

Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

Drug busts on our doorstep prove you can't hide problem

In the twisted, profit-driven world of drug running, appearances can be deceiving.

The houses on Nine Mile Road and on Highmeadow in Farmington Hills don't look like the boarded-up, burned-out dens of iniquity commonly portrayed as the headquarters for narcotics dealers in the Big City.

But make no mistake — police took thousands of dollars in marijuana and heroin and weapons and cash from these locations.

How does this happen in our quiet suburban community? The truth is, the war against drugs has been waged all around us for decades. As the front lines grow increasingly difficult to hold, drug dealers have begun to retreat, putting communities like ours in the midst of the fray.

Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer has said dealers hope to avoid detection by hiding in affluent homes, in quiet neighborhoods where people mostly keep to themselves and large amounts of cash can be spent on fancy cars, mink coats and ATVs without attracting any attention at all.

They've just picked the wrong time to settle in Farmington Hills — or anywhere in Oakland County, for that matter. Hills Police have initiated even stronger alliances with Oakland County's Narcotics Enforcement Team, newly constituted under the direction of Sheriff Michael Bouchard and with the federal Drug Enforcement Administration.

Local officers are assigned to both

■ They've (drug dealers) just picked the wrong time to settle in Farmington Hills — or anywhere in Oakland County, for that matter.



Seized: Drugs and cash are part of the evidence in one of the three drug busts.

focus on tracking major dealers. "You have to try and hit at the highest level possible," Dwyer believes. "If you cut off the head, the body falls."

While the results speak for themselves — three major drug busts in less than a month — it's been a little scary for Hills residents who may be wondering what lurks behind closed doors in their neighborhoods. Hard to think the teen-ager you see walking to the bus stop in the morning might be harboring bales of marijuana in his closet and a sawed off shotgun underneath his bed.

Still, this is no time for a mass exodus to even more remote areas. In the war on drugs, we haven't don't last for long. As battles are won and lost, the front lines just keep moving.

This is a time to reach out in our neighborhoods and get to know the people around us. It's a time to meet the parents of our children's friends and work cooperatively to keep kids out of harm's way. It's a time to keep our eyes and ears open for the first signs of trouble, so that we can help law enforcement officers keep the peace in our community.

squads, and a sheriff's deputy serves with the South Oakland Narcotics Information Consortium, which also includes officers from the Hills, West Bloomfield and Novi.

If the currency of drug enforcement is information, police have hit the jackpot lately. Dwyer attributes that to the staffing exchange and an increased

Plenty of time to debate CCW — if it gets on ballot

The Michigan Legislature passed last year legislation requiring local gun boards to issue permits to carry concealed weapons to everybody who applies, is age 21 or older, free of mental illness, has a clean criminal record and is willing to go through the necessary training.

The measure has been very controversial. Some people think it will dramatically increase the number of folks wandering around with permits to carry concealed weapons and, thus, the number of innocent people who are going to get shot.

Others contend that "an armed society is a polite society" and that an evil-doer will be deterred by worry that lots of folks will be carrying concealed weapons.

Now a group called People Who Care About Kids Committee, headed by Attorney General Jennifer Granholm and Wayne County Prosecutor Mike Dragan, has circulated petitions to put the law to a referendum vote of the people. They need to submit more than 151,000 valid signatures of registered voters by March 27 to put the measure to a statewide vote, although they're aiming for far more.

There are good reasons to put this legislation to a vote. In fact, we urge interested readers to sign the petitions.

When the "shall issue" CCW legislation to take discretion to issue permits out of the hands of local gun boards was originally proposed, it provoked great public outcry, in large part from the shooting incidents at Columbine High School in Colorado. So our legislative leaders pulled the legislation back, hop-

ing public interest would wane.

