

Missing python found dead

BY TIM SMITH
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The eight-foot-long pet python reported missing on April 17 was found dead on the side of I-75 about a week later, according to the Farmington Public Safety Department. But exactly how the 44-year-old brown and tan reptile made it from Farmington to Auburn Hills had both Public Safety Director Gary Goss and Deputy Director Mike Wiggins scratching their heads. According to police reports, the owner of the python received an anonymous telephone call on April 22 that a snake may have been found on the side of the freeway.

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Wow! Mary Lou Janiga and Bob Heintz study the Detroit Ballet exhibit at "Starry Night."

STAFF PHOTOS BY BOB BAZZANO

Arts gala

Kickoff called 'splendiferous'

BY JONI HUBBRED
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With a beaming smile, Farmington Area Festival of Arts coordinator Paul Barber described Saturday's Starry Night gala with one word: "Splendiferous." The kickoff to this week's Farmington Area Festival of the Arts drew more than 200 people, easily surpassing last year's attendance of 125. Committee chairwoman Sara Woolland believes additional publicity and a growing reputation have contributed to the

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Shhh: The silent auction draws bids at the kickoff gala Saturday night.

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event's success. "It exceeded our expectations," she commented during an interview at the William B. Costick Center Monday afternoon. The center has played host to a variety of arts displays and activities throughout the week. Decorations, lighting and a festive atmosphere belied the fact that Saturday's gala was held in a space normally used as a gymnasium. "We try very hard to turn a turnip into a rpe," she said. "That's why we draped the ceiling with blue and

Crowd says no

■ The Eleven Pines project once again draws concern from residents who want no development.

BY JONI HUBBRED
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It wasn't a public hearing, but a standing-room-only crowd at Tuesday's Farmington Hills City Council Eleven Pines study session still got a chance to speak their minds. Mostly, their minds are set on no development of the 92-acre property at 11 Mile and Halsted, which includes about 23 acres of abandoned landfill. Officials first proposed more than 800 housing units, including apartments, and a nine-hole golf course. Community protests led them to scrap those plans and start over from scratch.

Residents and council members seemed especially concerned in light of a recent home explosion in Rochester Hills, due to methane gas build-up believed to have come from the landfill over which it was built.

"I called Steve (city manager Brock) after I heard about the house blowing up in Rochester Hills," said council member Jerry Ellis. "I was concerned about houses being too close to the dump site."

He said Brock assured him the local landfill was quite different because it was about 10 years older and had no methane leakage now, although some was reported during tests done in the 1980s. Because the landfill has little or no cover, Department of Environmental Quality representatives believe all the methane it may have produced has dissipated.

"There are some clear differences between theirs and ours," Brock said Tuesday. "Our tests indicate there is not any methane left."

Residents say no

While officials spent an hour discussing what type of development mix would generate enough income to pay the \$7 million they'll end up investing in Eleven Pines, residents by and large favored nothing at all or only the golf course.

"Why is there no consideration of no development?" asked Mary Johnston, who lives in Springbrook. "Have you ever tried to get oxygen out of asphalt or cement walls? Are you even going to leave Eleven Pines?"

Mayor Nancy Bates said officials have to put something on the land to generate income to cover the \$5.5 million purchase price, borrowed from the city's water fund and \$1.5 million in

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IN THE PAPER TODAY



The 2000 Academic All-Stars are presented in a special section inside today's Observer. Each year, The Observer pays tribute to the best young scholars in our public and private high schools, as selected by a committee of area principals and assistant principals from test scores and grade-point averages. These young scholars share their visions for the future and pay tribute to their favorite teachers.

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HomeTown Classifieds WORK!

"I placed a classified ad to sell household goods and I had great results! I sold everything."

—Kathy G.



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Architect says he asked for the 'moon and stars'

BY TIM SMITH
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After Farmington City Council members Monday night tabled a sign variance request for South Orchard Mall, Gene Diachenko of Euko Designs/Signs conceded the proposal was a bit grandiose.

"I was asking for the moon and stars," said Diachenko, a sign architect for the Farmington Hills-based company. "I need to come up with something that's more realistic."

For a while, it appeared the request would be defeated altogether because council members thought the proposal to add about 35 square feet to the existing shopping center sign was excessive. Instead, the council tabled it, primarily because council member Arnold Campbell supported Diachenko coming back with a scaled-down proposal.

Council member Mary Bush, a Realtor at Cornwell & Bush Associates, the management company for South Orchard Plaza, abstained from the discussion and vote.

Diachenko said the variance is needed to enlarge the sign so that it include the shopping center's name — thus improving visibility and public awareness of the plaza. "There would be little difference in the listing of plaza businesses, between the current and proposed signs, he explained.

■ 'I need to come up with something that's more realistic.'

Gene Diachenko
—Euko Designs/signs

The total height of the proposed sign and pole it would be attached to would not exceed the current 16-foot, 1-inch, in compliance with Farmington city ordinance. The current allowable square footage for such a sign is 81 square feet; the existing sign has 80 square feet.

"It's absolutely critical for the plaza to have the plaza name up there," said Diachenko, after the council meeting. He is contracted by the shopping center.

South Orchard Plaza is on the west side of Orchard Lake Road, just north of Shilohwasee. Among tenants are Total Fitness and Vitamin.

Campbell suggested to Diachenko that business addresses (23303 to 23339 Orchard Lake) be added to the sign, to help customers locate the shops.

Because the base of the proposed sign would be just three feet above the ground, Campbell also said a monument-style base could be incorporated into the plan.

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Redding: Danny Yu stands in front of his new restaurant, Hong Hua Chinese Dining, former home of Bill Knapp's on Orchard Lake Road.

Chinese eatery to replace Bill Knapp's

BY TRACY BIRKENHAUER
STAFF WRITER

Perceiving a dearth of upscale Chinese restaurants in the area, Danny Yu capitalized on the opportunity.

The restaurateur is opening Hong Hua Fine Chinese Dining on Orchard Lake Road in Farmington Hills, in the former Bill Knapp's near 12 Mile Road. He and his co-owners would like to open later this month.

The upscale restaurant will specialize in seafood, including lobster, Chinese-style shrimp and scallops.

"There's no good Chinese in Michigan," said Yu, hollering over the noise

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of busy contractors remodeling his latest business adventure. "American people can't cook good Chinese food."

Yu moved to Troy from Canada seven years ago when he opened the Jumbo Buffet on Maple, near Stevenson in Troy. He also co-owns Keung Kee restaurant in Montreal.

"I love to eat," said the slight 38 year old. "I like eating very much. That's why I got into the restaurant business."

But the restaurant business is tough.

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