

CHAT ROOM



STUART ISRAEL

Harrison block scheduling not a good idea

Ninety minute long high school classes? A terrible idea.

That was my reaction when I first heard that Harrison High School plans to adopt block scheduling. After learning more about the plan, I remain skeptical.

Block scheduling is a recent trend in education administration that calls for fewer but longer class periods. The Harrison plan is a 4x4 schedule that would replace Harrison's traditional schedule of six 55 minute class periods per day.

Focusing teenagers on school work for any extended period is a real challenge. Ninety minute classes seem unworkable. This is an era of TV sound-bites and USA Today attention spans. Keeping kids interested and on track for 55 minutes takes talent, dedication, planning and effort. Doing it for 90 minutes takes Steven Spielberg.

Instruction diminished

I tested my negative reaction with a teacher friend in another district. He said extended class time works well for subjects with in-class practical work like home economics and industrial arts. It doesn't work well in academic classes, he said. What happens is that teachers use some class time for instruction and the remainder for in-class homework. The homework fills the time and the kids don't have to take their books home, which they like. But instruction and content are diminished.

It is simple arithmetic. Using rough numbers, a 55-minute math class that now extends over two semesters provides 165 instruction hours (180 days x 55 minutes). The same class, taught in a one-semester block of 90-minute classes provides 135 instruction hours (90 days x 90 minutes), 30 fewer hours annually. That's more than six weeks less class time per core subject. When you factor in planned five-minute breaks and in-class homework time, it's even worse.

As I learned about Harrison's plan, I heard other criticisms:

Block scheduling will create long time gaps between instruction on math, science and other core subjects and college-related examinations, like the ACT, the SAT and AP achievement tests. This will put Harrison students at a competitive disadvantage.

Reducing choices

Block scheduling will reduce the number of different subjects that some students may study over the four high school years, limiting student choices and educational scope.

Longer classes will greatly magnify the negative impact of student absences due to illness or to school-related commitments such as music and athletic programs.

Experience with block scheduling in other school districts has been negative and despite its trendiness, block scheduling has been strongly criticized in academic studies and professional literature. Most colleges, whose students should be more mature, independent and motivated than high school students, typically have class periods of an hour or less.

Even if some form of "alternative scheduling" would benefit some students, there is no justification for totally changing Harrison's traditional system, which has been and continues to be effective for large numbers of students.

Many parents voiced these and other criticisms to the school board and at a June 23 information meeting at Harrison. Privately, Harrison teachers also criticize the plan.

To its credit, Harrison has recognized that it may have gone too far, too fast. It changed its focus from "implementation" to "planning" and now has appointed five parents to the official block scheduling committee. In addition, Harrison is soliciting comments and questions from the community. Send them to Harrison

Please see CHAT ROOM, B2

Heritage Homes

Tour features 10 Victorian homes of Farmington

By MARY RODRIGUE
STAFF WRITER

Elegant Queen Anne Victorians, stately Greek Revival homes, a mid-nineteenth century Michigan farm house and a tavern dating back to 1827 highlight the annual Farmington area Heritage Home Tour Saturday and Sunday, Sept. 19-20.

Patrons will visit 10 homes, which can be split between the two days.

"You can go through fairly rapidly or go slow and soak it over two days," said Ruth Mochlman, local historian.

Tickets cost \$10 in advance or \$12 on tour weekend and are valid both days. Proceeds will benefit the Farmington Historical Society, Farmington Historical Commission and the Farmington Hills Historical Commission.

Mochlman, author of the book "Heritage Homes of Farmington," has chaired this event for nine years.

"It's a long-time tradition," she said.

"It goes back at least twenty years."

Mochlman said this year's selection of homes breaks down into two categories — a cluster in downtown Farmington that will be accessible for walkers, and outlying homes in Farmington Hills that patrons will drive to.

Here is a brief sketch of the featured homes.

Thomas Russell House

This Queen Anne Victorian was built in 1892 by Thomas Russell, a local farmer. His wife, Lucy, died in 1897 and Russell left for New York and never returned. Most of the additions were done by Henry and Marie Pauline who moved here as newlyweds in 1909. Some of the home's features include a multi-gabled roof, fish scale shingles, horizontal siding, color glass panels in the windows, a flared second story with shingled siding, verge boards and tall thin chimneys.

Grandma Jones House

This 1869 farm-style Victorian is believed to have been the farm manager's house for the Warner farms. The interior moldings show a Greek Revival look. In the '40s a first-floor bath was added and in the '60s a breakfast room was completed. The present owner has an eclectic collection of artwork and antiques displayed throughout the house.

The Floyd Nichols House

Built by Floyd Nichols in 1900 for his bride, Grace Voorhies, the house survives as an example of late Queen Anne Victorian. Nichols, who worked with Gov. Warner for 54 years, was very involved in the social and economic affairs of Farmington. Visitors will enjoy the home's front and back porches which afford views of the Warner Museum grounds.

The P.D. Warner House

P.D. Warner arrived in Farmington as a toddler in 1825. Twenty years later he married Rhoda Botsford and two decades later adopted an infant, Fred, who would grow up to become governor of Michigan. A collection of clocks and depression glass can be seen in this Victorian home.

Farmington Historical Museum

The Warner Mansion was built in 1867 by P.D. and Rhoda Warner, adoptive parents of Fred Warner. Fred was the first three-term governor of Michigan, in office from 1905 to 1911. The house is in the Victorian Italianate style with a shuttered belvedere (open roofed gallery in the upper story built for giving a view of the scenery). Grounds include a two-story carriage house, beautifully maintained gardens and a gazebo. The house is on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Sprague House

This Greek Revival House built in 1847 by Alonzo and Miranda Sprague on 46 acres features an enclosed stairway to the second floor, storm door entrance to the cellar, a cistern for capturing runoff rainwater in the basement and the early "out house" currently used as a tool shed. An addition in the 1930s includes a new kitchen and a stone porch of bungalow construction. It is listed on the Farmington Hills Register of Historic Places.

