

## Farmington Observer

Part of HomeTown Communications Network™

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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.

## Let us hear from you

Freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one.

A.J. Liebling, American journalist, author

Sorry, old A.J., but that's just not the case any more — if it ever was. Certainly not in the age of the Internet. And really, not in the history of this country.

The free exchange of ideas via the printed — and mass distributed — word dates back in the United States at least to the Federalist Papers. When Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay took their case for Constitutional ratification to the public, it was in a series of essays that appeared in several newspapers across New York state during 1787-88.

So while the battles of the Revolutionary War won America her freedom, it was the people's press that cemented it.

Since then, the media has played many roles: conscience of America, agent for change, muckraker, social arbiter, political kingmaker, and yes, an occasional "hobby" for some of the country's wealthiest and most colorful entrepreneurs. Through it all, there has been one constant: the newspaper (broadcast outlet and Web site) as a sounding board for its readers, listeners and viewers.

Nowhere is that more true than at the Farmington Observer. There's a reason we call ourselves a community newspaper — it starts with you, the community.

The formula is easy, really. We write, you respond, we print your response. Or you respond to something someone else has said in their response and we print

that. Or you tell us about a local issue or achievement of a family member, friend or neighbor — and you guessed it — we print that.

It doesn't have to be heavy-duty political analysis or some earth-shattering scientific revelation, either. For example, in recent weeks we've run letters from readers thanking organizations and elected officials for helpful actions. A young student expressed her views on affirmative action as it relates to college acceptance.

Whether you're reacting to something you've read or sharing your views on a national topic, your letters are valued.

There are just a few rules. Letters should be 400 words or less and include your name, address and phone number for verification. With rare exceptions, we won't run an unsigned letter. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

As for how you get it to us, there are options galore:

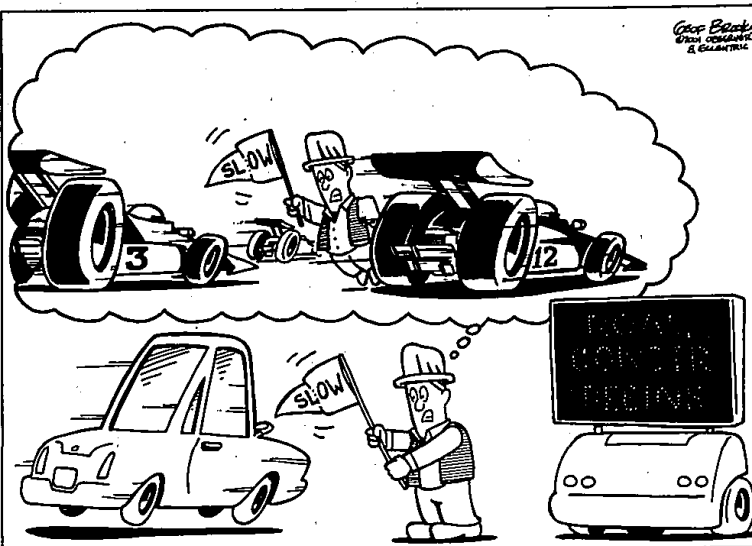
■ Drop it in the mail to the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335

■ Fax it to us at (248) 477-9722

■ E-mail it to us as a textfile at jhubred@oe.hometowncomm.net

Or, if you really want to capture the spirit of community journalism, stop in at our downtown Farmington office, located just west of Farmington Road, with your information or just to chat. Office hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday.

After all, there's no sounding board better than face-to-face human contact.



## LETTERS

### ■ More firefighters

We applaud City Manager Steve Brock, Fire Chief Marinucci and members of City Council for their foresight in seriously looking into the future of our Fire Department.

Their consideration of improving emergency medical services to the residents is a win-win situation. By adding nine career, cross-trained Fire Fighters/Paramedics to provide Advanced Life Support services will shave approximately 3-4 valuable minutes off of the response time it takes for personnel to be at the side of a patient, or scene of an emergency.

By taking over this responsibility from our private ambulance company, this upgrade in service will almost pay for itself. We feel that the service provided by the Fire Department is second to none and anxiously look forward to the expanded Fire/EMS services we will provide to the community.

To Mr. Brock, Chief Marinucci, member of City Council, and to the residents of Farmington Hills, you have our support!

Members of the Farmington Hills Fire Fighters Association  
Local 2659

### ■ License to steal?

In reference to: All security should have more training.

Since when has anyone a license to steal?

In the better interest for everyone, I suggest we turn to the 13 Commandments. The seventh reads, "Thou shalt not steal," and lets defend security and ALL policemen.

If we had none, we would enter the "animal world." In that world, that world, the strongest always wins regardless if one is right or wrong.

Oh but, a thief even died in a scuffle — why did she not surrender when caught? If she had not stolen, she would still be living.

All must die sometime. Our Lord giveth and He taketh away. At this occasion, it pleased HIM to take away (even during her act).

Could it be a lesson to mankind from the Creator Himself? I think it would make plain common sense for all of us to better support and appreciate those who lay their lives on the line for our well being, don't you?

Leslie Swanson  
Farmington

### ■ Forest view differs

It was with great interest I read the article, "Forest Elementary parents plan picketing, teaming of 4th, 5th graders," in the Feb. 18 issue of the Farmington Observer. As a parent with a child who spent six years at Forest and as a substitute teacher in the district, I hold a drastically different view than the one that is presented in this article.

