

Dog park

City should welcome canines

It's too bad dogs and people don't and can't mix in Farmington Hills parks. If you take a look at Shiawassee Park in Farmington, where dogs are allowed on leashes, everyone — at least at a glance — seems happy, serene and content.

Despite the appearance, there likely are problems with dog droppings, barking dogs, dogs that scare people, or how about people who scare dogs? But all in all, life goes on as it should.

The time has come for Farmington Hills to do the same. A park where people can play, walk or run with their dogs is long overdue. It's just part of the American way of life to be able to play with your dog in a park.

Years ago when Farmington Hills officials

decided dogs would not be welcome in city parks this newspaper opposed the prohibition. Farmington Hills offers beautiful subdivisions, but many with yet another prohibition on fences. Once again, dog owners are out of luck.

Certainly, city officials should be concerned about cleanliness in parks and liability. But this is also a city that owns an ice arena and helps finance an after-school program that allows someone other than parents to bus children from one activity to another. Surely, dogs cannot be that much more of a liability.

We urge city officials and dog opponents to open up their hearts and let dogs have a place where they are welcome ... and their owners, too.

Let's hear it for the bands

Nothing should make this community prouder than the recent announcement that the Farmington Public Schools has been named number one on a list of the 100 best communities for music education in America. Congratulations go to the school district, educators, administrators and Paul Barber, director of music.

Surveys were filled out by more than 5,800 public school and independent teachers, school and district administrators, school board members, parents and community leaders representing all 50 states.

Barber's interest in the survey — to give information about what's going on with music in the country — indicates why Farmington schools are so rich in music education. Barber's goal is to include all kids in all grades in the wonderful world of music — and to give kids as many opportunities as is humanly possible.

With such honest and aspiring goals, there's no wonder Barber has led the district to this latest honor.

"The real benefit of this could be to establish some guidelines for schools and to share with other schools what we can do to help children through music," Barber said. "That's what I was hoping was going to happen."

What the honor also shows is that while fund-

ing, indeed, is always tough for school districts, Farmington is nonetheless doing it right. And the American Music Conference — which bestowed the honor — agrees.

Barber believes the keys to Farmington's success have been an equal effort across the grade levels, as well as a top-notch staff of 38 music educators who teach vocal and instrumental music from kindergarten through 12th grade.

We agree. It is amazing that such interest is paid to the music program. In many districts, music education barely ranks.

Barber is on the ball with efforts to not only introduce elementary students to music and composition, but to envelope them in it. Appreciation of the arts becomes lifelong when instilled at a young age.

Instruction also gets an outlet with plenty of activities and concerts, such as Day for Strings that pairs all instrumental students with adult musicians from universities and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Indeed, Farmington schools and Barber must be lauded for making music as important as any other subject students study throughout the year.

Again, our congratulations go to the school district and Barber. The successful efforts have again put the community on the map of excellence.

School elections need voter turnout

The message seems to be getting through. We're involved in stiff global competition. The more we know, the more we grow. Our future depends on good schools, capable of turning out graduates who can function successfully in an ever-changing, technologically challenging environment.

Poll after poll of Michigan voters attest that we get the message. Education is our top concern by a wide margin over taxes, crime, social services or foreign affairs.

We know it's important. Unfortunately, that concern doesn't translate into participation in school elections as candidates or voters.

The story is pretty much the same in all of our Observer communities.

In Clarendonville, South Redford and Farmington, school board candidates are running unopposed. Voter turnout in recent school elections has generally been around 10 percent or lower. In Farmington in 1999, just 3 percent of the voters showed up, and even in 1998, when there was a strongly contested race, just 4.3 percent of the voters showed up. Westland, Redford Union, Livonia and Garden City all report similarly low turnouts.

Even PTA participation is dropping in some communities.

Each year we wrestle with trying to find reasons why voters fail to turn out and let their voices be heard on a subject they tell pollsters has their top priority.

The usual complaints: school elections are held at odd times; despite the best efforts of these newspapers, many claim not to know who the candidates are or what they stand for; and, many say, their vote doesn't mean anything because the real power and control over schools is in Lansing, not with the local school board.

The school election calendar has done a lot to foster voter cynicism. Many feel that elections are scheduled and quietly held so that only those with a vested interest participate. This has been a charge often hurled during school tax elections.

