

## Communicate

### The festival board must do it

Everybody says it: Change just isn't easy. But it's made more difficult when the reason for the change and how things will be changed is not communicated.

That couldn't be truer than for the Farmington Founder's Festival Board of Directors, which last year hired Mike and Sandra Watta of Watta Up! to operate a new festival for the community.

Downtown merchants recently have been up in arms over a number of issues concerning the festival, including a \$50 fee to display merchandise in front of their stores.

Merchants, who say they have recently reformed Downtown Farmington Business Association, have asked the board plenty of questions, with answers they expect in writing. Among the questions are:

■ Is the money for a general participation fee or for specific expenses?

■ Is the Farmington Area Family Fest intended to be a profit-making venture?

■ What are this year's rates for participating in the festival's Founder's Day Parade?

Very good questions and most appropriate questions.

However, had the board of directors communicated the changes and new plans for a new festival that must be self-sufficient and profitable, there would have been no need for these questions as late in the day. And clearly no need for the bad feelings that have occurred.

While the board is taking its licks, it must also be noted that the local newspapers have dropped the ball in publicizing and communicating not only what led to these changes, but how these changes will affect merchants, artists and vendors who have long participated in, and been loyal to, the festival.

Yes. Changes are being made to the festi-

val. That was a necessary move to keep the festival alive and to continue to draw visitors — a good number of them shoppers — to the Farmington area.

A good part of this festival is, we hope, the goodwill that is generated for the community among those who visit the area.

Festivals are a highly competitive effort.

The dates of this one were moved to avoid competing with some high-profile events in Plymouth and Wyandotte. Now the festival will compete with the Livonia Spree, albeit the Farmington event will be different than the one to the south.

Festival board members must recognize the need to communicate with the community, including merchants and vendors.

Festival board members would do well to remember the personal touch former chamber president Jody Soronen gave the festival and its events.

While the festival may be changing, people aren't necessarily. Those who have long been in this community have come to expect a certain level of service, affection and interest.

Providing that keeps goodwill alive.

Under the board's direction, Mike and Sandra Watta are working hard to turn the tide of the festival's fortunes. Board members cannot expect them to publicize and communicate the festival and its changes by themselves.

Anything new, including fees, certainly must be accompanied with letters explaining the whys and hows. That's not only a bit more personal, but it's an explanation. And one participants count on.

The first step in leadership is getting people on your side. This is what the festival board, in large part, has failed to do.

But there's still time to mend some broken fences. And it's time to do it.

## Keep up fight against tax break

In November, the Michigan State Tax Commission implemented new personal property depreciation tables for electric and gas utilities.

The commission changed the multiplier to be used by local assessors to value electric and gas utility personal property (equipment, transmission and distribution lines, not land). Under the new system an assessor uses the "net book value" of the property, the cost of the property when purchased or installed, instead of current day replacement costs.

This decision results in a windfall for the utilities that could amount to up to \$116 million and a severe burden in lost taxes for local governments.

Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties sought an injunction to stop implementation of the new system, but on Jan. 28 Chief Circuit Court Judge Michael F. Sapala ruled against the injunction allowing the commission to proceed.

The counties will now pursue their complaint with the Michigan State Tax Tribunal. Several local communities, including Livonia, Farmington and Farmington Hills, have joined in the suit. The Michigan Chamber of Commerce has joined in supporting the position of the tax commission and the utilities. Chamber President Jim Barrett has called the suit "frivolous."

We believe that the counties should pursue their complaint. A suit which seeks to preserve millions in tax dollars and opposes special treatment for the utility companies is anything but "frivolous."

In a press release from Wayne County, the position taken by the counties is clear: "The counties sought to maintain the status quo, until further evidence suggesting an improved method of valuation could be presented. Assessed values historically have been based on the current value of the property, minus depreciation and are the foundation for tax

revenue by every city, county, township and school district."

This seems to be a reasonable request. Perhaps the utilities do need some tax relief, but this isn't the way to do it and the tax shortage it will cause could be devastating, resulting in cutbacks in programs when they are most needed.

Several of our communities have experienced an unusually high number of power outages in the last few years, but we aren't hearing any guarantee that the money saved in taxes will be used to upgrade the equipment being taxed.

Instead, it seems like another example of the state rewarding big business at the expense of local communities, and if it works for the utilities maybe other big businesses will do the same.

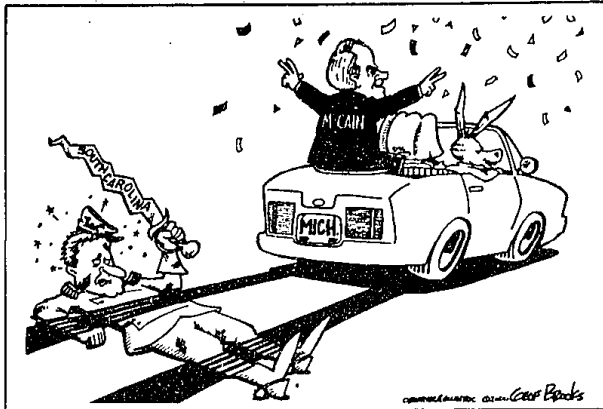
Wayne County Executive Ed McNamara warns, "Aside from the current loss in tax base and revenue, my concern is the precedent being established. It won't take long before other large taxpayers ask the state for the same treatment."

