

Vouchers, projects, lost mascot top school news

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From beginning to end, much transpired in Farmington Public Schools during the just-concluded 2000.

A school board meeting in January featured a comprehensive review of the "Freshman Academy," a program designed to help students with the difficult transition from eighth- to ninth grade.

December was filled with snow and three lost days of school.

In between were issues (teacher behavior, vouchers, advertising) and accomplishments (another championship for the Harrison High School football team, top ranking for the district's music program).

Where is he?

Perhaps the most intriguing story of 2000 was the disappearance of Saber, Farmington High School's mascot falcon. Saber flew the coop after working with his trainer (Howell-based falconer Chris Metzloff) on the FHS football field during a Labor Day practice, in preparation for an upcoming homecoming performance.

Something rattled Saber's cage, so to speak, and he flew away from his trainer. About 10 days later, however, Saber was safely found in the basement of Roosevelt Elementary School in Redford Township.

"I wasn't so concerned with how he got there so much as he

was there," Metzloff said that afternoon. "But I knew it was him."

Although Saber was not able to perform as scheduled at the homecoming game, he made an appearance later in the season.

The past year saw a fair number of changes both in and out of district schools. Closed lunch campuses were introduced in the fall at the high schools, complete with revamped serving lines.

Older students still have a mixed opinion about the change, made to enhance safety by eliminating the need for students to commute to and from fast food restaurants.

Harrison High School is still being remodeled on the exterior, with major structural repair being done to the main canopy entrance. Inside,

besides the closed lunch campus, students and staffers are generally adjusting well to block scheduling, said Principal Rande Horn.

Changes in administrative staff also took place last year. Don Hammond and Mildred Taylor were hired as principal at Power and Warner middle schools,

and Mark Reid, who took over (from Brouillette) as board president for the current

Morawski took over as William Grace Elementary School principal.

Lydia Runkel was named assistant principal at Farmington High School while Sharon Cooper was promoted from Beechview Elementary School teacher to assistant principal, based out of O.E. Dunckel Middle School.

No to vouchers

Meanwhile, Judy White, long-time assistant superintendent of instructional services for the district, announced she will retire at the end of the 2000-01 school year.

"I always said I wanted to end my career teaching," White said in August, when she made her announcement. "So, I want to do less of the administrative work that comes with this job and just follow my heart."

The campaign against the voucher proposal was a year-long job for public education supporters. Spearheading the effort in the Farmington district were school board members such as Priscilla Brouillette and Gary Sharp, who visited PTA groups — as individuals, and not elected officials — to inform parents about Proposal 1.

Then, in October, about 100 came out to a "Vote No on Proposal 1" rally at Shiloh Park to urge defeat of the plan.

"I explain that this is a bad deal for Farmington Public Schools," said Frank Reid, who took over (from Brouillette) as board president for the current

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school year. "It's bad for your neighborhood schools and it's bad for the state. You're part of the action plan."

"And so I urge you to check the literature table out, grab an envelope or two, knock on those doors and explain to your neighbor what's going on here."

Those efforts paid dividends. On Nov. 7, Farmington-Farmington Hills voters defeated Proposal 1, 30,067-to-14,420; the wide margin mirrored the rest of Michigan.

Speaking of Brouillette and Sharp, both incumbents withstood a last-minute write-in bid by challenger Melody Jaske and were re-elected in June to four-year terms.

High school civics and history classes discussed current issues (the Presidential ballot flap in Florida) and older ones, such as the Vietnam War. At Farmington High, for example, students finished a unit on Vietnam by raising 58,000 pennies — one

penny for each American casualty — and donating the money to the Paralyzed Veterans of America-Michigan Chapter.

Meanwhile, the mom of one of those lost soldiers took on a fight of her own, to bring recognition to Vietnam veterans during Memorial Day proceedings in Farmington.

Helen Robertson urged that something be done to honor the veterans, including her son Kenny Williams, a 1967 Farmington High School graduate who was killed in action in 1969.