The Kirby White House

This Federalist Revival house designed by noted architect Marcus Burrows was originally part of a five-acre site located a mile north on Farmington Road. The house has undergone an intensive, multi-year restoration.

John Glick Home & Plum Tree Pottery

This property was part of a working farm through the community's formative years. This typical Michigan farm house from the mid nineteenth century is home to artist John Glick, whose work is in the permanent collections of the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C., the Detroit Institute of Arts and Cranbrook Art Museum.

The Philbrick Tavern

Nathan Philbrick sold his tavern on Grand River and built the present structure in 1827. During its run as a tavern it had a tap room and small sleeping rooms. Town meetings were held there. The tavern was converted to a farmhouse and was reportedly a stop on the Underground Railroad.

The Greek Revival style features a stone basement and hand hewn beams visible from the attic. The family room

Please see HOME TOUR, B2



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL ISRAEL



Tour homes:
Above, the Thomas Russell House is a Queen Anne Victorian built in 1892 featuring a multi gabled roof, fish scale shingles and color glass window panels. At left, John Glick's Plum Tree Pottery was established in 1964 and includes a studio show-room, sculpture area and upper gallery. The property was part of a working farm throughout the city's formative years.

Hills gardener creates oasis of beauty

By KATHIE O'DONOHUE
SPECIAL WRITER

The front yard of the home is blanketed with a stunning array of annual flowers: marigolds, begonia, impatiens. But like the proverbial tip of the iceberg, one has to enter Paul Paddon's backyard to truly appreciate the mastery of this gardener.

A soft-spoken gentleman with a remarkable tan and remnants of his native English accent, Paddon has no need of bragging; after 41 years, his

garden speaks for itself. Everything in these gardens bids welcome: breathtaking perennials, birdhouses, grass that feels like walking on soft carpet, butterfly and ladybird homes, two ponds, one of which has a waterfall. Touring this yard beckons one to drink in the serenity of a nature sanctuary, a retreat.

Paddon and his wife, Olive, moved to one of the first homes in the Kendallwood subdivision in 1957 before the city of Farmington Hills was even in existence. At that time the area was known as Farmington Township. Orchard Lake Road was two lanes with little traffic, and virtually no land west of what is currently Farmington Hills was developed.

Yet since that time Paddon's fame has spread far beyond the perimeter of Farmington Hills; visitors from all over the world have toured his gardens. Talk to local garden aficionados and the "guy with the beautiful garden" or "the house on Brandywine" is typically mentioned.

Born over seventy years ago in Kent, England, a city whose name coincidentally means "garden of England," Paddon and his brother shared a small home with his parents on a grand estate where his

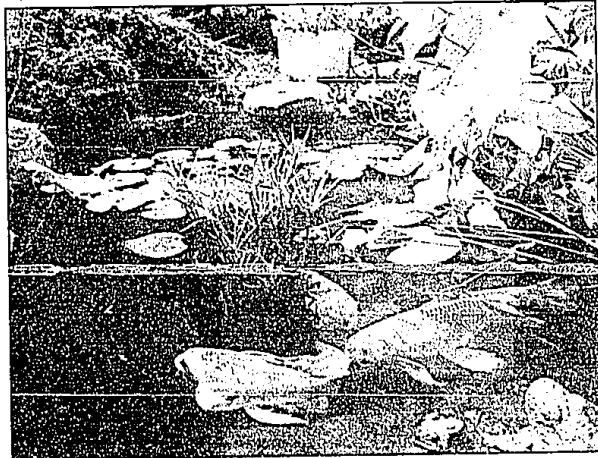
mother was head cook and his father, head chauffeur. Three master gardeners who cared for the grounds noticed young Paul's interest and fascination with planting and taught him their trade. Indeed, Paddon's gardens brings to mind many of the great European gardens.

"What worked then (in terms of gardening) are the same things that work today," Paddon says. "Yet the first question I am usually asked is 'what fertilizer do you use?' The key to a successful garden is soil; if you have good soil, you will have a good garden...with poor soil, your garden will suffer."

When Paddon first tried to work the soil years ago, he noted the heavy clay content of the ground. As many Kendallwood residents also recognize, the area was built on a flood plain. After years of preparation by turning the earth, mulching and addition of peat, his soil looks rich and healthy.

Wildlife is attracted to Paddon's garden including many types of birds, insects and butterflies. Recently the ponds were stocked with polliwogs, and frogs are now welcoming inhabitants. Paddon's plants look incredibly healthy, but he denies the use of commercial fertilizer, chemicals or insect spray. All of his annuals — and this year there are some 10,000 — are grown by Paddon in one of two small greenhouses adjacent to his house. One of the reasons he starts his own plants is the inability to get the range in variety of plant types from most commercial nurseries. He deals with local and European seed companies. Twenty or thirty different kinds of perennials grace his beds including phlox, daylilies, dahlias, black-eyed Susans and many more. Paddon states, "Whenever I see something new, I

Please see GARDEN, B3



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL ISRAEL

Giant goldfish: These fish in Paul Paddon's backyard pond are obviously well fed. They live in one of the two ponds that complete his backyard garden motif. Local garden club members and passersby alike enjoy a visit to his inviting backyard paradise.