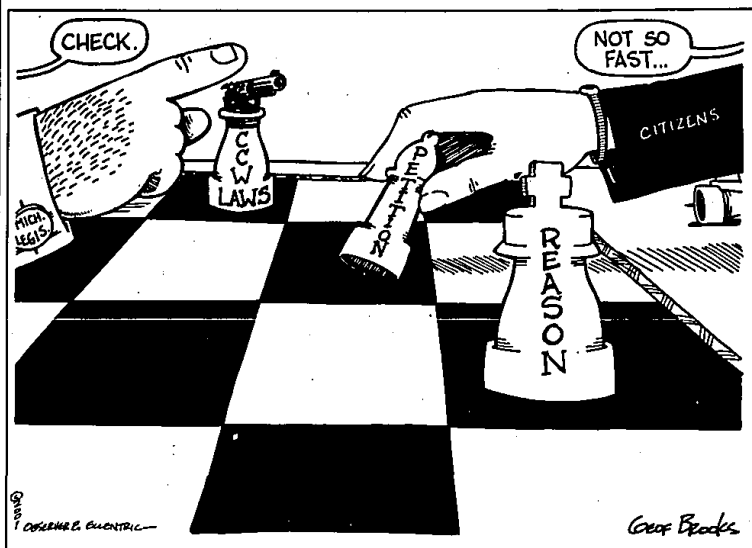
It did, and so supporters waited until the last legislative session of the legislature last year to bring the legislation back. While the public was more interested in seeing what happened in the presidential election recounts and Christmas shopping, legislators rushed the bill to passage.

If this wasn't enough, legislators dreamed up a little trick to try to make the legislation immune to referendum. Because the Constitution says appropriation bills are not subject to referendum, lawmakers tacked on \$1 million in spending in an attempt to block any petition drive. Sen. Phil Hoffman, Horton, and former Rep. Mike Green, R-Mayville, admitted that was the purpose of the allocation.

Sneaking important legislation through a lame-duck session of the legislature is bad enough. Lame-duck sessions are intended to clean up legislative business that has been overtaken by an election, not to hide controversial legislation from public notice. But dreaming up a fancy gimmick designed to prevent the public from considering the merits of legislation at referendum shows scant regard for the democratic process.

There will be plenty of time to debate whether the CCW legislation that lawmakers have passed is good or bad, but only if the drive to put the measure to statewide referendum succeeds. We urge readers to sign.

Those who wish to sign the petition can contact the committee by phone at (313) 224-8188 or over the Internet at <http://www.peoplewhocareaboutkids.com>.



LETTERS

■ Gill parents speak

Parents and students of the year round program at Gill Elementary love the alternative schedule offered in the Farmington Public Schools. Our children are shining examples of success and public school achievement.

The students attend school the exact same number of days as kids on the traditional schedule.

In addition to the traditional vacations, year round students have two week inter-session breaks in November, February and May. Students attend approximately 10 weeks, then have a two week inter-session, and a six-week summer break.

We feel this is the best school schedule to reduce burnout. First grade year round teacher Cindy Shuster agrees. "The year round schedule is much less stressful than the traditional schedule. Teachers, parents and students will all agree to that." Parent Kevin Mitchell agrees, stating "We've been in the program for eight years and have really enjoyed it. Our boys have never complained about having school in July."

Teacher Vickie Shaw, year round teacher for 8 1/2 years, adds, "Since we no longer need to schedule the school calendar around an agriculture year and since most children are ready to go back to school after five or six summer weeks off, it seems the year round calendar makes the most sense."

The main reasons we chose to place our students in the Gill Year Round program is they retain knowledge and have an easier transition to the next grade due to a shortened summer vacation.

Our children still have a six week summer break, which is plenty of time to relax, take trips, and have fun. Third grade student David Kucukaralan says it works for him, "I like summer vacation because it's shorter and you don't forget stuff."

Another benefit of a year round schedule is the feeling of community with the year round families and staff. Students in Gill year round develop strong friendships as they continue through each grade with the same students.

Parent Pam Prezioso, sees this as a real benefit of year round, as "the continuity for children and their friendships from year to year. This leads to less adjustment, as the whole class stays together. Parents also get to know one another and are very supportive of year round education and Gill Elementary School."

Kinderergarten teacher Linda Lipson says "I like the cohesive, small community feeling in the year round program. Since parents have specifically chosen this program for their children, they have demonstrated their commitment to being active partners in their children's education. I think this is a definite strength of the program."

