridlock



Roadway ruminations: Traffic pours through Farmington Hills' busiest intersection, Orchard Lake and 12 Mile.

LETTERS

Festival of thanks

We have packed away the last of the banners and vacuumed up the elephant ear sugar in the office, so now it's time for our annual thank yous to all those who helped make the 1998 Founders Festival a success. The event certainly wouldn't be the same without the efforts of many, many people.

Very special thank yous go to employees of Farmington's Department of Public Works who worked diligently to keep the area clean and the public safety officers from both cities who assisted in the parade. Our parade volunteers deserving a hand are: Denny Lis, Kent Nickol, Debbie Grant, DeeDee Grant, Dennis Favor, Cele Austin, Denise Janssen, Annalee Morrison and moderator Jan Dolan. Our own Farmington Area Radio Club provided us help at parade start sites and with essential parade communication as they have for many years.

Eric Johnston did his usual bang-up job on selection of the entertainment; Debbie Grossi handled the crafter tent with aplomb. Farmington Hills Department of Special Services provides us with the entertainment showmobile, set-up, take-down, and all-around general assistance. Brad and Keith Waker handled environmental control and Lynn and Rick Wegener aided on special occasions.

Congratulations go to all who spent time organizing a group, rehearsing a routine or building a float to appear in the festival parade. We had so many units this year, it was a wonder that there was anyone left to watch from the curbside.

The chamber staff, Diane Lis and Elana Carr, have worked for months on preparation for the festival and Carleigh Fiharty and Eddie Delbridge organized the Corvette Fantasy Raffle.

Our festival sponsors, many of whom have been with us years, show the community the strength of their commitment to the area and this annual event: Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Area Arts Commission, Farmington DDA, Masonic Temple, Metrobank, NBD Bank Farmington/Farmington Hills, the Oakland Press, Providence Hospital, Waste Management.

I hope the event was a good time for everyone.

Jody Soronen
Festival Administrator
Farmington/Farmington Hills
Chamber of Commerce

Everywhere there's a sign

Once again, election signs mar the beauty of public roads and subdivision entrances in Farmington Hills. Once again city zoning office employees confiscate hundreds of illegal

signs at the expense of their regular, assigned work. Once again, there is no penalty, or fine, imposed against the perpetrators because the ordinance lacks such a provision. Home owners leaving a "house for sale" sign on the roadway risk court action; politicians seeking votes face none.

Is it ironic or simply politically correct, by today's standards, that those running for political office and promising to uphold and improve government are the very people whose campaign's now break the law? If custom holds, the offending candidate will express surprise when told that his signs are all over the place, he will then blame his grass-roots supporters for losing control of their enthusiasm. But, to the public, the signs appear not to come from a neighbor's basement but from a print shop as part of a planned strategy.

Still, a prevailing opinion holds that you can't fight city hall. Accordingly, the present complicated set of rules governing where signs may be placed, legally or illegally, on Farmington Hills public roadways merely reflects the wishes of elected officials who have benefited from the policy. Similarly, Washington politics cannot be changed because politicians value campaign fund raising as is. Whether, national or local, this skeptical view is understandable but unacceptable to me.

Let's have a clear, direct ordinance prohibiting any special interest signs on public property, with penalties for offenses. In Farmington Hills, grass, flowers and gardens only, please.

Lawrence Niblett
Farmington Hills

Grateful grandparents

On behalf of my wife and myself (the grandparents of Melissa Garr), we want to thank all the people in the Farmington area and the Farmington Observer. Your prayers, caring, and concern were a great help to her and us. We are proud that you came forward in a time of need and helped.

God has given her to us twice now. Once at birth and last year after the accident. She is a miracle from God.

Helen and Harold Campbell
Garden City

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

IN THE FARMINGTON ENTERPRISE - 40 YEARS AGO
AUG. 7, 1958:

Though voters in the city of Farmington approved annexing eight square miles of surrounding Farmington Township, those affected shot down the measure.

A group of businessmen plan to meet to form an organization in the downtown area.

FARMINGTON OBSERVER - 2 YEARS AGO AUG. 8

Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power