

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.

Arts fest volunteers, staff should take a bow

Of the many signature events that make Farmington and Farmington Hills a wonderful place to be, the annual Festival of the Arts celebration brings a unique flair to the William B. Costick Center.

From music to dance, painting to poetry, nearly every area of the arts is represented during the 10-day festival. Beginning with the Starry Night Gala, which took place on Saturday, 10 major events are hosted by the Costick Center.

Aside from the near-balletic choreography it takes to make this all work, the greatest beauty of the festival lies in its inclusive nature. People of all ages, all ethnicities and beliefs are given a voice for their dreams, their hopes, their fears and philosophies.

A local first grader, writing for the PTA "Reflections" recognition and achievement program, wrote about what a world it would be if scientists found a cure for diabetes, because he lives with it every day. A winner in the library's Teen Writing Contest wrote a story about lethal spiders spewing mechanical webs.

Photographer Junebug Clark, the Farmington Area Arts Commission's Artist in Residence, displayed not only the faces he has captured on film over the years but also a bit of his family history. Each work of art - whether on paper, canvas, in clay or other media - represented a bit of the artist who created it, and that kind of sharing and revelation about the

people in our community draws us even closer.

This is the depth of us, the spark that adds life to the world in which we live and work. And if you talk to the volunteers and city staffers who put it all together, it's the energy that keeps them running

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for the 10 days of the festival and the months of preparation beforehand.

Costick Center director Robb Clarkson, cultural arts coordinator Nancy Comandouros, Starry Night Gala chairwoman Sara Woollard, Farmington Community Arts Council chairwoman Ellen Kendall, Farmington Area Arts Commission chairwoman Fern Barber, Farmington Artist Club chairwoman Annette Lind and the scores of volunteers who have worked under their leadership should take a well-deserved bow for a job well done.

Of course, none of them likes to take much credit.

"We have a ball doing this," said Comandouros. And it shows.

New concealed weapons law doesn't pass muster

Gun-rights advocates have certainly made some fair points about the current state of law regarding permits to carry concealed weapons. Drafted back in the 1920s, Michigan's present CCW law has resulted in a system that allows county gun boards to decide on permit applications in an arbitrary or permit.

But the revision to CCW laws - rushed through the Legislature in the closing days of last year's session and set to go into effect this July - is a serious overreaction.

There can be little doubt it will result in a large increase in the number of people legally carrying guns, and "heat" in Michigan, by some estimates up to a 10-fold increase.

We've no desire to see Michigan turned into "The Wild Midwest."

Given a chance to vote on this law in a referendum, Michigan voters should toss it out and send state lawmakers back to the drawing board for some serious rewriting. Improvements needed to the law include:

■ **Tougher restrictions.** If lawmakers want to retain "shall issue" wording - language that eliminates the discretion of local gun boards and requires them to issue permits to anyone who meets all the criteria - additional restrictions are in order. Applicants should be required to "show a need."

Under the current "may issue" rules, gun boards often do require a showing of need, but what they'll accept as a need is frequently disputed. Lawmakers should require that showing, then provide a list of what needs are considered acceptable for issuing a CCW permit. If the applicant can show that need, shall issue wording begins to make more sense.

■ **Revise in the new CCW law the so-called "village idiot clause."** State lawmakers included the clause to allow gun boards to weed out applicants who might not have a criminal record or might not have been committed to a mental institution, yet would present a danger to themselves or others if allowed to walk around with guns. Nice idea, but to invoke that clause, gun boards would have to produce "clear and convincing evidence" that the applicant presents a danger. That standard of evidence is too high. The wording needs to be changed to provide a presumption in favor of the board when it exercises its discretion. Applicants could still appeal to the courts if rejected on that basis, but the burden of evidence would shift.

■ **The time period given to gun boards to conduct background checks on applicants is seriously too short.** Set in the new law at 30 days, it is half to one third the time given gun boards in other states to review the background of applicants.

■ **Nice as it is that lawmakers ruled out applicants with a history of mental illness, there is no way for gun boards to check on that history.** There is no central database to refer to. The system depends on applicants admitting to gun boards that they have had such problems. Otherwise, boards would have to poll every resident in the state to do a thorough check. Lawmakers need to close this gap.

At this point, it appears a referendum question on the new CCW law is headed to the ballot in 2002. The People Who Care About Kids Committee gathered 260,000 signatures to put the law to a referendum.

