

# Festival

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years to come.

For starters, Lichtman is immersing herself into the role. She's seeking in input from the Farmington Area Founders Festival board, talking to merchants who didn't like the recent direction and tone of the event and getting fresh ideas from regular people who, like her, love the rich history of Farmington.

"It's been, 'Welcome to the Founders Festival, Suzanne. We need to do this, this, this and this,'" said Lichtman, counting her fingers for emphasis. "At the same time I'm doing this, I'm doing research, listening, going through past meeting minutes and ... working on a plan."

That plan is unfolding. Last week, with accordion folder in hand, Lichtman's request to the Farmington City Council to reconstitute the popular ox roast and hospitality tent signaled a continuation of the back-to-the-future philosophy embraced at an August 2000 town hall meeting. Also back in place is the original name and

July date. Last year, the event was called the Farmington Area Family Fest and squared off against the Livonia Spree during June.

## Hard at work

Meanwhile, other festival devotees are doing their share in preparation for the July 19-21 event.

Various committees are brainstorming ideas and getting ready to deliver their part of the plan.

Lichtman is fielding telephone calls placed by the public to the event's hotline, (248) 470-FEST.

And, a logo is being developed by local design artist Guil Green, one that will emphasize a missing ingredient of recent festivals — the history and tradition started by Farmington's founding fathers.

Lichtman said the two-year regime of Mike and Sandra Watts (hired by the festival board to make the festival more of an economically viable region-

al attraction) wasn't necessarily "a bad thing," noting that the 2000 festival actually made a profit for the first time in several years.

"But I think, for this community, with so much community pride that exists, having a number of people working on it makes sense," Lichtman said. "This is something that is important to the whole community."

Coupling that with high expectations for the festival, she is looking forward to presenting an event that will incorporate the best of the past with some winning new ideas.

## First things first

"To have it as a draw for the southeastern area is not a primary goal," Lichtman emphasized. "I certainly think if we produce a quality event that has a lot going for it, then that will be a side benefit. We obviously want a good turnout, but this is a celebration of a community and its history."

According to Gary Lichtman, the town hall meeting and hearing people out was essential to the subsequent renewed embrace of tradition.

Results include a return to the former name and date and assurances that a non-profit group won't need to pay to

## 'Bringing in the history, returning the name, that meant so much to people.'

Gary Lichtman

—Lichtman & Associates

marsh in the parade or be charged the same fee as a commercial vendor to set up a booth. Making sure Farmington Hills is connected is just as important.

"Bringing in the history, returning the name, that meant so much to people," he said. "These two communities used to be one. People in Farmington Hills ... need to find a special time to celebrate what the Founders Festival is, what the founding history is, rather than, 'that's them and this is us.'"

## Including the Hills

There will be a strong Hills component in the 2001 event, promised Suzanne Lichtman.

For example, the second annual Kids Day in the Park, on Thursday, July 19, is being spearheaded by Dave Boyer, director of the Farmington Hills Special Services Department.

And Nancy Coumoundouros, cultural arts coordinator for the

two cities, is turning Memorial Park into "Art on the Grand," representing the collected works of fine arts crafters.

Farmington Hills also is helping work with the festival's historical committee to launch a guided history tour of many of the area's landmark sites.

"It's great to have a moon-walk," joked Gary Lichtman. "But it's also wonderful to be able to offer something that opens up people's eyes."

Still, history by itself probably wouldn't be enough to keep the festival afloat financially.

"While we want to respect and honor the traditions of the festival," said Suzanne Lichtman, "there needs to be a recognition there are various demographics in the communities combined and we need to make sure the festival is addressing the needs of many different areas of interest."

"It is a line to walk. It's respecting and honoring tradition but at the same time, it's making it fresh and interesting."

Who knows what else she might have embedded in her magic bag, ready to unveil in order to do just that.

## Board's confident in 2001 festival

BY TIM SMITH  
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Could this be a make-or-break year for the Farmington Founders Festival?

Don't even suggest that to festival administrator Suzanne Lichtman, who strongly believes that a return to lost traditions will help it rebound from a couple of down years.

"Absolutely not" a crossroads year, said Lichtman, during a recent interview at the Farmington Observer offices. "What I'm getting from the board is just a very high confidence factor and optimism for what this is going to be this year."

Lichtman said she is certain she can help stabilize the festival, which has been hampered by some uncertainty since 1998 when the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce determined it could no longer afford writing off festival cost.

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