

POINTS OF VIEW

Youth issues continue to take priority with city's new mayor

As we begin the new year I would like to inform the community on the progress of work I have been doing on youth issues during my service on the Farmington Hills City Council.

While mayor in 1993 I initiated the task force to study youth issues and from that information established the Commission for Children, Youth and Families. These commissioners are a resource for Council on Youth and Family issues and also are advocates for children and their families in our community.

One unmet need the commission studied was for after-school programming for middle school youth. The commission submitted a grant request for nearly \$400,000 to fund the first youth center. When it was awarded, it became the basic funding for the first of four youth centers in Farmington Hills.

It was understood from the beginning that the grant was only for three years and additional money would be needed. With a lot of help from my friends I initiated the Farmington/Farmington Hills Foundation. Many community enriching programs have been supported, including \$170,000 that has already been given for the after-school youth program.

Working with the assistance of the Commission for Children, Youth and Families, I promoted another program to assist in offering services. It is called the Farmington Hills Volun-

teer Center.

The late Gov. George Romney offered his time and talent to work with us and make the volunteer center a reality. It is another way to make services available at no additional taxpayer expense.

Since 1994 I have served on the National League of Cities Human Development Committee. Much of our time is spent studying Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, immigration and other federal human services legislation. In 1996 some of us on the committee urged the formation of a task force to focus on youth issues nationally.

In 1997 this task force was formed and I was appointed to serve on it along with 22 other elected officials and three young people from across the nation. I was successful in my request to have a Farmington Hills young man, David Kinchen, appointed to serve as one of those three. He is an outstanding member.

The committee on which David and I served studied various models of youth leadership and programming in other states. Tom Menino, mayor of Boston, had a very successful group called the Mayor's Youth Council.

Mayor Menino had invited these young people to be his partners in decision making that affect their lives. Some other communities with active youth councils are in Texas, Nevada and Kansas.

In 1998 the National League of Cities approved the initial requests of



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one task force and moved to invite youth delegates to the national conference and to involve them in program planning.

To test and move forward plans to encourage youth leadership, students were encouraged to attend and participate in the National League of Cities Conferences. Young people from across the nation quickly developed a network of friends and are well on the way to establishing a viable National Youth Council. These young people have been panelists and at general assembly sessions of the National League of Cities Conferences with audiences of 4,000-6,000. They are quite amazing.

Locally, we have appointed youth to sit in on some of our current boards and commissions that are already established. However, after further study, it seems the best way to get a true reading on youth opinions is to establish a youth council and have various boards and commissions take issues to them for their input. An example would be the Parks and Recreation Commission requesting input about a skateboard park.

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The issue of a local youth council should be led and moved forward by our own youth delegates, who are members of the Commission for Children, Youth and Families. With commission support, those young people, along with a committee which they select and recommend to council, would report to council with information they have formulated.

In 1998 the National League of Cities approved the final recommendations of the task force and established a National Council for Youth, Education and Families and a National Institute. The main responsibility of the council will be to develop the agenda, determine structure and provide oversight for the National Institute. David Kinchen and I have been appointed to serve on that council.

The purpose of the institute is to collect and make available information on best practices, studies, research and data to assist leaders in local government in better serving young people and their families.

National fund-raising has already begun to support the Institute. From a state perspective, the Michigan Municipal League Executive Director George Goodman, has been a supporter from the beginning and served on the original task force.

As members of this National League of Cities Council for Youth, Education and Families we are very proud of the work accomplished thus far. We have moved in a rational, reasoned manner, not promising the

young people anything we could not deliver. The results and expectations are very exciting. I believe the efforts of many people will result in outstanding and positive changes in programming, leadership possibilities, and wholesome opportunities for young people all across America.

One interesting suggestion for a local program, introduced in the youth workshop track in which I participated, was for a "Wall of Fame."

Farmington Hills Youth and Family Supervisor Todd Lipa and I have discussed the idea. It is a way to acknowledge the positive actions of the youth in our community by means of a plaque on the wall with their names and a few words about their good deeds. Todd has identified a wall in the Coatick Center he thinks would be an excellent location to propose. We will be communicating further with the presenter of the program and our own young people to further define the project.

At the recent conference of the National League of Cities I convened the workshop on Youth as Leaders. We will be sharing that information with the youth committee.

Although our work is not nearly complete, worthy accomplishments have been achieved. I appreciate the support of council and the community on this long journey of exploration and study. I believe you will be pleased with the results.

Nancy Bates is the Farmington Hills mayor.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Thanks Andrew

On behalf of the Farmington Hills Police Officers Association and police officers around the state, I would like to thank State Rep. Andrew Raczkowski (37th district) for his efforts in modifying the recently passed residency bill.

Specifically we applaud Mr. Raczkowski's courageous stand at a

recent Farmington Hills council meeting where council voted 7-0 to endorse a watered down compromise of the original House bill which would have abolished any residency requirement. The compromise would have made residency a mandatory subject of collective bargaining.

Rep. Raczkowski believes that residency requirements violate a city employee's right to choose where he

or she may live. He stated these beliefs in front of the city council members and predictably, he was criticized for "attacking local control because the state's abolishment of residency would violate a city's right to self-determination."

I find it curious that these same council persons fail to see that they are in turn denying an employee the right to self-determination as to

where they want to live. I also find it interesting (and discouraging) that Mr. Raczkowski was the only elected official of our community to speak with the FHPOA and the Police Officers Association of Michigan to find out their perspectives on the residency issue. After all these are the citizens that are the most affected by these archaic policies.

Clearly Mr. Raczkowski represents

the best interest of his constituency as evidenced by the fact that a recent WWJ poll showed the majority of Farmington/Farmington Hills residents favor abolishing any residency requirements.

Wayne Beerbower
Vice-President FOAM
Chairman, FHPOA Political Action Committee

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