The Michigan United Conservation Clubs and the Michigan Coalition of Responsible Gun Owners filed suit to block that vote. On Monday, April 30, Supreme Court justices remanded the case to the court of appeals, insisting on a ruling by June 3 and stating that the question of whether law is appropriate money can be subjected to referendum is "ripe for review."

We've already stated on these pages that we believe the expression of that many voters should be honored and the ballot question should proceed. Furthermore, the last-minute addition of a \$1 million appropriation to the CCW bill was so clearly a ploy by legislators to block a public vote that anything less than allowing an election to proceed will do violence to the very notion of "government by the people."

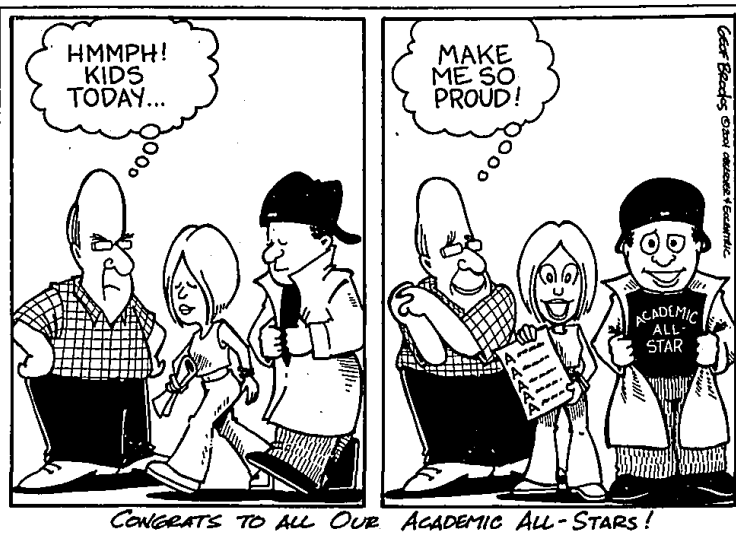
There is no about Second Amendment rights. Clearly, a Michigan citizen has a right to own a gun. Nor is it about the right of self-defense. We all retain that right. It is not even about the "right to bear arms."

There is dispute about how much right one would have to carry a gun in the open under the present wording of the state and U.S. Constitutions, although clearly someone totting a gun in that fashion would be shunned by society and questioned constantly by police.

This is about carrying a gun concealed, hidden from view. The government has a right to insist it has a legitimate interest asking citizens to get a permit if they want to do that, and the courts have supported it.

Nevertheless, proponents of the new CCW law have identified flaws in the old system. Their new version, however, forces us to choose between two bad options: "want to" is not a sufficient reason for somebody to be walking around with a pistol hidden on their person.

We urge rejection of the law as passed by the legislature. That might send a message to zealots on either side, encouraging them to get back to the drafting table.



LETTERS

■ A little good news

Many times we read only about the terrible things. Well, here's something positive that deserves mention and accolades. Last weekend, more than 200 Girl Scouts from Farmington Hills camped out at Camp Narrin in Ortonville. Many thanks go to neighborhood organizers Rhonda and Don Cohagan and Julie Darrin for making a trip possible. Without the strong leadership and hard work of countless leaders, parent volunteers and Rhonda, Don and Julie, this event would never have happened.

Throughout the weekend the Girl Scouts learned about nature, team building, responsibility... and they also had fun. They say that Girl Scouts is where "Girls Grow Strong." But it takes dedicated leaders to accomplish this.

Thanks again to all the adults who contribute their time and talent as positive role models in developing great kids in our community.

St. Fabian Junior Girl Scout Troop 2902

■ License to steal?

Since when has anyone a license to steal?

In the better interest for everyone, I suggest we turn to the 10 Commandments. The seventh reads, "Thou shalt not steal" and let's defend ourselves and all policemen. If we had none, we would enter "animal world." In 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 this 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

■ Concerned by anger

It was with considerable sadness that I read a front-page article in today's issue of the Farmington Observer (A husband's plea for justice).

The loss of Susan Dismmon's life at the hands of her mentally ill brother whom she loved is the stuff of Shakespearean drama. The loss of his beloved wife is a grief which Harvey Dismmon will undoubtedly carry for the rest of his life.