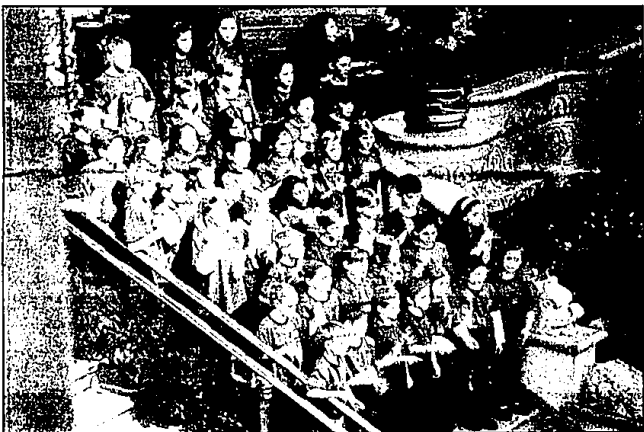
"Can't they do something?" asked Robertson in early April. "Should it be another year of nothing?"

Robertson eventually succeeded in getting a wreath placed during the Memorial Park ceremonies and was assured that Vietnam vets would have a presence at Farmington's 2001 Memorial Day parade.



STAFF FILE PHOTO BY BILL BRADLEY

Fantastic fanatic: Farmington Harrison fan Heather Sinawi cheers the winning team



On cue: Hillside Harmony pleases Fox pre-show audience

Hillside singers entertain crowd at Fox Theatre

Hillside Harmony from Hillside Elementary in Farmington Hills, directed by Dale Phillips, entertained two nights at the Fox Theatre before the showing of the Radio City Christmas Spectacular featuring the Rockettes recently.

Auditions were held in November for the singers and the 106-member Hillside Harmony was one of 14 groups selected to perform. The group was divided into two evening performances because of the large number of students. Half of the choir sang on Dec. 14 and

the other half performed on Dec. 19.

Family members, Hillside staff and Principal Janice Colliton were present.

In the grand lobby of the Fox Theatre is a beautiful marble staircase where the choir was positioned. "With the exquisite walls, ceiling, and holiday decorations it was just breathtaking," Colliton said.

Olympia Entertainment personnel, who organized the evening's festivities, were even singing along with the Hillside Harmony. Their personnel com-

mented on the singing skills of the students and how their whole demeanor positively represented Hillside and Farmington Public Schools.

One of the students, Jayme Kelmigian, said: "At first I felt very nervous, but as we started singing and I saw all these faces smiling up at me and taking pictures I got very excited."

As a result of the first Fox experience, Hillside Harmony has been invited to provide a video audition to sing for the opening of Fox Theatre's *Sesame Street Live* in January.

Auditor: Hills is financially sound

Good news and a warning of work to come were all part of a recent night's presentation of the Farmington Hills Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, given by auditors from Plante & Moran, LLP.

Partner Douglas Bohrer pointed out several positive aspects of the city's financial condition, including a millage that has remained constant for four years, a top of the line bond rating, the successful parks and recreation bond milage and new corporate building. He said maintaining an adequate fund balance, a sort of "savings account" that would cover about eight weeks' worth of expenditures, helped keep

the city's bond rating at the highest possible level.

Of the \$13.2 million fund balance, about \$6.6 million is reserved for future technology and capital improvements.

A 4.4 percent increase in general fund revenues during the fiscal year that ended June 30, 2000, was due to growth and revaluation of existing properties, Bohrer said. Revenues exceeded expenditures by \$2.8 million.

Another positive occurrence was the full funding of state revenue sharing, which will result in an 8 percent increase based on the state's fiscal year, which ended Sept. 30, 2000. Plante & Moran commended

the city council and management for the overall condition of financial records and documents, citing strong procedures in the finance and treasury departments.

The task will consume even more staff time, Bohrer said, with the advent of a new financial statement reporting model, which city staff will have to deal with in the coming year.

Essentially, Bohrer said, the city will have to keep two sets of books, one in the current form and another using the "accrual" method.

One of the biggest challenges will be depreciation of capital assets like roads and bridges.

Youth Council offers 'finals break'

Just in time to mark the end of final exams, the Mayor's Youth Advisory Council is sponsoring a "chill time" on Friday, Jan. 13, from 8 p.m. to midnight at the William Costick Activities Center, 28600 W. 11 Mile.

Mark the passage of mid-year madness by swimming, playing table tennis, shooting pool or basketball, dancing, watching movies and mingling with friends.

There will be food, fun, and a deejay.

The cost is \$5 and tickets will be available at the door. For more information, Farmington high schoolers can call 473-1841.

Finals in the public schools are Jan 10, 11, and 12.

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