

Farmington Observer

Part of HomeTown Communications Network™

Jon Hubred
COMMUNITY EDITOR
Hugh Gallagher
MANAGING EDITOR
Sue Roalek
PUBLISHER
Banks Dishmon
VP/COO

Jaime Towar
VP, EDITORIAL
Dick Agnlan
PRESIDENT
Phillip Power
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD

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.

Board should take time with boundary proposal

Aside from budget cuts, drawing attendance boundaries may be the toughest decision school officials make.

Families in Section 8, between 12 and 13 Mile Roads west of Drake, seem to have mixed feelings about taking their children out of Wood Creek Elementary. Some parents want their children moved to closer schools (Hillsdale and Forest have been proposed), eliminating the daily four-mile bus trip through some of the most heavily trafficked intersections in the city. Safety is a concern, as is the difficulty in getting to the school in case of emergency.

Other parents worry about the trauma of moving away from friends and a school setting their children adore. They're concerned about what they see as a lack of parental input in whatever plan is approved.

While we understand parents wanting to have their voices heard, the truth is, no one could draw enough lines to satisfy everyone's needs. Parents understandingly want to protect their own; having a few more involved in the ultimate decision more clearly emphasizes their call to represent everyone's children.

Nowhere is the phrase "too many cooks spoil the broth" more applicable than in this case, and we urge parents to remember - in the immortal words of Mr. Spock - the needs of the many often outweigh the needs of the few.

By the same token, Farmington School District faces important challenges in this decision, and much more. It would be wise to take their time and make extra efforts to keep parents posted, offering as many opportunities as possible for public comment before any proposal is approved.

In addition to the schools most directly affected, Longacre parents have valid

Doing the right thing means someone, probably many someones, will be unhappy.

Safety concerns are critical, but officials are faced with myriad issues that deserve a fair and open hearing. This is a district that prides itself on parent communication and interaction; we trust that tradition will continue. Parents have to understand being heard is quite different from getting what you want.

We elect school board members to make the tough calls, because their sworn duty is to weigh the evidence and make decisions in the best interests of everyone concerned. Doing the right thing means someone, probably many someones, will be unhappy.

A complete boundary adjustment plan will take that into account and provide families with the help they need to make transitions as easy as possible. Children aren't being shuttled from one school to another without concern for their well-being; every school in this district maintains high standards.

Boundary changes may be difficult to draw, even more difficult to implement. But if cooler heads prevail, parents, students and officials can work together to ensure no child suffers from them.

Northlight: Having rushed to set a special meeting Monday night to consider if the Hills City Council tabled a PUD agreement that would put 320,000-square-feet of shopping center space in the 14 Mile/Northwestern area, because councilman Chris McEneaney had an unavoidable previous commitment. We're not meaning to be critical, but if time is such an issue, why was this postponed to their next regular meeting, a full two weeks away? Officials certainly have a right to ask for - to demand - answers to all their questions. But residents and developers have rights, too. If officials have major concerns about this plan, and it's clear they do, then it's time to find another way to help homeowners who are struggling.

Utilities deregulation doesn't always cut rates

If there's anything we've all taken for granted, it's our utilities. We turn on the heat on a frigid Michigan evening, and our abode warms. The tap runs hot and cold with water and when we toss the remains of dinner in the sink and turn on the garbage disposal, it all goes away.

But things are changing. The folks at the gas company are deregulating a la Ma Bell, and the city of Detroit water and sewer systems are in need of improvements.

The bottom line is rate hikes for all. That flush in the bathroom is going to cost more and keeping the old home toasty will cost 40-60 percent more next winter.

Detroit is hiking its water and sewer rates for two reasons. The water system is in need of repairs and the sewer system needs improvements to keep it from spewing more pollution into the Great Lakes.

Water rate hikes of about 10 percent are expected in most suburban communities because the city of Detroit is in the midst of a \$5 billion overhaul of its water treatment facilities. The system itself is thought to be one of the largest in the country.

While Detroit has often been difficult to deal with, the worth of our water system is taken for granted. Southeastern Michigan has been blessed with one of the best sources of clean, fresh water in the world. It has helped this region become an industrial giant that supports a population of 4 million or so folks.

Those who balk at the water rate hikes should be reminded that suburban communities wouldn't exist if city of Detroit taxpayers hadn't reached into their pockets in the first place to build the water system.

