

## Forum focuses on "Getting It" about diversity

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Raj Singh Bedi is a member of the Sikh religion. The Farmington High School student said there once was a time when his friends would take off their turbans and put on baseball caps before going to the grocery store or anywhere else, for that matter.

Things finally are starting to improve, as evidenced by Raj himself, wearing his turban while sitting on last week's panel forum "Getting It: A Conversation on Diversity with our High Schools."

But issues do remain about the acceptance of others' differences, both at school and in the community.

For example, another student questioned why school history textbooks didn't better represent the contributions made by African Americans.

Minority students said more minority teachers need to be standing in the classroom, providing positive role models and a variety of viewpoints.

### About acceptance

North Farmington High School student Jamie Binder acknowledged that "chemistry between the student and teacher" is essential. But, having a passion to teach outweighs race or religion.

The lack of diversity among the teaching ranks doesn't bother Raj Singh Bedi, "as long as

they have an open mind."

And with students of so many religions and cultural backgrounds attending area schools, it was suggested that a class about diversity be initiated.

"If you're comfortable with other religions and why they do what they do, that makes people feel more accepted," the student said.

The Feb. 8 panel at Farmington Training Center included a cross-section of students, parents and teachers from throughout Farmington Public Schools as well as Mercy High School.

Moderated by Channel 7 news anchor Mark Hayes, the panel was presented by the Farmington Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council.

A wide variety of topics included: how minority students adjust to new schools, cultural conflicts, access to academic and student interactions with community groups outside of school.

Participating were members of the student diversity roundtable, who attend Farmington, Harrison, Mercy and North high schools, Farmington Alternative Academy and Farmington Community School. The students were selected because of their diverse point of view, said Superintendent Bob Maxfield.

Hayes said he noted good progress in the areas of multicultural acceptance since he moderated a similar discussion 18 months ago.

"What impressed me was their

openness," Hayes said following the program. "They are willing to share their stories, they are willing to share their pain, and that's hard to do for kids this age."

"But it shows us there is a bright future among our leaders of tomorrow."

Hayes, a Novi resident, later said he would like to see his own hometown and other communities adopt some of the initiatives in the nature of police pursuit tactics that are employed as well as the decision to pursue is "reasonableness," the policy reads.

Investigations are conducted "no matter if there is any damage, no matter what the incident is, no matter what the outcome," Dwyer said.

Assistant Chief Marty Bledsoe is on the administrative team that reviews high-speed chases. He said they make their judgments based on in-car video camera, dispatch tapes and descriptions from the officers involved.

"If there are minor matters of procedure, we have the supervisor counsel the officer," he said. "If there was something considerable ... a real police violation

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... we may choose to discipline the officer."

Bledsoe believes having a policy helps police officers, because they know their actions will be reviewed. The decision to follow a fleeing suspect isn't an easy one any more, he said.

"Chases aren't what they used to be. Officers will break off a chase more often than not, and we don't do unusual things to slow it down, like we used to when we were young officers," Bledsoe said.

More heavily traveled roads and increasing questions of liability, he believes the public's perception of high-speed chases has changed the way police handle them.

"It's the evolution of police and attitudes," Bledsoe said.

That evolution could take another turn, with legislation proposed by Van Regenmortel. He first proposed the idea of standard police seven years ago,

after incidents like the one Saturday, which ended tragically in Westland.

"In doing some research, we found there were divergent approaches to pursuits," he said. While some communities had standards, he added, others did not, "which kind of gives felons permission to flee."

His bill would create a commission of experts who would develop a model policy addressing issues such as how, when and where pursuits should be conducted. The commission may be an existing board that reviews law enforcement standards or an appointed group.

"The single standard for these policies should be what's in the best interest of the public's safety," he said.

He believes establishing a model policy will help ensure chases aren't conducted except when necessary and that they're carried out appropriately.

## Valentine's Visit



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HANNAHAN

Share the love: Second graders at Hillside Elementary School had seniors from local nursing homes visit their classroom Wednesday. Gerry and Bill Perkins listen to student Mary Gardner's story about her life.

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needed to carry manumission papers at all times.

About those papers, he told students that "A black man or woman, in the north, even if he had to have papers saying they were free. ... If not, they would know I was a runaway slave and they'd return me to the plantation."

In another classroom, a class sat on the floor and listened intently to the words of Harriet Tubman, as portrayed by parent Joann Stephens.

"Often, the Underground Railroad trips would begin on Saturday night because slaves didn't work on Sunday," said Stephens, about how Tubman would help quietly launch a group of slaves along rivers and streams toward Canada and freedom.

"That would give us a day and a half head start."

Answering a student's question about why she was known as the Moses of her people, Stephens Tubman noted that "I was such a good conductor that none of my slaves got caught."

Tubman actually made 20 successful trips along the Underground Railroad, leading more than 300 slaves to freedom.