It was the hatred of anger toward the brother-in-law, Harold Bloom, which concerns me. I believe that Mr. Dismmon should look a little further for the target of his anger and vituperation. As a long-time advocate for the mentally ill, I have witnessed a planned erosion of services for the mentally ill orchestrated in Lansing over the past 10 years. It has become increasingly difficult to obtain treatment.

Mental hospitals have been closed and the treatment facilities which are needed to serve those patients who have been committed to their home communities have struggled as funds

which should have followed these patients never arrived on the scene.

Regardless of the protestations from Lansing about all of the wonderfulness which they have accomplished, the city street corners, the jails and Susan Dismmon are just a few of the contradictions.

Although I can understand Mr. Dismmon's anger toward Mr. Bloom, I hope that in time he will realize that the target for his anger should be a system of mental health services that has given a desperately ill man the opportunity to commit such a vile act. Those of us who have been in the trenches trying to shake up the system in Lansing, in the Governor's office, will welcome him to our ranks.

Joan A. Rollick
Farmington Hills

■ Loss of freedom

I wish to respond to Brian J. Banner's guest opinion in the April 19 Observer. "There can be little doubt that there will be an increase in the number of homicides," etc. Numerous other states that have passed "shall issue" CCW reform have experienced the opposite, a decrease in the amount of crime.

"Look to our neighbors to the North." Some of us do, with apprehension. At one time, the English-speaking nations were bastions of freedom. Now England, Australia and, most recently, Canada have enacted increasingly restrictive, even draconian firearms laws, apparently with the goal of eventually disarming their citizens.

Statists like Mr. Banner see this as good. Some of us view it as a disturbing loss of freedom.

Increasingly, the United States, the "Arsenal of Democracy," stands alone. Astute observers at venues as Rush Limbaugh, Charlton Heston and Walter Williams have noted that there is a virtual cultural "war" in this country, one aspect of which is between those seeking some sort of disarmed, socialist utopia and those of us who uphold traditional American values, including the belief that a resolute, armed citizenry is the ultimate guarantor of personal, family, and national security and liberty.

I fear these viewpoints are irreconcilable.

John M. Patrick
Farmington Hills

■ A day at the carnival

My friend called me and asked me to accompany her to the Kenbrook Elementary School carnival. It was my very first trip to an elementary school, my very first carnival since I arrived in USA three years ago.

I was not very sure what kind of experience it would be. I prepared my daughter and myself for the outing. It was a cold and windy day, but all the kids around me were oblivious to the pranks of nature. It was a task to keep abreast the running bundles of joy. They were eager, impatient and very happy.

We entered the building and were transported to a different world where everything else dissolved. Everyone was equal; there was no distinction of caste and color, everyone was greeted with a warm smile.

All the worries of the world ceased to exist. In this universe, only two things mattered: a pink ticket and an orange

ticket. Pink tickets meant that you could play and win, whereas orange tickets you could exchange for nice, tacky souvenirs.

We glided from one game to another. We won some, lost some, but before every game there was a sudden rush of adrenaline. Expectant eyes followed all the moves. The carnival was very well organized; all the teachers and volunteers were doing everything to make it a success. The only restless humans were active kids who were running and rushing because time was running out.

Their faces were like tiny canvases. One could see all the beautiful expressions, and each expression had a unique hue. It is an experience in itself to watch hide-and-seek of emotions on a child's face.

The last stop was the redemption center. That was pandemonium. Kids took note of all the wares. For them it was a decision of a lifetime, whether to exchange two tickets for a miniature T-rux or use all the four tickets for something else.

Everyone was tired, and we headed toward the cafeteria. It was my first visit to a school cafeteria. Losers, winners they all were there munching snacks and sharing soft drinks.

My thoughts strayed to Columbine. Terror gripped my heart thinking how a normal happy cafeteria can transform itself into a heinous scene of crime. In the cacophony of noises, I heard sobbing kids crying for help and mercy. Suddenly I lost my appetite. Arkansas, Columbine, Santee... all these places where children were violently snatched from cafeterias, corridors, classrooms and library to embark on the journey of death loomed in front of my eyes.

Finally the day was over and it was time to go home. As I crossed the threshold of Kenbrook's prayer hall, I escaped my lips. May all these children live long and attend the school carnivals of their children and grandchildren. May all these children find purpose in their lives. May all these children search the true essence of their lives as they searched the piles of souvenirs in the redemption center for the perfect prize.

Zahera Husaini
Southfield

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:
jhured@oe.hometowncomm.net

Fax:
248-477-9722

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