Presently, my daughter is a sixth grader at Bloomfield Hills Middle School and is an all "A" student. I attribute this to the wonderful education she received at Forest. When entering middle school, she handled switching classes like a pro. She was completely organized because she had learned the importance of being prepared for her classes over the past two years of teaming at Forest.

I shared this article with my daughter and she stated that at no time did she ever have seven switches in one day. She did state it was hard to get used to at first, but the long-term benefits were worth it.

The article also stated that Forest students are suffering in their development of language arts skills because of this system. Again, this was not the case with our daughter.

In the fall of 2000, our daughter won a trophy in the statewide Forensics Tournament held in Ann Arbor as a sixth grader. She had graduated from Forest and the teaming system only five months earlier. She is an excellent writer and often receives special recognition for her written work. We could not be more pleased with Forest and this teaming system.

This 10-year system is not new. The teachers involved are all experts in their subject and through this system they are each able to share their expertise with all of the fourth and fifth grade students. The long-term benefits to the students are numerous with the teaming system. If parents don't understand the system, have them ask questions and learn about the benefits.

Forest is a wonderful school and I hope that parents don't change a good thing before they really look at the long-term benefits.

Cynthia Rooney  
Bloomfield Hills

### ■ Special ed rules

There have been many stories written, and opinions expressed regarding Michigan's proposed new special education rules. The public deserves to have an accurate understanding of these important issues. Let me correct and clarify a few of the most important points.

The proposed rule changes have been under discussion within the Department of Education and with the education community for several years. This discussion began with a task force commissioned to study special education in Michigan eight years ago.

Under the auspices of the task force, 168 different interest groups had input into discussion focused on improving the delivery of special education services. The task force report has served as a cornerstone for the subsequent eight years of discussion, debate, and study, which has resulted in the current proposal.

This proposal represents the first substantial modification of Michigan's special education rules in almost three decades. Since promulgation of the current rules, much has changed. Most importantly, while the current rules were designed for a time in which there were no federal protections, we now have strong federal protection and close regulation of services for children with disabilities. The revised rules align with and support federal regulations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The proposed rule changes will accomplish many positive things. First, many redundant or out-dated rules will be rescinded. This will eliminate confusion and assure that all children benefit from the protection guaranteed by IDEA 1997, and its supporting regulations.

Second, decision-making responsibility will be moved closer to the community and family. We have learned that "one size fits all" standards, written in Lansing, do not always work best for

families and school districts. State protections against abuse of this responsibility will be maintained, of course.

Thirdly, the proposed rules will focus programs on student need, rather than impairment categories. I believe, along with many others, that it is children, not labels that are important. We must be focused on the needs of each individual child not on labeling, categorizing, sorting and counting.

Finally, I must comment on the issue of the Durant case. These rules are not about the Durant dispute or its resolution. These rules are about bringing better service to Michigan's children. The statutory mandate to provide special education to all children in Michigan remains as strong as ever.

I will, however, point out — once again — that the court found in the Durant II case that the state was indeed in compliance with the Headlee Amendment and its obligation for funding of special education and special education transportation. In fact, the state is meeting — and indeed exceeding — its constitutional obligation for education funding, and will continue to do so.

The answer to our children's future lies in working together to reshape our special education system. We must build a system that has the flexibility to assure that each child receives the quality education best suited to meet his or her unique needs. The proposed special education rule changes moves us in the right direction.

Arthur E. Ellis  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
Michigan Department of Education

■ 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.

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## GUEST OPINION

### Gun control: Look north

In his final State of the Union Address, President Clinton proposed that anyone planning to purchase a handgun would have to apply for a photo license from their state showing that they passed the Brady background check and a gun safety course.

Now as the country adjusts to a new president and administration there are no photo/ID laws and it will likely be another four years before any sensible gun regulations will pass into law. And yet, each year there are more than 30,000 gun-related deaths in this country.

According to the most recent statistics from the Center for Disease Control, here in Michigan, there were more than 1,100 firearms-related deaths in 1997 alone. This is unacceptable.

Meanwhile, just across the Detroit River, our "Neighbors to the North" are making significant sensible changes in their gun laws. There has been sweeping change in Canadian firearms laws with positive and dramatic results.

The Canadian Firearms Act of 1995, which went into effect in December of 1996, provided for several requirements for current and future gun owners. Canadian gun owners had until January 1, 2001, to apply for a firearms photo ID license and they have until 2003 to register each firearm they own. Additionally, anyone applying for a license must go through a background safety check, pass a gun safety course, and notify their current and former spouses or partners of their intent to purchase a firearm.

As an additional safety measure, all guns are required to be stored unloaded and made inoperable, through devices such as trigger locks. According to the Canadian Firearms Centre, within two years of the enactment of this law, thousands of firearms licenses have been refused for safety reasons, hundreds of licenses have been revoked, and more than 60,000 extensive background checks have been conducted.

While Canada has taken sensible gun safety measures, the U.S. lags far behind. Nationally, there are three times as many gun dealers in this country as there are McDonald's restaurants, as evidenced by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms statistics.

And, according to a 1997 United Nations study, the U.S. has weaker gun regulations and higher gun violence than any other industrialized country and even most developing nations. As well, the Canadian Firearms Centre reports there are an estimated 7.4 million firearms in Canada, a country with a population of 31 million roughly the size of California.

In stark contrast, there are an estimated 222 million firearms in the U.S. And, in a population of about 275 million people, there is nearly one gun for every person. In Michigan, however, we seem to be going in the other direction altogether. In January, Gov. John Engler signed the concealed weapons bill into law making it easier for Michigan

Please see GUNs, A15