

## 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.

## Festival needs help to survive, thrive

It hasn't been an easy year for the Farmington Founders Festival.

Board members have struggled to get the event on track since the Farmington/Farmington Hills Area Chamber of Commerce stopped underwriting cost over-runs and started looking for a professional promoter to run the event three years ago.

When a newly constituted festival board hired Mike Watts and his company, Watts Up, Inc. to do the job, he told them it would take several years for the festival to sustain itself, based on a new fee structure and increased promotion to draw people from surrounding communities.

Watts didn't get the time. The drastic changes he proposed — changing the name, establishing a fee structure, moving the dates to June — were so ill-received that board members scrambled to deal with merchants' complaints, a downturn in attendance and even a lawsuit that stemmed from fees paid by non-profits.

Even though the transformation wasn't complete, Watts' tenure did bring some positive changes. A shuttle service offset critical parking problems in the downtown area, and an increased emphasis on cultural arts and family events proved highly successful.

Though another cloud darkened the festival's horizon, it, too, had a silver lining. The sudden vacancy left by administrator Bruce Lilley has been quickly filled by Suzanne Lichtman, well known for her work promoting the Farmington Hills/Farmington Community Foundation.

People who've worked with her use words like "organized," "pleasant" and "energetic" to describe Lichtman, all qualities she'll need to get the Founders Festival in shape by July. She'll also need thick skin and a steely will to deal with downtown retailers stung by last year's low attendance

coupled with higher fees, and a community disappointed in a seeming decline in what was once a thriving summertime celebration.

For better or worse, Watts' involvement with the festival focused a glaring spotlight on the one issue that will

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make or break this event. For years, the Chamber of Commerce underwrote financial losses.

Making up the difference and making things better will require more than a simple increase in fees to merchants and crafters.

We urge Lichtman and the board to aggressively pursue corporate sponsorships and other opportunities for both communities to close ranks behind this signature event. Service groups, including Boy and Girl Scout troops, civic organizations, veterans clubs, even church groups could be tapped to contribute time and talents.

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Board members should extend a very insistent invitation for members of both communities to step up to the plate.

## Could a California power crisis happen here?

They say it probably won't happen here. We hope they're right.

The "it" in the above statement is the recent California power crisis with its rolling blackouts, darkened homes and businesses ... and a governor begging megawatts from surrounding states. What a specter: The most populous state in the most powerful nation on Earth, and they can't even keep the lights on.

"Here" is the state of Michigan. They are the state's lawmakers, utility officials, state Public Service Commissioners and consumer advocates.

A California-style energy crunch is unlikely (some even said "impossible") in Michigan, according to articles appearing in most editions of The Observer Sunday.

The most frequently cited cause of the California calamity is "deregulation" — government attempts to create a competitive marketplace for power. California is a case study in how not to deregulate public utilities, state energy experts say. Michigan, on the other hand, seems to be doing it right ... or at least better than California.

The differences between deregulation in California and Michigan are many and are detailed in reporter Mike Malott's Sunday stories. Suffice it to say in this missive that our lawmakers and utility officials seem to be paying close attention and learning from California and taking steps to see that "it" can't happen here.

Our leaders had better be paying attention. An uninterrupted stream of affordable electricity is so obviously crucial to Michigan in the best of economic times. The two-headed monster

of a recession and an energy crunch is something we'd rather not think about.

So, for now, we'll put our trust in people like state Sen. Mat Dunaskis (R-Lake Orion) who said recently: "I want to assure Michigan residents that we will not face the electric energy crisis seen in California. Michigan's industry is poised to provide residents with both reliable and affordable electricity."

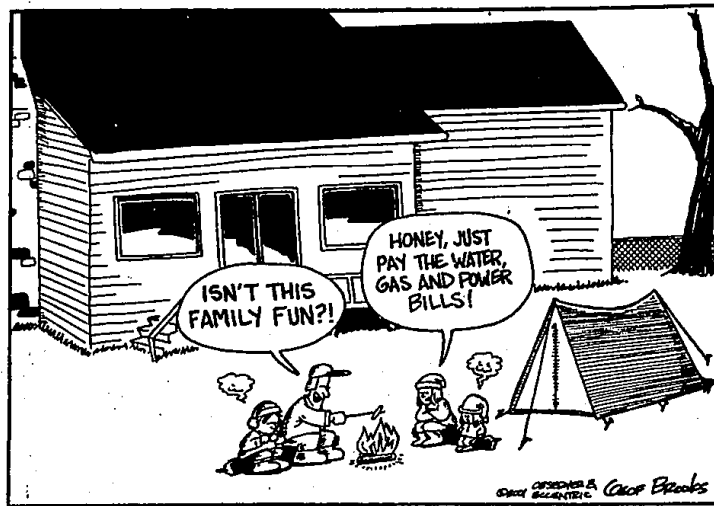
If that statement sounds wildly optimistic, well, Dunaskis should know; he's the primary architect of Michigan's utilities deregulation plan.

Of course, there are dissenters to this enthusiasm — Barry Cargill of the Small Business Association of Michigan, for one — and they should be recognized and their concerns examined.

For one thing, Cargill says, Michigan power producers are increasingly relying on natural gas to fire their generators at a time when prices for natural gas are on the rise. That could lead to electric rate hikes. And, realistically, he points out, it will take years for deregulation to create a truly competitive marketplace for energy — that's if deregulation works as politicians and consumers hope it will.

We're happy to see that our leaders in Lansing seem to be up to speed on this energy issue. "Now and then the Legislature does something right," said Dunaskis, who is confident enough to be jocular.

OK, OK, they're saying it can't happen here. We just hope they're still saying that next July when it's 98 degrees (with humidity to match) the air conditioners are humming away. We'll be watching.



