

Founders Festival

Change is good for community

Change is sometimes uneasy, other times scary and fraught with uncertainty. But it always presents a challenge and a promise of something new and exciting. That's true about the changes planned for the annual Founders Festival in July.

Implementing changes for the festival, which is now more than 30 years old, will be uneasy at first. With the right mindset and time, the changes will fall into place, with the hope of creating a new and refreshing event for the Farmington-Farmington Hills community.

Among the major changes is the chamber's decision to get out of the festival business and hand it over to a nonprofit entity that is now hiring a professional to produce the event. This change alone may cause some long-time participants and volunteers some ire. But in the end, it may be the best decision for the festival.

Take a look at other community events, such as the Plymouth International Ice Sculpture Spectacular and the Novi '50s Festival. Both successful and large events are organized and produced by entities separate from the communities and chambers.

Today, events must be financially self-sustaining to stay alive. The chamber board — which often just broke even with the festival and sometimes lost money — is right in getting out of the festival business because events do take money to put on and should generate revenue in order to continue improving.

After all, the chamber's main purpose is to advocate for business and to ensure a healthy environment to sustain business. While the festival was believed to have done that to some extent, a festival is not within a chamber's purview and it's time to let those who know about putting on professional festivals to go to it.

These turn of events should in no way impugn the hard work given the festivals over the past 16 years by former chamber President Jody Soronen, who put her heart and soul into the annual events.

Truly, without Soronen, there would have been no festivals and the community must recognize that. In fact, before she left for greener professional pastures, Soronen was asked to write down all she knew about putting on the festival, as well as contact names and phone numbers. That says something.

Another change that must be embraced is the determination to make the festival a truly communitywide event by including the city of Farmington Hills, as well as the civic organizations that have long benefited from the festival.

The Farmington community is more than just downtown. By including Farmington Hills and the civic organizations, the festival can take on a new life, new ideas and mirror what our communities truly are.

Already on tap for festival week are fireworks in Farmington Hills, as well as a circus



Watts-Up: Sandra and Mike Watts shown here at the chamber of commerce 35th anniversary party Saturday, will coordinate and produce the Founders Festival in July.

and a multicultural-multiracial fair. That's in addition to arts and crafts, good food to eat, and entertainment, much of which will be brought in by newly hired Watts-Up Inc., alias Mike and Sandra Watts, who are responsible for the success of the Plymouth International Ice Spectacular.

Though not possible this year, it might be a good idea to change the festival dates. Last year, attendance was down as the festival is now faced with stiff competition with well-known and popular art festivals in Plymouth and Wyandotte.

People have only so much time so it's important to capture their full attention during a week when Farmington and Farmington Hills will be the places to be.

The goal is to provide a festival that's popular not only to Farmington area residents, but those from our neighboring communities. With hard work, open minds and a positive attitude, the Founders Festival should put the Farmington area on the map for entertainment and fun activities for families.

But it requires foresight and a desire to let change happen without remorse or anger. The planned changes are not coming because anyone failed. It's just time to let the festival change with the changing communities we live in.

Rouge: Let's work together

If Oakland and Wayne county officials were to develop a slogan for the Rouge River, the motto should be "Let's work together."

Farmington Hills, Farmington, Novi, Livonia and others are among the 41 of 48 Rouge basin communities that have applied to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality for a voluntary stormwater permit. If approved by the DEQ, the communities have agreed to work to control illicit sewer connections, public participation and public education programs. Communities remain concerned about the threats of federal mandates, while Wayne County officials and some communities are concerned over who oversees the project, but overall the regulatory agencies, the federal court and local communities have all worked well together.

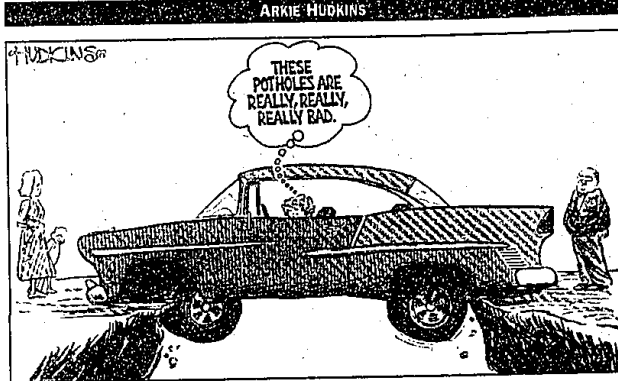
The permit process was developed from the "bottom up" — a voluntary process for communities to address the stormwater runoff in cleaning the Rouge. Those permits were outlined and examined locally last year with input from communities and subwatershed groups of representatives of these local communities. Of course, U.S. District Judge John Feikens has prodded the communities along through the process with his threat of an authority to oversee the process, but the permits have shown that the communities are serious about cleaning the Rouge. At this point, the EPA and DEQ have not raised any

serious objections about the permit applications. The subwatershed groups have a long way to go to clean the river, but if this local, yet regional, approach continues with the same seriousness shown during the subwatershed meetings, then the stormwater runoff of road salt and chemicals that plagues the Rouge can be controlled with enough time, effort and money.