Between presentations, Stephens, whose daughter Jasmine attends third grade at Beechview, said she was glad another parent (Adriane White) recruited her for the program.

"I thought it was a nice idea to get the kids involved," Stephens said. "It's experiential and children tend to remember that more."

Also part of Beechview students' experience Monday were stops at various safe houses,

house along the "route."

### Powerful stories

Beginning the day, was a skit, with two girls telling family stories about making their way to freedom.

Fifth grader Laura Gaines portrayed Johanna Reed, the daughter of a safe house owner.

"I think it's important that we did a re-making of the Underground Railroad because it's important to our history," Laura said. "You can't go through life not knowing about this."

Amber Hall, a fifth grader, performed the role of runaway slave Eliza Jackson during the opening skit. "Kids these days need to understand what happened 200 years ago," Amber said.

Spearheading the event were Kulas and media specialist Mark Spreitzer, along with parents White and Mary Beth Miller.

"It's just amazing," said Beechview Principal Norma Jean Sasa, about the program. "Lots of adults and children have learned through this process."

Spreitzer read *Now Let Me Fly* and *I Wish Tonight*, powerful stories about the journey that slaves had to make.

"It's hard to not be emotional when telling these stories," Spreitzer said. "It makes you really feel the importance of our black culture."



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HANNAHAN

All aboard: Beechview fourth grade teacher Scott Stautler leads his class by lantern light to their next stop on the school's "Underground railroad."

complete with corn bread to eat and water to drink. Teachers filled in some of the blanks about the move to abolish slavery.

"Students are hearing stories from people who owned the safe houses," added Peg Kulas, the school's learning center teacher. "Nathan Power's story from Farmington is one of the stories being told."

Apparently, Farmington was one of the final stops along the Underground Railroad.

Spiritual music played on the school public address system at the end of each segment, indicating it was time for students to make their way to the next safe

anticipated festival.

Lilley recently told Stark and the festival board he had to step down from the post after only about four months because of a business opportunity, unforeseen when Lilley's appointment was made in October.

In a prepared statement released by the Farmington Area Founders Festival announcing Lichtman's appointment, she vowed to "honor the impressive history of the Farmington area" at this year's festival. "We encourage residents and business leaders alike to come out and participate in this extraordinary display of community pride."

With the community foundation, Lichtman's efforts included expanding the organization's mission to include fundraising plans for the city of Farmington Hills' youth centers and the Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council.

Stark said Lichtman was the only serious candidate for the job. "There were a couple other names discussed," Stark added.

The change will not impact the festival hotline, which remains (248) 470-FEST.

## Action taken on Oakland property

As expected, the Farmington City Council on Feb. 6 formally adopted an amendment to the zoning map, completing the rezoning of 33432 Oakland Street from residential to Central Business District use.

The second reading and adoption enables Baker Street Draperies owner Shelley Raymond to move her studio design business from Village Commons into the two-story brick home in a historic neighborhood on Oakland at Grand River.

Council members unanimously approved the amendment. Members of the public attended the meeting, but did not speak on the issue.

The council voted 4-1 to allow the rezoning at its Jan. 16 meeting, despite opposition from a number of residents from the neighborhood.

The amendment to the zoning map was introduced at the same meeting.

According to the council, a key factor in their decision was that the city's Master Plan for future land use permits the Oakland property to be rezoned CBD.

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cherished."

Going a long way toward accomplishing that is the return of the event to July instead of June, when it was held last summer. Also, it will again be known as the Founders Festival, rather than the one-time-only moniker, Farmington Area Family Fest. This summer's festival is scheduled July 19-21.

"Changing the name back, and the date back, that's a step in the right direction," said Lichtman, a consultant with Farmington Hills-based firm Lichtman & Associates. "And now we need to build on that."

She intends to work with the festival board and committees to bring back "signature, trademark items" that longtime festival-goers associate with the event, as well as incorporate some of the better changes that took place during the two years of the Watts Up, Inc. era.

Lichtman, who soon will leave her role as executive director of the Farmington Hills/Farmington Community Foundation, said the incorporation of more family-related activities during the recent festivals.

"One thing that's part of what

makes this community so successful," she said, "is our commitment to families and to children."

Although criticism of the way Mike and Sandra Watts ran the festival in 1999 and 2000 led to a year-long hiatus, the groundswell to return the festival to its roots, Lichtman preferred to categorize it as a learning experience.

"To the (festival) board's credit, they tried thinking outside the box, coloring outside the lines," Lichtman said. "That kind of creative thinking is necessary. I think some valuable things were learned."

### Multi-tasker

Lichtman's ability to simultaneously work on - and complete - several tasks is a major reason for her selection, board President Jim Stark said Tuesday.

"That's crucial to what we're doing, that's exactly what you need for this job," said about Lichtman. "There are so many components that have to be dealt with at once."

Initially, Lichtman will meet with committees to begin working together toward the much-