

Community Life

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The Observer

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CHAT ROOM



Pastor's legacy is continued growth, faith

By now, you're probably fed up with stories and TV programs packed with millennium musings. Totally subjective "lists" of the top this or that.

Compile those very lists in another 10 years, and chances are they will read dramatically different. Except, of course, for Michael Jordan's placement as ESPN's top athlete of the just-concluded century.

But why do so many care about capsules of easy-to-swallow information in the first place? It seems as though Americans are too obsessed with pop culture, either being part of the coffee house cutting edge or mainstream. They rush to buy the latest Beanie Baby or Pokemon item or make decisions about what to like based solely on what critiqued and marketing gurus tell them.

Not many seem to be rushing to their church, temple or synagogue, however, as we begin the 21st century. At the risk of sounding preachy, maybe more should consider going to their respective place of worship, because this society is getting increasingly warped, all at the expense of common human decency.

Consider that the National Football League and National Basketball Association scheduled games on Christmas Day. Sadly, it's all about big bucks, even on the holiest of days. And that's only a silver lining the holiday's commercialization.

Moreover, and I'm not guilty of this as you — the fact that people are wearing out a path to their movie multiplex, sporting event or shopping mall, but not to places where "The Word" is preached must have troubled Dr. Bartlett L. Hess during the last part of his life.

Founded Ward Church

Pastor Hess, a little man with a towering presence who founded Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Livonia (since relocated to Northville Township), passed away on Dec. 21, just six days short of his 89th birthday.

Under his leadership, which concluded with his 1992 retirement, Ward's membership grew to more than 5,000 strong; in 1981, he co-founded the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a denomination now with over 190 churches and 60,000 members around the world.

There's no denying that Ward today is in good shape, probably better than many. Current pastor Dr. James McGuire is continuing Hess' legacy, and Ward prides itself on offering a large number of youth ministries — aimed at helping raise tomorrow's spiritual leaders and congregations.

The bedrock foundation was largely put there by the work of Pastor Hess, remembered as "a lovely and loving man" who didn't worry if he sometimes displayed human tendencies and quirks. Tornness, anger and a penchant for buying collects.

"He'd occasionally lose his temper, those who were the recipients of such won't forget it," said Dr. L. Edward Davis during funeral services held at Ward on Hess' birthday.

"But given a good night's rest and maybe a chat with (his wife) Margaret, well, he mastered the art of the apology. ... He could be grumpy, but he'd get over it."

Hess also was described as a young-minded "progressive," even as he approached age 90. He did not care to live in the past, but always with an eye toward the future.

That future now carries on without him and his leadership.

Time will tell whether our society will ever rise out of the immoral muck it seems to be mired in. But one thing is for sure: It's too bad Bart Hess didn't live to see the 21st century. We sure could have used him.

Tim Smith is an author ("Miracle Birth Stories of Very Premature Babies") and reporter for the Farmington Observer who attends Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church. He can be reached at (248) 477-5450.

Pokémon power

Parents, teachers raise concerns over popular fad



Harmless fad or serious obsession? Parents and others debate the Pokémon phenomenon.

By KATHIE O'DONOHUE
SPECIAL WRITER

Mike first noticed it this summer at the neighborhood pool — other children immediately approached his three children in droves, all laden with card collection binders and each one intent on playing with and trading Pokémon cards.

"It was amazing," he said. "Wherever we went, the kids' topic was Pokémon. And every kid in sight was talking about the same thing."

Harmless fun, Mike thought, until school started and he noticed a disturbing trend: his 11-year-old son became obsessed with the game and card's, his 8-year-old daughter was the target of an older child's bullying to trade a rare card, and his 6-year-old son no longer wanted to ride his bike or play with other toys.

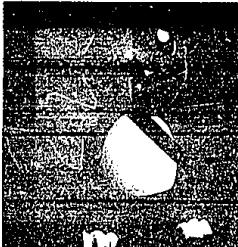
"In short, it became an out-and-out obsession," said the Farmington Hills dad. "My wife and I didn't like the way our kids played with each other anymore. The Pokémon fight each other; and our kids seem to be angry, frustrated (when playing the video game) and they definitely fought more. We decided at this point to get rid of the cards."

Have things changed? In that household, both parents say "Yes. It's more peaceful; they're more focused on their school work. We basically feel that anything that creates bad feelings between our kids is not a good thing."

Frantic frenzy

Just what is this craze that has pre-teen children collecting, trading up, and frequently in a frantic frenzy snatching up everything in sight with the Pokémon logo on it? Pokémon is short for "Pocket Monsters" and is a copyright of Nintendo. What began in Japan as a cartoon and video game has now spun off as cards, and in the process, has become one of the top-selling and most-requested toys on the market.

Pokémon are small "creatures" with different powers, currently numbering 150. Some change or evolve into variations on the originals. They go by names such as "Pikachu," "Charmander," "Ivysaur," and "Squirtle." From many reliable sources, one of the most-



Charmander. A lizard-like character.

wanted cards seems to be that of "Charizard" a dragon-like creature whose description in the Prima's Official Strategy Guide reads: He "spits fire that is hot enough to melt boulders. Known to cause forest fires unintentionally."