We believe wholeheartedly in the Gill Year Round program and encourage you to consider it for your child. For more information, call Gill Elementary for a brochure at (248) 489-3690 or attend the Parent and New Student Orientation at 7 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5.

Gill parents Jan Tatomir, Jill Heffron, Nicole Taylor, Kelly McDonald, Terry Maas, Joe DeFlores Lynn Halton, Pam Prezioso, Richard Leck, Jerry Balogh, Melissa Burke and Debbie Jacob

■ Alienated

No more Mr. Nice Guy! Yes, that's what we've been. Politely petitioning the City to hear our plea. The good citizens of the Historic District, naively believing in the political process, went through all the proper channels to present our case against rezoning an historic home as a business.

No, we weren't there in 1998, when the Master Plan was redone.

Why? Was it because we didn't care or because we're ignorant people?

No. It was because notification of a zoning change was so skimpy — maybe intentionally. Where were the big signs, which we see in neighboring communities, announcing "Proposed Zoning Change?"

How about notifying neighbors within 300 feet of the properties under consideration? How about notifying Historic District residents who have "historically" been concerned about (and opposed to) changes in Historic District boundaries? Guess the City didn't want us to know. So, now we're too late.

The zoning board, the planning commission, city council, not to mention the city manager, all favored the business use of a residence, in spite of overwhelming opposition from neighbors.

Well, you're all put on notice — you have alienated the good citizens of the Historic District and we won't forget. It wasn't just the rezoning decision you made which angered us, but more over it was the way you treated us. You tried to limit our freedom of speech, you discounted us, you discredited us and some you even chastised us. For what, for standing up and stating what we want for our neighborhood? How dare you!

Janie Gundlach, Farmington

■ Suicide Alley

On March 23 of last year, the Observer published my letter "Light Needed."

On July 13, 2000, your dramatic picture showed a car hit by a truck that overturned upon impact on 14 Mile Road west of Orchard Lake. The jaws of life had to be used to remove the badly injured woman. After making many contacts, I learned the new Gateway Mall offered to pay to put a light at their intersection.

I spoke with someone in the engineering department in Farmington Hills and they confirmed the above but explained they couldn't put a light at that point because it was too close to Orchard Lake and the Pebble Creek complex; one quarter of a mile further west. They were unable to supply me with a record of the accidents that occurred without contacting the Bloomfield Police Department, as 14 Mile is shared by both cities.

When I received their report, I noticed that 71.8 percent of the time the roads were dry when accidents took place. I was told they have plans to do something about this situation but it will take three years.

There are a total of 12 exits and entrances onto 14 Mile with only two lanes and a "safe" center lane causing any care winding up in the center to become head-on casualties. In the meantime, all these exits: Loehman Mall, Hunters Ridge Office Building, Hunter Ridge Complex, Gateway Mall, and Gateway Apartments pose a real

serious threat to people driving in this area.

We call it Suicide Alley and want something done before someone is killed.

Milton Rose Farmington Hills

■ Coat thank you

This year the Oakland County Sheriff's Office sponsored Coats for the Cold 2000. Many already know that the program is designed to collect new or clean used coats to be given to those most in need. This is the 15th year the program has been in existence and with each year, the collection has grown significantly thanks to the generosity of the community.

I'd like to thank everyone who took the time to make a coat donation and those who sponsored a drop-off location. We collected almost 7,000 coats in every size and shape imaginable from throughout Oakland County. The Boot Camp/Trustees Camp sorted the coats and they were delivered to seven different charities between Dec. 20 and 21. Those who contributed can be assured the coats are being put to good use. Your effort is keeping another soul warm during this year's extraordinarily cold and snowy winter months.

I'd also like to thank those in the media who supported Coats for the Cold 2000. With your help, we were able to advertise the program and inform the public of the locations of the various drop-off sites. This year, we had over 60 drop-off points.

Thank you again for helping us make a difference in the lives of the needy in our community this winter.

Michael J. Bouchard Oakland County Sheriff

■ The Farmington Observer welcomes longer articles as guest columns. Send them to the editor at 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI, 48335 or e-mail them to jhubred@oe.hometown.com.

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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