

# The Farmington Observer

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## Power outages

### Edison officials say they're working on them

By JON HURD  
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Ron May's job is to keep 2.8 million people happy. It's no wonder, then, that Detroit Edison's vice president of delivery and service has some special concerns about residents in Farmington and Farmington Hills. Residents here have called about frequent power outages for years, culminating in a controversial public hearing with Edison representatives last fall.

#### Underway

Work has already begun in Farmington and Farmington Hills as part of an agreement with the state's Public Service Commission to complete \$620 million of service improvements, he said. The most effective measures may be in the area of tree-trimming, designed to keep an optimal distance of 10 feet between tree branches and power lines.

Farmington City Manager Frank Leuhoff said the company had been trying to cooperate with homeowners who were reluctant to have tree branches cut back. Over time, inadequately trimmed trees made contact with wires during storms, causing power outages.

This year, he believes the company has been much more aggressive.

"We've been working with Detroit Edison to go in and talk to homeowners and tell them why the trimming has to be done," Leuhoff said. "It's unfortunate, because that is what has to be done."

Hills City Manager Steve Brock said he isn't aware of the scope of the work that's been done in his community; however, officials there have asked the company to meet with them.

"We are aware of the PSC order that they speed up and enhance their repairs," he said. "We're giving them an opportunity to update us. I'm hopeful they'll take us up on our invitation."

The supplier of electrical

**"If it's an older community and you want to put things underground, you're going into somebody's mature backyard and asking them to dig up their garden or move their deck."**

**Ron May**  
—Detroit Edison delivery and service vice president

power for some two million customers in southeast Michigan alone seems more than aware some fences need mending.

#### Bad year

"1999 was a difficult year, not only for Edison, but for our customers," said director of public information Lorie Kessler.

The year included four major storms, including two catastrophic events in July. Eight storms with winds exceeding 60 miles per hour occurred in a 14-month period. In June, 1999, equipment failed on the Drexel substation, which serves about 600-800 homes. Troubles in the company's transmission system led to outages at the Southfield substation on July 30.

On top of that, some areas of Farmington Hills experienced several service interruptions for reasons that weren't weather-related, Kessler said. For some residents, that meant almost consecutive outages.

"Some customers got restored on Friday, were out again on Saturday, restored and then out again the next Saturday," May said.

When the company sees "pockets" of trouble, where customers lose power more than two or three times in a year, Detroit Edison takes a hard look at what's causing the problem, May said. Employees do a physical examination of the land to check the condition of the pole and whether trees may be interfering with the line.

#### Tree trimming

When branches graze the transmission lines, they create a short-circuit, which interrupts power, Detroit Edison has

undertaken an extensive tree-trimming program in the Hills area, designed to ensure at least a 10-foot clearance between trees and power lines.

In the first quarter of this year, May said, the company brought in 150 additional tree-trimmers, as well as line and line clearance workers to complete 34 projects designed to improve service to 22,000 customers in Farmington and Farmington Hills.

While the company is responsible for neighborhood transmission lines, homeowners must clear lines that carry power into their homes, May added.

#### Underground

Moving transmission lines underground won't solve those problems, however. May said service interruptions will still occur and residents may not consider the process of digging into their properties worth the time and expense.

"If it's an older community and you want to put things underground, you're going into somebody's mature backyard and asking them to dig up their garden or move their deck," he said. "It's a personal disruption. I don't think most people would say that's really worth it to them."

Underground wires are vulnerable when residents or utility companies dig in, he added, and repairs are a much more complicated undertaking. And when power is out, customers want it restored quickly.

Detroit Edison tracks outages through customer calls. Its automated response system is designed to handle 40,000 calls

in an hour. Customers inform the company of their location, and that data is fed into a computer, which is able to then pinpoint the location of outages, Kessler explained.

In major storms, all Edison employees have an alternate assignment to stand by downed power lines until they're cleared. Restoration crews work around the clock to restore power to the greatest number of customers quickly.

#### Something new

This year, when storms hit, customers will also be able to learn just how long it will be before their lights come back on.

"You can call back when you've reported an outage and find out how long it will take to get everybody restored," Kessler said. "Then customers can make decisions based on that. We're down to the point where we're 90 percent accurate."

When people know it's going to take two or three days, they can decide whether to leave their home, to store frozen or refrigerated foods with relatives or friends and other decisions that have to be made in the wake of a severe storm, Kessler said.

"If you keep the freezer closed, it's surprising how long things will last," May added. "We do, on our web site, tell people where they can get dry ice."

As for actually supplying it to customers, he said that puts the company in the position of vending another product, which can lead to a whole other series of problems, he said. "Is that where you want us to be putting our resources during the restoration process?"

May and Kessler said Detroit Edison is working toward a significant reduction of problems in both communities. While the company does its level best, they realize customer expectations are high for this indispensable service.

"When you're out of power, it shouldn't happen at all, or it shouldn't be for long," May said. "That's what we're trying to get to. That's our goal."

## RECREATION NEWS

### DISC GOLF TRIPS

Ages 12 and up have a choice of playing disc golf at three different courses. Trips are scheduled from 4:30-6:30 p.m. April 13, 20 and 27, departing from and returning to the Costick Activities Center. The deadline to register is one week prior to the trip date. The cost is \$14 and includes a disc, transportation, 18 holes of disc golf and a snack.

Call 473-9570.

### SPRING SALE

It's time to sign up for the Spring Clean-up Sale being held on Saturday, April 29 at Heritage Park Day Camp Building. Call 473-9570.

### OPEN GYM

The Costick Activities Center Gym in Farmington Hills offers the following activities and

times: Adult Basketball, 7:30-9:03 p.m. Thursdays and 9-11 a.m. Sundays; Teen Basketball, 3-5 p.m. Saturdays and 1-3 p.m. Sundays; Adult Volleyball, 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.; Family Gym and Swim, 12:03-3 p.m. Saturdays. The cost to participate for residents 17 and under is \$2 and \$4 for non-residents. For 18 and over residents pay \$3 and non-residents pay \$5. For more information contact the Farmington Hills Department of Special Services at 473-9570.

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### PARKEY EASTER

The Parkey Easter Eggstravaganza will be held Saturday, April 15. Activities will include snacks, games, a craft project, storytelling and an Easter Egg Hunt. 3-5 year-olds are scheduled from 10-11:30 a.m. and 6-10 year-olds are scheduled from 12:30-2 p.m. Call 473-9570.

### SKATING TRIP

Ages 12 and up can take a trip to Airborne Skate Park on March 29, leaving the Costick Activities Center at 6 p.m. and returning at 10:30 p.m. The fee is \$15 per person who has equipment (helmet, elbow, wrist, and kneepads). The cost is \$24 per person for those without equipment. For more information call the Recreation Division at 473-9570.

### ADULT SOFTBALL

New team registration is currently under way. Call 473-9570.

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