Marketing to children

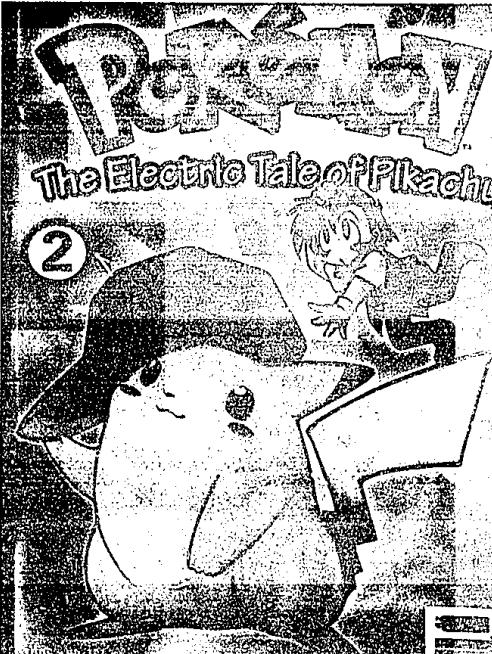
The object of the game is to become the best "Pokémon master" by collecting as many of the creatures as possible. It's likely no coincidence that the Pokémon slogan is "Gotta catch 'em all," as children certainly seem to be taking this phrase seriously. While many see the phenomenon as harmless fantasy, others are concerned.

Kathi Carzon, whose son Joe, 8, is a third grader at Our Lady of Sorrows in Farmington, is opposed to the card game. "They give kids the wrong impression on how to deal with problems. They demonstrate aggressive behavior — don't think, just do."

Carzon won't buy Pokémon cards for Joe or his younger brother, John Paul, 4, and says because she has discouraged them, "He doesn't even care about them. It's a fad: TV is marketing it to kids and parents."

Kids fight over them. They have too much in terms of material things. With Pokémon, they want more and more. They'll steal the cards. It's an influence I don't want my children to have."

Farmington Hills psychotherapist Ken Johnson of Davis Counseling Center is familiar with the phenomenon as well. "Pokémon is probably the most attractive, interesting concept for kids at present, and it primarily interests young and middle-school-aged kids, not high-school-aged kids," Johnson says. "There are kids that get over-involved with it, and it predominates their



Fad: The Pokémon craze includes trading cards, toy Pokémon figures and comic books like this.

thinking. This is not a healthy situation. Also of concern is the aggressive quality of characters."

As one who conducts individual and group therapy sessions with adolescents, Johnson adds, "There is a positive side to Pokémon: Kids talk with one another in a pretty adaptive way. I have seen kids who otherwise don't communicate well. ... Here they have a structured topic and it helps with social skills and organization. I wish some of them could do this with school work."

Unless overinvolvement becomes

apparent, Johnson advises against banning the cards. "If the children are consumed, as a parent you must set limits." But he cautions against making Pokémon a battleground issue.

"The identity of each of the characters takes on almost a science fiction attraction — they evolve; it's challenging and conceptual. Some kids rise to the intellectual challenge. There are holographic cards, which are attractive, but it's primarily the individual nature of the characters that interests them."

Please See POKEMON, B2

Trails of old gave way to highways

By RUTH MOHLMAN
SPECIAL WRITER

Neglected and long gone, the first tavern in Farmington is not forgotten. The site of the building was along the now busy Grand River in Farmington Hills.

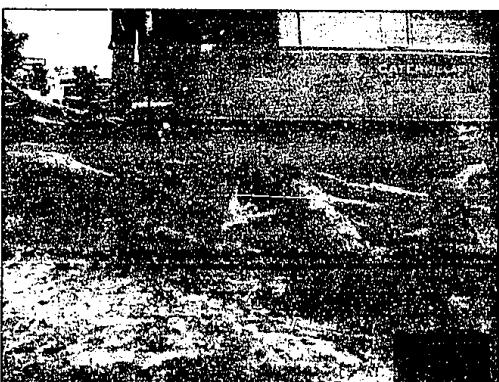
In pioneer days, the inn was a welcome shelter in the wilderness, a place for food, lodging and camaraderie.

When Farmington was first settled, three Indian trails to the interior of Michigan came through the township.

They were the Grand River Trail, the Orchard Lake Trail and the Shiawassee Trail.

The approximate location of those trails are now roads and highways. When Oakland County was opened to settlement, pioneers soon turned the trails into roads.

Solomon Walker was a pioneer to Farmington, arriving in 1824. Land in those days was owned in sections, half sections and quarter sections. Samuel Walker owned 474 acres along the Grand River Trail, part of sections 29



Planks unearthed: In 1991 when new sewers were installed, logs from the Grand River Trail road were unearthed in the median of Grand River in front of the Botsford Inn.



Today: Hard paving replaced planks on Grand River.