

Founder's Festival

Let's give change a fair chance

Judging by some comments made by visitors, vendors and crafters at the 36th annual Farmington Area Founders Festival, change is difficult to bear.

And so it is. Without changes made to the festival, now operated by a non-profit board and managed by Mike and Sandra Watts of Watts-Up! Inc. the festival will die, or at least become such a planning and financial burden, we'll wish it would die.

Some crafters and vendors vowed they wouldn't think too hard about coming back in 2000, citing higher fees to rent table space (as high as \$150), lack of communication and promotion about the event and getting moved from friendlier, more familiar locations around downtown Farmington.

That's too bad. But Watts-Up was asked by the board that runs the festival to help make the event financially healthy. Crafters and vendors must consider the cost involved in putting on a festival the size of the one in Farmington.

They must also ask themselves when was the last time prices were raised.

Watts-Up was brought into this milieu late in the day. That fact was acknowledged by both Mike and Sandra Watts, the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce and Farmington and Farmington Hills officials.

Yet the Wattses promised they would immediately make some improvements. What happened was a lack of time to fully forewarn people and allow them time to become accustomed to changes.

We have no doubt that in the next few years - the Wattses were given a three-year management contract - the planning of the festival and the outcome certainly will be smoother.

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The official inclusion of Farmington Hills in the festival appeared to be a winner, particularly with the circus and the fireworks, which kicked off the weeklong event.

The festival board, however, should consider moving the date of the festival. Right now, it competes with Plymouth's Art in the Park, the well-known and well-attended art fair in Wyandotte and yet another in Royal Oak.

With Farmington Hills now fully involved, how about moving the festival to the week before the July 4 holiday and conclude the event with the fireworks - in celebration of not only the festival but Independence Day?

As with anything that is new, we have to give both the new festival board and Watts-Up time to adjust, time to plan, time to make judicious improvements and time for success.

It will come, and it will happen. Mike and Sandra Watts have a proven track record - the Plymouth Ice Spectacular and Detroit Hoedown to name a couple successes - in the events business. And it is a business, not just for the Wattses but for the Farmington festival.

Let's be patient. Let's be optimistic. And above all, let's temper our criticisms until Watts-Up and the festival board has a full year to plan for the festival.

MEAP scores aren't only measure

Confusion over standardized testing - such as MEAP - seems so pervasive that even the animated sitcom "The Simpsons" pokes fun.

In a fabled episode, the Simpson children, chiefly Lisa and recidivist Bart, each take career aptitude tests.

Scores show Lisa will become a homemaker, while Bart is destined for a law enforcement career.

The show makes clear the potential impact of standardized tests: Lisa becomes despondent and a classroom delinquent, and Bart becomes an overzealous hall monitor.

The parody highlights the need for caution as educators and parents analyze MEAP results. Sometimes the children are forgotten in favor of statistical comparisons.

MEAP results should not result in a wholesale reordering of educational priorities, though the tests give us valuable information about how to improve curricula.

Learning to pass a test is not a complete education. And simply teaching to pass a test is not completely educating.

MEAP tests are useful as an analytical and planning tool. At the least, MEAP results may inform parents, educators and school districts how a curriculum may be lacking.

Anticipating MEAP scores seems to put plenty of people on edge. Because MEAP is given at various times throughout the year, scores become a blur for the public.

MEAP results also prompt plenty of analysis.

Yet the primary concern is why scores aren't better. Caveats always follow a district's scores: a school's population has changed, timing of the test was inappropriate or the test was changed since last year, which didn't give teachers - and consequently students - time to prepare.

In the end, most students get up the next morning and go to school with little worry about the results.

Yet the adults in their lives put such great focus on the results, so much so that some school districts market in anticipation of the tests.

Some districts have T-shirts announcing

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it; special snacks or breakfasts in his honor. To be fair, educators, the media and parents should understand that test scores alone don't necessarily imply good, well-rounded education.

MEAP does not test a student's knowledge of current events or their knowledge and the applicability of art and music, or their people skills, perhaps one of the most important elements in successful employment.

MEAP scores can help a school district identify its weaknesses and help develop curricula that corrects those weaknesses.

For example, Livonia put great emphasis on MEAP scores in 1998 after Superintendent Ken Watson's assessment that the district's "MEAP scores don't match the public image of Livonia schools."