Sewer rate hikes are in store for some communities as southeastern Michigan starts coming in line with federal standards for sewage released into the Great Lakes basin. Again, like the water, southeastern Michigan communities can consider themselves lucky. We've been

upstream in the Great Lakes of towns like Toledo and Cleveland, which have been getting our discharges and their faces for years. It's time for the Detroit area to make sure the water it returns to the Great Lakes is as clean as possible.

The rates in gas prices being proposed by MichCon will push our heating bills up by \$20 to \$30 monthly by next month, if averaged over a year, or considerably more getting winter months if you choose not to average. The reason given is deregulation. The gas company folks say the price of gas has been kept low in an agreement to test deregulation and that the gas companies have been eating the wholesale price increases. And it's now time to come in line with current prices.

It's understandable that MichCon and Consumers Energy, which serve most of Michigan, want to make a decent profit for their investments.

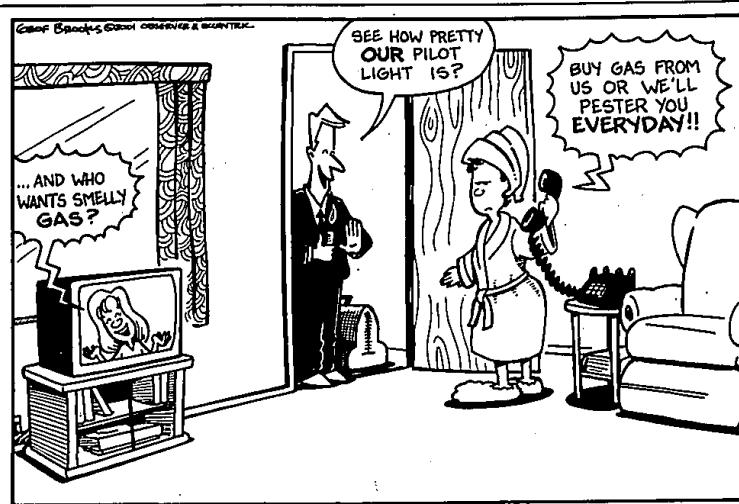
However, deregulation of power companies is a scary thing especially in light of the power problems in California. We certainly don't want to end up like our West Coast countrymen.

Deregulation also makes many wary in the wake of the breakup in the 1980s of the phone company and the ensuing confusing competition that has put many phone bills under a cloud of suspicion. There has been slamming of phone bills and phone solicitation calls to homes that have enraged many.

Phone company deregulation was supposed to save us money because there would be more competition for our phone dollars. However, it's never been proven that phone bills have ever gone down. There's just the wimpy response that phone bills could have gone higher if there hadn't been deregulation.

It has put a sour taste in our collective mouths, and makes us suspicious of what deregulation it raises the question: Do we want to turn over the power sources in our homes to the same process used in the phone?

It will take some convincing.



LETTERS

Nursing homes

There were some inaccuracies in a recent Chat Room article about the Consumer Guide to Michigan Nursing Homes (Nursing home guide misleads, Feb. 22).

It is published by the Health Care Association of Michigan, the Michigan Association of Homes and Services for the Aging, and the Michigan County Medical Care Facilities Council.

The first edition of the Guide, published in 1999, did in fact contain some inaccuracies resulting from misinterpreted data. When the inaccuracies were discovered, action was taken to correct them and measures implemented to ensure the mistake was not repeated in 2001.

The Family Satisfaction component of the Guide is a survey of people with family members in nursing home care. Consensus of nursing home care, not the provider community, developed this survey.

It is true that Michigan nursing homes are cited for violations at a rate higher than the national average. The writer concludes that this means that Michigan nursing homes are providing care that is below the national average. That is incorrect. When measured by all other nationally accepted indicators of quality, Michigan ranks average in comparison to other states.

The Guide includes surveys through Nov. 1, 2000. As with any undertaking of this magnitude, some cut-off date is necessary to get information printed. These processes always create a lag time between the cut-off date and when the information is available. As stated in the Guide, consumers are encouraged to ask nursing home facilities for all of the survey data available to them by state law, which would include recent survey results.

We also encourage consumers to consult additional sources. The resource section contains information on how to contact Michigan's Long Term Care Ombudsman, and how to obtain a copy of The Michigan Long-Term Care Companion available from Citizens for Better Care. The link to the federal government's Medicare Web site is listed in the resource section.

