

## POINTS OF VIEW

## Sever questions motives

I would like to thank the many outstanding people in our community for their support and their unselfish sacrifice to the community. The city administration along with the employees of the City of Farmington Hills are without a doubt the finest city staff in America. They have molded and developed Farmington Hills into one of the finest cities in the United States. The members of our boards and commissions who have given countless hours of service to our city should be commended for their hard work.

The city council, particularly those who have supported me during the past few years, know that I believe we have many accomplishments due to the outstanding working relationships we have enjoyed. Our current mayor, Aldo Vagnozzi, our first directly elected mayor, has done an outstanding job of building consensus on tough issues. He is committed to the people, a reflection of the council's desire to serve with distinction.

Cheryl Oliverio's successful run for city council five years ago helped change the way the council approached many issues improving the way we conduct council business in our city. Jon Grant's business background has been a valuable asset demonstrated by his leadership on the cities direction of improved technology. Jerry Ellis without question proved to be the missing link to making the current city council one of the best ever. His valuable effort to write a strong cellular tower ordinance is an outstanding accomplishment for our city. One of the most dedicated members of council has to be Nancy Bates. She is another council member who deserves many asterisks by her name making a strong impact on our community. Nancy has a unique leadership quality that causes her to stand out among community leaders in Farmington Hills. Her undying devotion to youth and families is exemplary.

It is obvious I have had the honor of serving on the Farmington Hills City Council during a time when major decisions had to be made. Working with a team of dedicated people helped us purchase land, acquire and build facilities that would not be feasible in the future. Our fire department has grown from putting out fires to saving lives when seconds count the most. Our community policing initiative has improved public safety and has become a model program for other cities across the country. There is no question that generations to come will enjoy our efforts of the past 10 years. Active families with baseball/softball players, hockey enthusiasts, tree lovers, naturalists and senior citizens will benefit from many of our most recent decisions. From the clerk's office to the Department of Public Works, the city has improved the quality of life in Farmington Hills.

One of my most memorable moments and a strong indication of the character of this community was when more than 180 people stepped forward to participate in the Year 2000 project. There aren't many communities who can boast about having the best of everything but we're very close. I certainly appreciate my parents moving to this community 33 years ago. This gave me many opportunities but most of all the chance to raise a family in this community. I remember years ago, when times were better, my wife and children spent time and money shopping for Christmas gifts to donate to the Salvation Army. We wanted our children to appreciate life more by understanding it is better to give than receive. Making sacrifices for others is something that makes them all better adults even though it was difficult to understand as young children.

Looking back over the last 20 years of community service, 13 on the Farmington Hills City Council, my only regret is the treatment I have received from the Observer Newspaper. Their efforts to sensationalize and attempts to discredit my character with distorted facts have slowed me down but never discouraged me from doing what I thought was in the best interest of this city. I stood my ground many times proving to be right once the truth was known. As the years went on, I began to expect less and less from the Observer Newspaper and they haven't disappointed me. This newspaper has reinforced by belief that they report with a double standard. They play favorites and cater to disgruntled citizens who have an ax to grind because they didn't get an appointment, lost an election or just didn't get their way. Worst of all, this newspaper has one again demonstrated total disregard for the best interest of our community. Editorials written based on distorted facts and sensationalized innuendoes are the very reason we have seen five different editors while I've been on city council.

Something is drastically wrong when my good intentions, proven over the years, can so easily be portrayed as unethical. The editorial written in this newspaper about me in November was the worst piece of trash I have ever read. Craftily written to create a false perception of my character. Your newspaper has truly offended my family name and compromised the integrity of this newspaper. You must be held accountable for this irresponsible journalism. I can assure you people in this community will not stand for it. As one resident said to me "I hope the Observer doesn't turn into a local rag, because I'll stop buying it."

**The newspaper was so quick to rush to judgment that they couldn't resist the opportunity to blast my name and good intentions. There has been a history of creating controversy with innuendoes and sensationalism. This caused a very good proposal to be withdrawn which may cost the city millions of dollars. It was the only proposal that took into consideration the church property. I hope the city council will protect their best interest.**

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Never has the double standard been so obvious. Just a couple of months ago, another elected official, whom you love and admire, did what you accused me of doing. He was written up as a saint and portrayed as a hero. Absolutely contrary to treatment afforded me when in fact I had no conflict as indicated by the city attorney. Only the distorted innuendoes have created a perception of unethical behavior, something I must vehemently protest.

While serving as mayor in 1989, I pushed to have a Code of Ethics adopted by the city council. It was decided that all conflicts would be disclosed at the time they occurred which is why members of the city council, including the mayor, have abstained from voting on certain issues. The code of conduct was not to deprive council members from doing business in the city but was to insure that disclosure was made at the appropriate time. Not one member of council has ever been required to disclose a perceived conflict in the minds of a few disgruntled citizens. Mayor Vagnozzi recently abstained from voting on a paving project in his neighborhood but wasn't required to disclose a conflict of interest when he knew the petitions were being circulated. Councilwoman Vicki Barnett dismissed herself from an executive session meeting because her husband may become involved in a lawsuit against the city. She hasn't disclosed this to the public because the conflict is perceived, not a reality.

So please tell me who is the almighty person who determines what is acceptable for one but not the other? Is it ethical for this newspaper to generate a double standard choosing to chastise some and glorifying others?

My involvement in the Eleven Pines Proposal would have guaranteed the community of reviewing a proposal that met many of the objectives of the city. The suggestion of unfair completion was unfounded since the bids were sent to everyone and anyone with no exclusions. As it turned out a bid was received from our former assistant city manager, a city paid consultant and another former employee. In fact, after reviewing the proposals it is my opinion that the city will reject all of the submissions for failure to meet the cities requirements and expectations. The city insured a fair bid process requiring closed bids which were publicly disclosed on Nov. 17, 1998, eight days after I was off the city council. Unfortunately, the big loser is the community, something the newspaper and a handful of disgruntled citizens can certainly take credit for.

For more than 20 years I have served this community, 13 as a Farmington Hills councilman. I have always put the city ahead of my own interest. I have stuck my neck out for this community time and time again, saving the day on many occasions. It will likely happen again and I will never take the safe road of doing nothing. I am very disappointed in the editor of this newspaper of selfishly catering to the wrong crowd. Attacking my honesty and integrity so unjustifiably is a bad reflection on the Observer Newspaper.

Just when I thought the newspaper finally found an editor that would last and work with the community, gaining the trust of its readers, her editorial causes me to question the motives of the Observer Newspaper. I would encourage the citizens of this community to demand the highest of standards requiring facts rather than perception. Demanding that in everything we say and do we do is in the best interest of our community. As far as I'm concerned we could all take a lie detector test. The editor, disgruntled citizens and myself. Ask one question - do you believe your intentions were in the best interest of this city? I know I'll pass with flying colors.

Terry Sever is a former Farmington Hills city councilman who was elected in November as an Oakland County commissioner.



*Ernie Harwell*

Ernie Harwell  
Baseball Hall of Fame announcer  
and Medicare Blue spokesman



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