Voters are also bombarded with information about the presidential, congressional and state elections.

By contrast, voters often find they don't have time to sort out school board candidates

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from all the rest.

For a candidate, a seat on the school board might seem more like a curse than a blessing. It means long hours, contentious negotiations, thankless disputes over everything from curriculum to building repairs and it rarely leads to a political career.

Also, many school board members find that their powers are limited by state mandates and expectations. The current state legislature and governor have taken an aggressive, hands-on approach to school districts, even to the point of threatening to take them over when they don't meet state standards. Those standards, as represented by the MEAP, have redefined curriculum development with little local input.

Still, we strongly encourage voters to take an interest in their schools. A large part of the state budget, your tax dollars, is allocated to schools.

And if you don't like the centralization imposed by Lansing, electing strong local school boards is the best defense against state involvement.

Good schools are the bedrock of a strong community. Even if you don't have children in the schools, the future prosperity of the community in general depends on the quality of the school system.

And you can make a difference. You can vote for candidates who will hire strong administrators and hold them to high standards of fiscal and educational integrity. You can have an influence over what is taught in your local schools.

When you abdicate that responsibility to a minority, they will set their own agenda the schools, often with disastrous results.

Democracy is like a body part; if it isn't regularly and vigorously exercised, it withers and dies.

GEORGE 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 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.homecomm.net

Dedicated

In this age of criticism of public officials and disgust with their personal behavior, I feel compelled to write and inform you of a situation that really restored my faith and belief that not all our elected officials fit into this category.

A tragic accident in front of Harrison High School in Farmington Hills, prompted a group of students to get involved and assist parents in getting an additional traffic signal installed. Over the past two years, parents have approached both the city of Farmington Hills and the county authority to get this additional signal. They were given the typical run-around from almost everywhere. The excuses ranged from no money in the budget, to it's not in our jurisdiction. During this time, this intersection gained the status of being the sixth worst (most dangerous) intersection in Oakland County. This remember, is at the entrance to a large high school.

The students would not take "no" for an answer and enlisted the help of Rep. Andrew Raczkowski from their district. As soon as this situation was brought to his attention, Rep. Raczkowski charged ahead with focus and determination in getting this accomplished as soon as possible with the fear of another fatal accident being prevalent every school day.

Rep. Raczkowski was able to accomplish within a three-week period what parents were unable to do in over two years. The dedication to getting the job done was impressive and his genuine concern for the safety and well-being of the students was refreshing.

I look up to any public official who can "put their money where their mouth is" and really perform. I will always be in debt to Rep. Andrew Raczkowski for the rest of my life, as my son was in a serious accident last year at that very intersection. I know it can happen to us. I am grateful that with the addition of his assistance and performance of getting this additional signal, the chances of my son losing his life just going to school have just dramatically diminished.

Mark Tyler
Farmington Hills

More on Eleven Pines

As a long-time Farmington Hills resident and real estate advisor to Thompson Brown Co. starting in 1955, please add my comments to others that are being submitted for consideration on the Eleven Pines/ San Marino golf course properties.

1) Suggestions to develop south end of Eleven Pines as IRO (continuation of existing IRO with entrance on Hallwood Court). Excellent.

2) Suggestions for golf course expansion on north end of Eleven Pines. Excellent.

3) Former school board property along ninth fairway of San Marino and Halsted Road, recommend: Low density development similar to what Boyne Resorts did at Boyne Highlands adjacent to one of their fairways. Excellent planning blending in very nicely with their golf course ambience.

4) Area along eighth fairway — leave untouched. Any development here will have an adverse effect on adjacent property values.

Your willingness to consider and evaluate input from Farmington Hills residents is deeply appreciated.

Emil J. Coolidge
Farmington Hills

It was nice

Once again the Farmington Friends of the Library were treated to a memorable evening May 19.

This was the 14th annual gala celebration. Fantastic refreshments were contributed by the vineyards and entertainment was by Blackthorn, a most enjoyable group playing Celtic music.

The Friends support the wonderful programs of the Farmington Libraries. Join the Friends.

Enjoy the annual gala. The library needs you.

Be a friend.

Gertrude Plinkney
Farmington Hills

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— Philip Power