## LETTERS

### ■ Open to all

I am truly saddened to hear of the closing of the Farmington VFW, their involvement in the community will greatly be missed I am sure.

However, as time passes, groups such as the VFW and American Legion will become a thing of the past, primarily because they do not open their membership to military veterans that did not serve our country during time of war. As an honorable discharged veteran, I have always felt slighted by these organizations for not recognizing my service to my country. I volunteered and spent four years on active duty in the US Marine Corps and I am proud of that.

Yet when I have tried to join veterans organizations, I do not "qualify" on my merits alone. In the past 25 years there are hundreds of thousands of military veterans who do not fall into the requirements of having served during a war.

Veterans organizations that do not welcome these veterans are doomed to extinction.

Doug Lashosky  
Farmington Hills

### ■ Good intentions

While good intentions lead Jennifer Granholm and Mike Duggan's involvement with the petition drive to repeal the new CCW law, their reactions are emotional and irrational.

Extensive research shows a dramatic and irrefutable link between gun laws and crime. Legislation supporting a law-abiding citizen's freedom to exercise their right to protect themselves reduces crime. In addition, "shall issue" CCW laws like the one passed in Michigan do not result in the shoot-out scenarios painted by Granholm and Duggan.

Not only is this proof established in nationwide studies, but locally as well. The results from Macomb County's regulations contradict the "doom-and-gloom" vision espoused by CCW opponents. While emotion may foster empathy, our elected officials must resist the urge to make policy decisions outside the realm of reason.

Steve Sutton  
Farmington Hills

### ■ Campaign strategy?

I read with interest and a bit of amusement Mr. Oliverio's comments on Michigan Attorney General Jennifer Granholm in the Feb. 15 issue.

Once again it seems, he has chosen to speak without giving much reasoned thought to the matter. "Encouraging diversity is like encouraging divisive-ness?" This from a member of an ethics committee?

Diversity encourages education and understanding, and therefore more tolerance and less xenophobia. Yes, we should appreciate our similarities. But we also need to celebrate our differences, for without them this world would be dull and rigid and not a very enjoyable place to live.

It seems that rumors of Ms. Granholm's possible gubernatorial aspirations have frightened much of the entrenched bureaucracy in this state, particularly ultra-right-wing Republicans. Why else would the Governor of our state, in concert with the

rubber-stamp legislature, try, once Ms. Granholm was elected to that post (by a significant margin), to strip the office of Attorney General of many of its powers, changing our state's Constitution and effectively cutting her off at the proverbial knees?

It was a cheap political stunt which, at the very least, shed light on the tactics and integrity of this group of "good" boys. It won't be the last one either, and we voters should expect them to roll out the sleazebag machine full time as the next election draws closer.

There will be a lot of huffing and puffing from people who most likely couldn't stand up to a detailed and intricate examination of their own lives and are making the most noise in an effort to deflect any unwanted personal attention. Mr. Oliverio has done us a favor, however.

He has given us an advanced peek into what will most likely be a strident and somewhat shameful campaign strategy in efforts to hold on to the power that this group has come to love. All citizens of reasonable mind should take this into consideration when the time comes to cast your votes.

Scott Stevenson  
Farmington

### ■ Why not presidents?

I have a question that has been bothering me. I have a child in the fourth grade this year, she had Martin Luther King's birthday off in January. Which was good.

What happened to celebrating Presidents Day? Mr. King was a very important man, of our past. I agree we should celebrate his birthday. But I also think that President Washington and President Lincoln were very important too. As did Mr. King, these two presidents did wonderful things for our country.

Our children should have Presidents Day off to remember these presidents on their birthdays, that we celebrate on Feb. 19. The children need to know how great they were.

Connie Hesse  
Ann Arbor

### ■ Piece of life missing

I recently read an article written in my Home Town Newspaper about a local woman who lost an antique holiday bench, and my heart goes out to her. It seems that my story is very similar to hers, and that's why I share her grief. Back on Jan. 5, I went shopping with my daughter at Laurel Park Mall to exchange a few Christmas gifts and that's when it happened — the day that has changed my life. It was a very cold January day when we arrived at the mall, the parking lot was full, so we had to park very far from the door.

And that's the last time I saw it. I zipped up my coat and put on my gloves, and made the mad dash for the door to the mall. When we reached the mall and went inside I unzipped my coat and took off my gloves, and that's when I lost something that simply can't be replaced.

You see, when I took off my gloves my diamond wedding band must have come off with them. My late husband gave me the ring to my back in 1989, and it is the one thing that helps me cherish his memory. I didn't notice that the ring was missing until I went to put it

on for church the next day. My daughter and I went back to the mall to retrace our steps and to check with the mall's lost and found. Despite our efforts we came up empty handed. I have placed an ad in all the local lost and founds offering a reward, but no one has come forward. I know that someone at the mall that day has found this piece of my life. The ring may have some value to the person who has found it but it can't compare to the value that it has for me. All I can ask is that you print my story in hope that one of your readers will see this and realize how much the ring means to me.

Elizabeth Sarlauskas  
Livonia

### ■ Make drunks pay

Why should good guys pay for expenses bad guys create for themselves?

When a drunk (whoever) goes to jail for a few days and creates expenses for the taxpayer, why not demand they pay their own way.

Why not have the state set up a special department to put loans on homes, boats, cars, etc. and demand 10 percent of their salary until it is all paid up? Put the money in a state fund and at the end of the year give the discount to taxpayers.

This would help the bad guys as well as the good guys. The bad not liking this idea may decide to put a little more effort to stay out of self-inflicted troubles.

If this makes sense to you write to your congressmen.

Leslie Swanson  
Farmington

**■ 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

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