But that doesn't mean the majority of businesses will benefit.

We question the Chamber's standard anti-tax position as being in the best interests of most businesses. Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson makes a better case for the business community when he says, "The Michigan Tax Commission is using sleight of hand to give gas and electric companies a whopping tax break that will provide them with an unfair competitive advantage over other businesses. Not only is this unfair to the other businesses, it will also negatively impact the tax bases of out local communities and could result in a severe cutback for our citizens."

We urge McNamara and Patterson to continue their fight.

GEOFF BROOKS



## 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 48835, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.homecomm.net

### Real insights

Although there are many things Gov. Engler has done in the area of education with which I disagree, one being the new social program created to buy MEAP compliance, I was surprised to read some of the Farmington school district's responses to Gov. Engler's recent speech.

First, I have heard the administration laud the wonders of four building principals. A recent personal experience put Dr. Maxfield's "total support and confidence" behind a district principal. I guess that "total support" only goes so far. When it affects the central office status quo, it's not a good thing.

The second item is the opposition of both Dr. Maxfield and School Board President, Priscilla Brouillette, to Gov. Engler's suggested required summer reading program for those who have not mastered reading by the fourth grade. First, if the district is doing its job there should be no non-readers by the fourth grade. Secondly, how much reading is being taught in pre-school? That's where Dr. Maxfield and Ms. Brouillette think the answer lies.

I'm also curious as to what evidence Ms. Brouillette has that competition doesn't apply to education? How then do colleges and universities attract students and their money? Ms. Brouillette is also disturbed by MEAP cash incentives to schools and districts, which I am too, but sees nothing wrong with cash incentives to students.

These are real insights into the administration/school board thinking process.

Tom Glossop  
Farmington

process. The people of Farmington can be proud of both Tim and Susan.

Howard B. Dubin  
Farmington

### It's unfortunate

Michigan's Republican primary may draw a record number of Democrats. Crossover voting (choosing the opposition's weakest candidate) is easy when your own party is not represented, and it seems fun to screw up the polls. Computers with no sense of humor interpret these numbers and project winners.

The real election is not a game — then voters mark their real choice. Unfortunately, the poorest candidates of both parties may be on the ballot because of primary statistics.

Hank Borgman  
Farmington

### Why opposition?

In March, the Michigan ban on partial-birth abortions, the Child Protection Act, is slated to take effect. Unfortunately, other positive legislation similar to the Child Protection Act has been held up in the courts by groups like the American Civil Liberties Union, Planned Parenthood and abortion providers.

While common sense legislation is passed in Lansing, proabortion activists are scheming ways to keep it from helping women. In the past, ACLU and Planned Parenthood have attempted to keep a Woman's Right to Know — Informed Consent, Parental Consent for Abortion, and the Ban on Medicaid-Funded Abortions from taking effect.

The Infant Protection Act protects infants. When a child is partially born it should be illegal to harm that child. This legislation forbids doctors from any procedure that might harm a fetus if it emerges, even partially, with any signs of life. Why would anyone be against this legislation?

Mildred Currall  
Farmington

### Being proud

Tim Smith's story on my wife, Susan Dubin, was wonderful. It truly captures the events as they actually occurred and serves as a fine public service vehicle for awareness of cardiac problems and how to deal with them.

It caused us to relive those scary moments and realize how lucky we are to have survived them. Susan is intent on educating and helping others regarding heart health and your article certainly goes a long way to begin that

## Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450, jmaliszewski@oe.homecomm.net  
HUNN GALLAGHER, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149, hmallagher@oe.homecomm.net  
PINA KNOESPEL, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177, pinaknoespel@oe.homecomm.net  
TROY GIBSON, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2118, tgibson@oe.homecomm.net  
RICK PIGNORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150, rickpignorelli@oe.homecomm.net  
JIM JIMMERSON, OPERATIONS DIRECTOR, 734-953-2180, jimjimerson@oe.homecomm.net  
SUSAN ROSKE, PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100, sroske@oe.homecomm.net  
BANKS DSHIMON, VP/CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER, 734-953-2252, bdsimmon@oe.homecomm.net  
HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JEANNE TOWAR, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD ASHMAN, PRESIDENT

OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power



### Good job

Fred: Thanks to Farmington Hills paramedics, firefighters, naturalist Joe Derek and veterinarian Steve Burns and veterinarian technician Becky Zupancic of Berkley Animal Clinic (both a left), two deer who fell into a construction hole at Farmington Hills were saved.