



Merchants: No decision to join yet

BY TIM SMITH
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Downtown Farmington merchants apparently aren't ready to make a decision about becoming a subcommittee of the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce.

About 15 merchants, members of the recently re-formed Downtown Farmington Business Association, met Wednesday night with Carleigh Flaherty, president of the chamber. Flaherty discussed the option of the DFBA becoming a chamber subcommittee.

"No decisions were made," said Farmington Bakery co-owner Becky Burns. "We just heard Carleigh speak."

Please see MERCHANTS, A5

Tragedy claims Harrison student

BY TIM SMITH
AND JONI HUBBED
STAFF WRITERS

The life of a "close-knit" Farmington Hills family changed forever with just one quick, ill-advised, tragic turn.

Shortly before 7:30 a.m. Friday in front of Harrison High School, the driver of a Mitsubishi Eclipse headed west on 12 Mile Road attempted to pull into the driveway that leads up to the school. The Eclipse, driven by 23-year-old David Lee, was broadsided on the passenger side by an eastbound Jeep Cherokee, driven by a 48-year-old West Bloomfield man.

Two of Lee's siblings also were in the car. Daniel Lee, 16, a sophomore at Harrison; and Debra Lee, 13, a student at East Middle School.

Daniel, described as a quietly determined straight-A student who



Daniel Lee

it didn't happen," said Harrison High School Principal Rande Horn. "We feel very saddened for the Lee family. At this point, they've lost a child and two others are in the hospital."

Quiet determination

According to Daniel's cross country coach, John Reed, the youngster

Please see TRAGEDY, A5



Tragedy: The Lee siblings were traveling in this Mitsubishi Eclipse Friday morning on their way to Harrison High School.

Fatality reopens questions about 12 Mile Road's safety

BY TIM SMITH AND JONI HUBBED
STAFF WRITERS

The tragic death of a 16-year-old student at Harrison High has heightened concerns about traffic at the school's 12 Mile Road entrance.

Harrison High School Principal Rande Horn said the major thoroughfare in front of the school has long been in dire need of being revamped. "That could entail either adding a second traffic signal or left-hand-turn arrow to the existing signal, which is at Schulman (a driveway into the school) or widening 12 Mile so that a center lane extends from Orchard Lake to Middlebelt roads. Currently, the middle lane only flares out near the high school."

"It is something we really think we need out there," a solemn Horn said Friday afternoon, not long after announcing the student's death to

the entire school over the public address system.

The principal added that the dangerous road conditions have been promising disaster "for a while. The left-turn lane needs to be extended all the way down 12 Mile. We've probably been very lucky that something else hasn't happened."

Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer spoke with Horn at the scene Wednesday morning. Although this accident's cause was an error on the part of the driver, who apparently misjudged a left-hand turn, he agreed officials have to take a look at improving safety along what has become a heavily trafficked roadway. "It appears there's a definite need to do a feasibility study of putting a green arrow to let that flow of traffic go in the early morning hours," Dwyer said. "We need to look at

enhancing that intersection, because traffic has picked up on 12 Mile. It's become a major thoroughfare."

Hills Sgt. Pat Comini, who works in the Traffic Division, said he wasn't aware of any serious accidents at that intersection in recent times. However, he noted, "It is a high-traffic area."

Several years ago, officials allocated funds to lower the hill near the school to improve visibility. Comini wasn't aware whether that had any impact on Friday's accident.

In any case, Mayor Nancy Bates said, the city will investigate whether additional measures can be taken to prevent another tragedy.

"You can believe we will have our people out there investigating whether there's anything else we can

Please see SAFETY, A5



Contentious corner: The intersection of 12 Mile, Rollcrest and Schulman Drive.



MONDAY

Meet: The Farmington City council will meet at 8 p.m. in council chambers, 23600 Liberty. The meeting is open to the public.