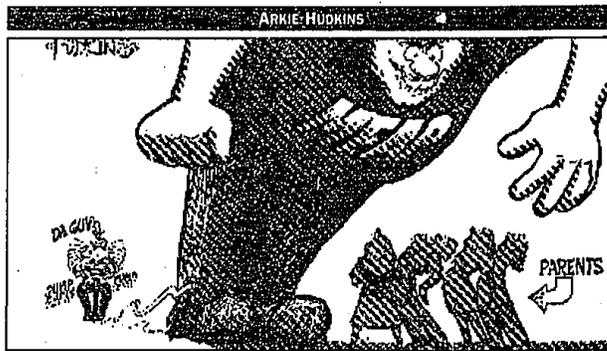
He then rejected his own 2 percent pay raise and created a new administrative position the Observer has referred to as a "MEAP czar." And the test scores did increase.

However, educators and parents must not be blinded by individual MEAP scores. Too often these scores are politicized and massaged, not for the good of the individual student but for the good of a district's public image. That's not education.

Educators and parents must be mindful that MEAP scores are not the only yardstick to measure educational progress.

Grades, other standardized tests and participation in extracurricular events are also measurements of the success of education.

Let's face the reality of MEAP. It is a test that has validity and can be used as a guidepost for positive change. But it is not the be-all and end-all of education or a child's educational future.



LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.homecom.net

Thank you

An open letter to the greater Farmington community:

Your generosity is overwhelming!

On behalf of the PlayScape Steering Committee, and the current and future children of the Farmington area, please accept our biggest and most sincere thank you for your individual and collective support of the Kids World PlayScape project. The following illustrates the unrivaled generosity of the people of the Greater Farmington Area:

- Over 1,000 contributors (individuals, families and businesses)
- Over 1,500 pickets ordered (kids, families, memorials, tributes, etc.)

- n Over \$70,000 of materials and services donated (from \$100 to \$30,000)
- n Over \$100,000 in cash donations (from \$25 to \$5,000)

I won't even try to calculate the cost per smile - I just can't wait to see 'em.

Three people are especially worthy of special recognition for their fund-raising efforts alone (and they are doing so much more for this project): Nancy Tushman and Bruce Lilley, co-chairs of the Fundraising Committee, have worked tirelessly to achieve "beyond the goal" (and our wildest dreams) success in obtaining community support; and Mardy Stirling, who single-handedly secured participation by several local contractors for construction/site preparation services and construction materials.

If you know Nancy, Bruce or Mardy, please say thanks to them for all of us. If you don't know them, please do yourself a favor - find and get to know them (they're probably at the PlayScape) - they are among the finest people you could ever know; exceptionally caring and giving persons, each one.

And while you're at it, give yourself and the entire greater Farmington area a huge round of applause for making possible what not too long ago was just a "vision."

Bill Richards

Farmington Assistant City Manager

it would be too difficult to educate voters about local issues because of the clutter created by national and state candidates and proposals. If the school board doesn't believe it can break through this wall of distraction to deliver its message to adults, why should I trust them to properly educate my children with the vast amount of competition for their attention?

Nintendo, MTV, the World Wide Web and a multitude of extracurricular activities seem more formidable obstacles than reaching parents who care about the quality of their children's education. If school board members don't believe they have the ability to educate the public, perhaps they should reconsider their current position.

Steve Sutton
 Farmington

Some questions

The NFHS production of "Joseph" was fabulous!

It was the most fun I've ever had attending a play and even my 11 year-old and eight year-old children said they liked it better than when we saw it at the Fox Theatre. The talent and energy of the students was truly remarkable.

The only problem I had with it was the excessively sexual dance by Putiphar's wife. For those who did not see it, the dancer was basically on her back, spreading her legs wide open, while Joseph sat right behind. I felt very uncomfortable watching this scene with my children.

I probably would let this pass without commenting except for two reasons: 1) a friend who has seen the Broadway staging of "Joseph" eight times, and who also saw the NFHS play, felt that this scene was unnecessarily more sexually explicit, because the professional staging never positioned Joseph and the wife this way, nor for an extended length of time, and 2) the "Pippin" play at NFHS two years ago also featured sexually explicit dance scenes.

I have to question why the play directors feel it necessary to have students perform roles in such a sexually provocative manner. I think it shows a lack of respect for the performers themselves, as well as the audience.

It also seems to me that our high school spring musical should be "family fare," and not something we have to worry whether or not is appropriate for our school-age children.

Linda Kennedy
 Farmington Hills

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— Philip Power