The permit process is a great start to control the stormwater runoff and has helped snowball the local momentum behind the \$1.3 billion Rouge River Wet Weather Demonstration Project.

We hope it continues.

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LETTERS

Thanks to drivers

On behalf of the employees of the Metro Region (West Oakland Project Office), of the Michigan Department of Transportation and our contractors, I want to thank area motorists, residents and businesspeople for their cooperation during the past nine months.

With the passage of Gov. Engler's Build Michigan II plan and TEA-21, we were able to deliver the largest road and bridge repair and rebuild program in state history; 1999 will be even bigger with \$1.2 billion invested in our roads and bridges.

We realize that many times, no matter what we do, we will impact motorists. I assure you, we will continue to work to minimize motorists' inconvenience by building at night, on weekends and being careful to minimize the impact on daytime and special event traffic. We will apply what was learned this year and improve as we work wherever we can through the winter and during the next construction season.

Again, thank you to all motorists and remember to drive carefully through the winter.

Mark Stuecher
MDOT West Oakland Field Office

MIOSHA gutting takes toll

John Engler has gutted MIOSHA since taking office in 1990. The agenda is directed at making MIOSHA a consultant rather than an agency that has the power to inspect, enforce, and penalize those that do not comply. Safety will be provided by "Voluntary Employer Compliance." In reality, it means "No Safety!" Job safety is a priority, and a workers right to life should not end when they punch a time clock.

We're fighting for our lives ... to the families who lost a loved one a friend, it's our heartfelt sympathy to you we send.

Your loved one went to work one day ... Now they're gone ... with God they stay.

They went to work with hopes and dreams ... Instead their lives ended in violent screams.

Safety and inspections, Business did not heed, Profits are the roots of this selfish greed.

Human life, "They" say, cannot compare, Companies continue to show us, "We Don't Care."

To John Engler I show my cold stone stare, No empathy or compassion, do you even care? Our workers are dying for an honest day's pay, But dear Johnny keeps saying, "Get out of my way."

Indifference does not make this crime go away, It causes injury and death, which workers will pay.

Noncompliance in safety is our biggest fear, But our strong voices fall on Bureaucrat deaf

ears.
We all have a right to come home each day, It's a crime that safety violations stand in the way.

The families, with tears, place a rose on the grave, How senseless, how tragic, a life we could have saved.

In memory, for those we've lost and those we fight to save.

Patrice Smith and Laurel Tondreau
Livonia

Private schools

Mr. Philip Power's Feb. 4 editorial in the Observer & Eccentric states "Private schools have been feeding off the public trough for years."

I would appreciate a follow-up editorial listing the benefits private schools have received and are receiving from the public trough.

I am a senior citizen and pay public school taxes which, I believe, fuel the public trough. My grandchildren attend a private school for which their parents pay tuition in addition to their public trough taxes. The only service they receive is bus transportation. Are they missing services they are entitled to?

I will be looking for a response from Mr. Powers in a future Observer edition. I'm sure many parents of private school children will be interested also.

Would Mr. Power be happier if all the private school children entered the public school system? How much would that raise our taxes?

Margaret LaBuda
Farmington Hills

Memories stirred

Reading Tim Kiska's Detroit News article about Channel 56's documentary on "Neighborhood Theatres" brought back a lot of early marriage "memories."

Our first place to live in 1952 was a tiny three-room apartment over the Civic Theatre in downtown Farmington. It had a tiny kitchen, a large bathroom with bathtub built for midnights. We had to take off the bedroom door to be able to walk around bed.

There was an all-night hamburger joint below which really got busy and noisy after the two bars in town closed. Vapors of hamburgers and popcorn filled our home at all times.

I think we were the last tenants because of state fire laws. Now I have fun taking grandchildren to the movies and showing them where we used to live.

Patricia Centers
Livonia

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— Philip Power