The Guide is published as a public service. We took great care to ensure that the Guide is accurate and includes information that will help guide decisions. An advisory committee consisting not only of nursing home provider groups but also state agency representatives and consumers oversaw the project. Another key component of the Guide has been a user survey, which has allowed hundreds of consumers to give suggestions for improving the guide.

The majority of Michigan's nursing homes provide high quality care in an environment of over-regulation and under-funding. Consumers are well served by the comprehensive, helpful information contained in the Guide. We welcome suggestions and feedback. We are constantly improving this resource in order to better serve those Michigan residents who face the difficult decision to place a loved one in a nursing home.

Jonathan Stanton,
Director of Communications,
Health Care Association of Michigan

Parents want choice

A better headline for "Parents demand choice" from your Feb. 25

front page would be "Parents demand choice."

Once again, the government's monopoly on schools forces parents to beg a local tribunal to make a decision better left to themselves. After "careful" thought, a decree will be handed down sending some children to the school they desire while others will be left behind.

Until education reform occurs, parents will be forced to plead their case and hope they are the lucky ones.

Steve Sutton
Farmington Hills

Ethics set straight

Today I read Aldo Vagnozzi's letter to the editor, and was once again amazed at his ability to spin the facts.

Vagnozzi claims the Farmington Hills Ethics Committee was disbanded for inactivity. The truth of the matter is that the committee's Chairman, who was appointed by Vagnozzi when he was mayor, was struck with a life threatening illness, just as we were half finished writing the new Ethics Charter.

The Ethics Committee decided to wait for the chairman to recover since we received no direction from the City Council. Mr. Vagnozzi never offered a replacement and left the committee in limbo. None of the Ethics Committee members were ever informed officially in writing the Ethics Committee was dissolved.

Mr. Vagnozzi, the fact that you cannot even be straightforward about why the Ethics Committee had no activity speaks volumes. Our fellow residents deserve the truth, Mr. Vagnozzi, not a spin job.

Ronald Oliverio
Farmington Hills

To Granholm-ites

For the third straight week I've read a letter on this page that deals with a set of topics that started with an article on Jennifer Granholm.

After reading the latest one by Aldo Vagnozzi, I'm compelled to add my thoughts. First, it would be a much better use of space to focus on the subject at hand instead of having the letter writers attack each other. Second, the real issue - which people are only barely touching on - is that the attorney general wants to be our next governor.

Her performance in the attorney general's office is playing to mixed reviews. She certainly has less practical political experience than the other four Democrats mentioned (Blanchard, Bonior, Peters and Smith) for governor. The close association with Ed McNamara's political machine is a concern.

To those who would support her or defend her, all I can say is "caveat emptor."

Christopher M. Cummins
Farmington Hills

Bullying citizens

It is ironic that the National Rifle Association and its allies who wrap themselves in the 2nd amendment to the U.S. Constitution in their drive to allow almost everyone to have a concealed weapon are the same ones who are using every bullying tactic in the book to prevent citizens from using

their 1st amendment rights to oppose that effort.

I'm referring to the effort by petitioners who are seeking signatures to put the legislation that allows up to 200,000 more concealed weapons permits up for a vote of the people in the 2002 election.

Many of the petition gatherers are young mothers who are concerned about the danger their children face if more weapons are allowed on the streets. In their effort to gather petition signatures they are facing threats, verbal abuse and other methods of intimidation from the NRA types.

In addition, locations that allow the circulation of petitions are facing pressure from the pro-gun crowd to chase the petitioners away or face dire consequences. Already victimized have been several theater complexes, Soccer! Soccer! and even the YMCA's.

Despite these attacks on the right to petition the drive is going well and most people are more than willing to sign. The need to overturn the expanded concealed weapons law was made clear on a recent TV news show which reported that during a one-week period 35 children were killed by guns.

The danger posed by the expanded concealed weapons law is why there is solid opposition to the legislation by all police organizations, including the Michigan Association of Police Chiefs which is headed by Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer.

Incidentally the 2nd amendment has more to do with the establishment of a well regulated militia than with the placing of a gun in the hands of every man, woman and child.

Aldo Vagnozzi
Farmington Hills

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.hometowncomm.net

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.

Mail:
Letters to the Editor
Farmington Observer
33411 Grand River
Farmington, MI 48335

E-Mail:
jhubred@oe.hometowncomm.net

Fax:
248-477-8722

HomeTown COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK