

## CHAT ROOM



Marie Smith

## Kids on fringe yearning to belong, too

As the high school killings in our country continue, I wonder what contributes to the ultimate eruption of violence in our youth. The boys who committed the most recent massacre in Colorado were described as being on the fringe. They didn't fit in. So, like so many kids before them, they created their own group, with symbols and activities that defied all those who had rejected them, blatantly or subtly.

Many people say the parents of these boys are to blame. It was their fault for permitting violent video games, Soldier of Fortune magazines, and for allowing them to wear black trench coats. If we can blame the parents, then the rest of us parents are safe.

We may all share the blame. Despite civil rights and affirmative action plans, we don't accept those who are different. Even teachers and parents, who profess to love children, often dismiss those with unusual, annoying habits.

### What went wrong?

I want to know what happened to those boys between the time they were brought home in soft raveling blankets and the day they turned their hatred on themselves and took out 13 innocents and a whole community with them. I want to know because my oldest son, (I'll call him "Nick"), now half-grown, has been on the fringe since preschool.

Nick has fair skin and thick, dark hair that stands up on top with no assistance from gel. He is lean, taller than average, and when he laughs, he bends in half at the waist.

When Nick was 5, we passed a neighbor's house where 10-20 neighbor kids in bright red jumpsuits were frolicking in the yard. Nick said, "Please can I go play?" Of course, I dressed him and sent him out. Ten minutes later, the parent in that house called to say, "I have too many children here." She would not send other children home with Nick because "they wouldn't want to come. They don't like Nick," she said. Nick stood outside the group and did not join in, and he hesitated when they asked him questions. She said she couldn't "make the kids like him."

I have never seen his face look as sad as that day when I opened the door. "They don't want ME," he said. I held him for a long time.

Another time, he went out to play and a mother called me to say, "We make play dates in this neighborhood. We don't just send our kids out to one another's house to play." I remember screaming into the receiver, "Who made these rules?"

### Struggling socially

Nick has continued to struggle socially. He hesitates, sometimes for minutes when people ask him questions, and the silence is horribly uncomfortable. Even I have commanded, Answer the question in a voice that is a little too shrill.

When Nick played soccer, his legs looked too long for his body. He made huge circles with his arms, and bobbed his head awkwardly. All the way down the soccer field, he would announce every aspect of the play, the score, the players, the position of the ball. I thought, why doesn't he shut up? His father noted that Nick kept better track of the details than the coaches did.

In kindergarten, his teacher became exasperated at his halting speech and his averted eyes. In first grade, his teacher suggested we put him on Ritalin to help him focus. In second grade, we tried a charter school that prided itself on unconditionally accepting all children. Unfortunately, they neglected to teach them after they accepted them. We returned to the public school we had left.

When Nick turned 9, he joined a basketball team, the Magic. Coach Miller, a volunteer dad, began by having the team identify what each play-

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# Artist in Residence

## OCC professor helps students find creativity

Farmington's newest Artist in Residence is an author, a potter and the art department chair at OCC.

By MARY RODRIQUE  
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As a student in Dearborn Public Schools, Robert Piepenburg was being groomed for an auto industry job, like it or not.

"Math and science was stressed heavily," said Farmington's Artist in Residence for 1999. "I was tracked." At Henry Ford Community College, he was tapped by Burroughs Corp. for a cooperative work/study program in engineering. "The engineers I worked with were miserable," he said. "I came back (to HFCC) and took my first drawing class."

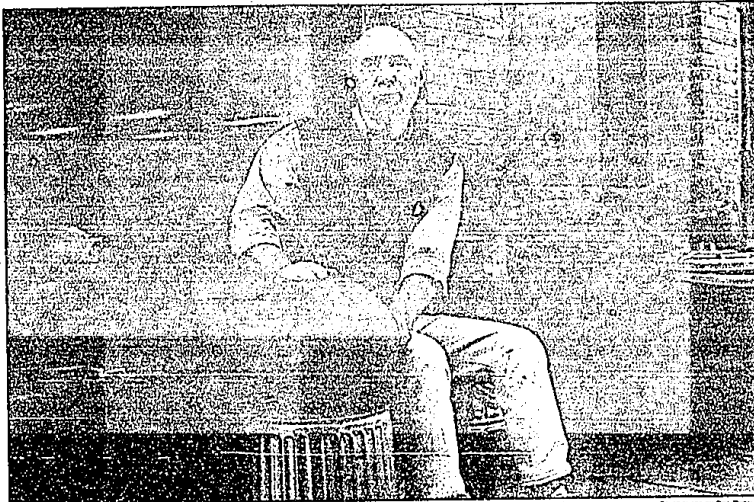
A good teacher was all the encouragement he needed to spread his wings. Soon Piepenburg transferred to Eastern Michigan University where he eventually earned three degrees, including master of fine arts with a major in sculpture.

Today, he chairs the art department at Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge campus. He is a ceramics instructor, artist and author of three books. The latest feather in his cap is Artist in Residence, an honor bestowed by the Farmington Community Arts Council and celebrated during the annual Festival of the Arts, now in progress.

"When I transferred to Eastern, I planned to turn my drawing skills to painting. I had a three-credit hole in my schedule and I took a ceramics class to fill it. That turned out to be a second birth for me," said Piepenburg, an affable man who looks right at home in his sprawling OCC ceramics studio.

"My simple definition of creativity is 'Know who you are.' Then you can be who you are."

Piepenburg was nominated for the award by his wife, Gail Piepenburg, art department chair at Farmington High School, who was Farmington Artist in Residence in 1980. Thus they are now



STAFF PHOTO BY GAIL BISHOP

Artist with work: Robert Piepenburg displays one of his pots outside the ceramics studio at Oakland Community College, Orchard Ridge.

the only married couple to share that honor.

Over nearly 30 years teaching at OCC, Piepenburg has watched the ceramics department expand to full operation with a waiting list.

"We began with two electric kilns. Now we have four. We can accommodate 125 students. We could fill more but the studio couldn't handle more. We work at maximum capacity."

Of the award, he said "It's great. People need to feel appreciated, to have success acknowledged. I'm aware of that as a teacher. It's especially nice being recognized in your own community. Home is usually the last place where you receive accolades."

The Piepenburgs live in Farmington Hills, about a mile from the OCC campus. They've raised five children now ranging in age from 16 to 30.

As an artist, Piepenburg "is not into factory-type production. Between semesters, I'll do work. It seems it always sells."

At the William Costick Activities Center through Sunday, viewers can see eight of his works displayed on pedestals in the main exhibit hall. He describes his work as "nonfunctional. It doesn't live well in the kitchen."

He favors Raku, an ancient Japanese technique adopted for the contemporary potter. One of the books he authored is "Raku Pottery." The other two are "The Spirit of Clay" which is used as a ceramics textbook in some colleges, and "Treasures of the Creative Spirit, An Artist's Understanding of Human Creativity." The latest one is more philosophical in nature.

Until two years ago, Piepenburg and his wife exhibited annually during the

Ann Arbor Street Fair. They simply failed to mail in the application form a couple of years back and then realized they needed the break from their busy schedules. In summer, they often do workshops together for art teachers.

"Art is so important in education. It helps students to discover and enhance their self-worth," he said. "It gives them self-esteem. It helps them to discover their humanity."

Over his career, Piepenburg has received three grants from the Michigan Council for the Arts and one from the National Endowment for the Arts. He would like to see government more involved in supporting the arts, which he feels is a cornerstone of society.

"Teaching is real important to me," he said. "It's a part of what brings joy to my life, and passion. I'm very lucky."

# Arts service winner knows how to raise cash for community projects

By MARY RODRIQUE  
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Service to the Arts winner May Arvo has been volunteering for good causes her whole life. In her native Redford Township, she was Citizen of the Year, the same honor she achieved later while a resident of Southfield.

She also has the distinction of being the second woman ever to win a coveted Beaver Award from Boy Scouts while serving as a den mother. And she was the oldest woman ever crowned Mrs. Michigan in 1980. Just don't ask how old, she jokes.

Arvo, who lives in Novi but has been an active member and fund-raiser for Farmington Musicale for almost two

decades, was selected by the Farmington Community Arts Council this year as service winner primarily for raising funds for new pianos at the Longacre House and Costick Activities Center. With Musicale, she also raised funds for a grand piano at the Farmington Library. Arvo is being cited for fund raising for youth music scholarships, her particular passion.

She is Musicale's representative with Farmington Community Arts Council, serves on the Longacre House Board, and is a longtime member of the Farmington Players.

"She has been a true arts activist, and has dedicated many years of service in our community to promote youth, music and the arts," said Ben

Scaglione, a Musicale spokeswoman.

The daughter of singers - her father was a cafe singer in Europe - Arvo inherited a strong singing voice which she first used publicly in a church choir solo at age 5. At 7, she sang on "Radio Schoolhouse" and in ninth grade at Redford Union High won her first contest to sing and tour with the school band as vocalist. She attended Interlochen on scholarship for two weeks, study of voice and choral directing. Although offered several college music scholarships, including a bid to study opera in Syracuse, she instead chose Bronson School of Nursing, affiliated with Western Michigan University. Encouraged to join

While youth choir director at Nardin



May Arvo Park United Methodist Church in Farmington Hills, she met Bev Nateshine, who encouraged her to join the

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## Register for training

☐ Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Organization(s) you represent: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Address: (include city and zip code) \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Telephone: (work and home) \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Current e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Type of computer you have: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ First choice for training session: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Second choice for training session: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Check No.: \_\_\_\_\_

## Build a Web site for your club, organization



"Mihometown.com is a new community Web site service designed to serve and promote community organizations in the state of Michigan," said Brian Roberto, manager of the Observer & Eccentric Enhanced Media Department.

You don't need to write code or know HTML. All you need is a computer, a modem and an Internet connection. Connect to mihometown.com and follow the on-screen instructions. The site allows community groups to post their newsletters and calendars of events online, to post messages in discussion areas or to engage in live chat with other participants. You can also send e-mail to all members of the organization with just one click of the mouse.

You can even stack pages within pages, Roberto said. "An alumni organization might have a site set up for general

members," he said. "Within that, you could create another site for board members, to which only they have access. Or you might create a link to another site for the reunion committee."

Bringing many local groups' Web sites together in one location creates a sense of community, Roberto said. And it makes the sites easier to find.

Training sessions are scheduled for 6:30-9:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 12, 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, May 15, and 9 a.m. to noon Wednesday, May 19, at CompUSA in the Novi Town Center. Each session will last two and a half hours, after which, Roberto said, you will be ready to set up your site.

The \$15 fee includes training, materials and refreshments. You can fill out the attached coupon and send a check payable to the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers or register online with a credit card at this secure site <http://eeonline.com/mihometown> or call Jennifer Murray at (734) 953-2038 for more information. Space is limited.