INDEX

Apartment/E8
Arts/C1
Automotive/H3
Classified/E, O, H
Classified
Index/E3
Crossword
Puzzle/E5
Jobs/G1

Malls/C4
Movies/C5
New Homes/E1
Obituaries/A8
Real Estate/E1
Service Guide/G12
Sports/B1
Travel/C6



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'Eyesore' to become a diamond in rough

BY TIM SMITH
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For too many years, Farmington resident Steve Bergstrom has had to look out his front door and see an eyesore at the southeast corner of Grand River and Mayfield.

Whether the corner featured a boarded-up old gas station or empty lot with two huge craters where underground fuel storage tanks used to be, it hasn't been one of Farmington's top attractions.

But Bergstrom and other residents of the subdivision finally have something to look forward to. On March 13, the Farmington Planning Commission approved a site plan that will enable an upscale jewelry store and offices to be built at the corner.

"For the last eight years we've been staring at a boarded-up building or empty pit," said Bergstrom, a member of the Farmington Zoning Board of Appeals and a 15-year Mayfield resident. "We're glad that something's going to go there. It seems like an ideal, reasonable use for that site."

According to one of Bergstrom's neighbors, Karen Miller, the planned jewelry store proposed by Harry Kairian, will be a definite plus for the subdivision. Kairian was unavailable for comment.

"It'd be better than a vacant lot," said Miller, who, like Bergstrom, said such a development would probably have a positive impact on their property values.

The corner lot once was home to a gas station, and most recently it was the location for a Precision Tune. But

Bergstrom estimated that that business closed down in the early 1990s, leaving a boarded-up building, which was eventually demolished in 1999.

Several things needed to be taken care of to get to this point.

Sometime during the last several years, the underground fuel storage tanks were removed.

There also was a level of soil contamination at the site, which required remediation from the state's Department of Environmental Quality, said Farmington Public Services Director Kevin Gushman.

"Due to it being a gas station, there were contaminants from the previous underground storage tanks," Gushman said, "which is not all that uncommon at those kinds of sites."

Gushman said the city received correspondence from the DEQ, through Kairian, "indicating that they remediated the soil conditions to the point where it's acceptable for building."

Also requiring attention was the jewelry store site plan, which the planning commission addressed during a January meeting. Commissioners wanted Kairian to:

- Reduce the size of the building to match the amount of available parking spaces.

- Tweak landscaping so that a greenbelt exists between the building and Grand River.

- Make sure the retaining wall separating the lot and an adjacent parking lot is properly fenced.

Kairian, at the March 13 meeting, came up with all the answers for the planning commission's questions. He

Please see PROJECT, A5



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BEGLER

Cities, league work to maintain home rule

BY JONI HUBBED
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Farmington and Farmington Hills mayors Bill Hartscock and Nancy Bates got a taste of invincibility March 29 at a luncheon honoring South Oakland Mayors for Outstanding Service to the Michigan Municipal League.

"They put red capes on us and called us 'superheroes,'" Bates said. "It was a little embarrassing. You feel like you ought to go change your clothes in a phone booth."

The League honored the South Oakland Mayors Association with the new award, which recognizes their work on a successful rally in Lansing in September 1999, to oppose a House bill they felt posed a serious threat to local control.

The MML and local cities continue to oppose state legislation that overrides local ordinances, and that was

the focus of much of the lobbying organization's annual legislative conference this week.

Officials were provided reams of information about the legal and constitutional justification for municipal "home rule," information that Bates considered a valuable resource.

"It really goes back to the beginning of our Constitution," she said. "This is the first time in the state of Michigan where our home rule has been under this kind of assault."

The MML has sponsored a petition drive to include a constitutional amendment requiring a "super majority" of the Legislature to approve any law that interferes with the scope of local authority. Lobbyists reported the petition drive is going well, and the MML encouraged communities to continue obtaining signatures on petitions circulating statewide, Hartscock said.

Please see LEAGUE, A4

A
day in
Lansing