

Breaking barriers



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESLER

Award-winner: Bill Tousey shows off his 2001 Meridian Award for producing translations of school bus information booklets for Farmington Schools. He said since the booklets were distributed, problems with students missing the bus and conflicts with parents have dropped dramatically.

Meridian winner

Bus guide earns honors

BY SUE BUCK
STAFF WRITER
sbuck@ec.homecomm.net

Farmington Public School Transportation Director Bill Tousey amused many at a recent school board meeting when he quipped that he only speaks two languages — English and bus driver.

That didn't stop Tousey from interpreting the need for better communication between parents, students and bus drivers at bus stops. Complicating that is the fact that students in Farmington schools speak more than 80 different languages.

To help bridge the communication gap, Tousey came up with "The Transportation Handbook for Kindergarten Students," which was translated into Albanian, Arabic, Japanese and Russian.

For his efforts, he received the Meridian Award of Achievement at the recent

Michigan School Business Officials conference in Grand Rapids, along with a check for \$1,600, which will go toward a student scholarship.

"We were experiencing new students missing busses and we could not communicate with students who were not able to understand the rules," Tousey said.

"School bus drivers were also frustrated when communicating the transportation policies and procedures to the new students and parents. We were experiencing unsafe behavior at bus stops. Parents were arriving late for the bus, running after the bus, and not being home when the bus arrived."

Tousey believes the handbook helps families assimilate into the American culture and the school bus environment.

"We have a very diverse community with a lot of bilingual students," Tousey said.

"It's hard for folks to understand transportation and how we do schools here. It's hard for folks to understand what we need from them. Sometimes we want the child to sit down or wait. Other than hand signals, there is no way to communicate with those students."

Basic information on name tags, schedules, discipline, bus stops, bus rules, safety tips and the kindergarten schedule are included. The project got off the ground following conversations with Samir Haddad, director of bilingual education, last fall.

Paraprofessionals who translated the handbook were:

- Yoshiko Gingerich (Japanese)
 - Gabriela Istanbuly (Arabic)
 - Julie Redfield and Irina Elzarova (Russian)
- The name of the Albanian translator wasn't available.

Hills approves youth center purchase

Farmington Hills City Council members have approved the purchase of a 4,100-square-foot facility at 29200 Shiawassee in the southeast part of the city, for use as a youth center.

The council authorized a purchase price of \$186,000 at their Monday, May 21 meeting. Money will come from the city's Capital Improvement Fund.

Located within walking distance of William Grace Elementary and a mile and a half from East Middle School, the facility would be used for youth activities and programs.

The city's newly formed Mayor's Youth Council has begun to discuss programming for the building. City manager Steve Brock said they will be making recommendations about

what high school-aged kids want to see and how much they want to share the building with students in middle school.

Formerly housing a church and child care business, the facility includes three meeting rooms, a kitchen and restrooms. The two acres of property includes parking for 30 vehicles.

The deal happened relatively quickly: Special Services staff learned the building was available late on May 14 and were told offers would be taken on May 15. Staff members toured the facility and had to compete with another potential buyer, with an offer and counter-offer changing hands before the purchase was agreed upon.

Brock said while he hadn't discussed this specific property

with council members, they had talked about purchasing a youth center property in that part of the city. The offer was made contingent upon council approval, he added.

Members of the Mayor's Youth Council were sworn in Monday night. They are: David Kinchen, Areej El-Jawahri, David Polite, Andrea Coleman, Josh Rabinowitz, Samantha Steckloff, Courtney Crites, Sarah Guilou, Christopher Kuelo, Hilary Michalak and Liz Sexton.

They will join the two representatives from the city of Farmington, Bryan Campbell and Maddie McAuley to bring the Farmington Hills/Farmington Mayor's Youth Council to 13 members.

Residents invited to Northwestern, roundabout meetings

Residents interested in the Northwestern Connector Project have two opportunities to learn about upcoming construction. A Modern Roundabout information seminar will be held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, May 30, in the Farmington Hills City Council Chambers at 31555 11 Mile Road. This will be followed by a public hearing from 4-8 p.m. Thursday, May 31, at West Bloomfield Parks and Recreation Activities Center at 4640 Walnut Lake Road in West Bloomfield Township.

The Northwestern Connector Project is a study of portions of 14 Mile Road, West Maple Road, Orchard Lake Road and Northwestern Highway which has identified road improvements to

help relieve traffic congestion and improve safety. Following a detailed two-year study, representatives from the City of Farmington Hills, West Bloomfield Township, the Road Commission for Oakland County and the Michigan Department of Transportation, have proposed a "Preferred Alternative" that will involve several improvements along major roadways.

One of the proposed improvements includes "modern roundabouts," which are being evaluated at several of the intersections in the project area. Originally developed in England in 1956, modern roundabouts are now being constructed in many American cities as an alternative to traffic signals at busy

intersections.

Project representatives will also be available to receive comments and answer questions on all aspects of the Northwestern Connector Project at the public hearing to be held May 31 as a follow-up to the Modern Roundabout informational seminar. Details about the "Preferred Alternative" and other study findings will be presented at both meetings.

For more information about the Northwestern Connector Project, please call the Farmington Hills Department of Public Services at 473-9521 or visit the project web site at www.dlccorp.com/sec.

INKWELL

My favorite person

Third grade students at William Grace each chose a famous person to study and dress up as for a party. (Top) Levi Martinez as Brendan Shanahan (left), Angelique Miller as Diana Ross, Tyler Keener as Dale Earnhardt, Steven Williams as Tony Hawk, Kelsey Taup as Hillary Clinton, Michelle Gephart as Queen Elizabeth, Elizabeth Djonaj as Christine Aguilera and Benji Card as Johnny Appleseed, Parus Gay as Nick Carter, Koyara Tyris as skater Kristi Yamaguchi and Maxwell Stephens as Michael Jordan.



St. Fabian performs

St. Fabian School performed its first musical, Annie Jr. April 26-28.

The cast was comprised of middle school students who performed to three sold-out audiences.

Tim Spriggs, music director at St. Fabian School, brought this heart-warming story line to life.



Center from page A1

to raise the money. A citizens committee has already been formed.

The feature will provide a real focal point for the whole area.

"It's a hub of this total site which we think is a nucleus," Griesim said. "It will break up the vastness of the parking lot."

This project gives a uniqueness and identity to the downtown shopping center, said Mayor Bill Hartscock. "It is sort of unusual for a city to own a downtown parking lot," Hartscock said. "It gives us a lot of latitude. This puts it front and cen-

ter." Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff mentioned the importance of timing in this project.

Farmington Road will be under construction between Eight and Nine Mile Roads this year, Lauhoff said. Next year Farmington Road from Grand River to Nine Mile Road will be under construction.

"This (construction plan) is designed to give a break to businesses, so they are not under construction for three or four years in a row and to give time

for fund-raising," Lauhoff said.

"While the roads are being done, fund-raising can commence for the Farmer's Market pavilion."

A big portion of the project can be special assessed to the affected property owners, Lauhoff said.

"The city only has this kind of opportunity every quarter century," Lauhoff said. "This is one of the nicest plans I've seen. It would give us an exceptional downtown. It's a great plan with a community behind it."

Sirens from page A1

Garr, who was in the 911 dispatch center when sirens sounded, said calls begin to swamp the emergency lines. "The 911 center took in excess of 100 calls for information."

When emergency service are flooded with non-emergency calls, a person with a heart attack can be put on hold, he added.

Garr said his office even fielded questions about the nature and location of the storms. "Unfortunately, we are not the National Weather Service, we don't know anymore than what people can see on their televisions at home."

Even the city clerk's office took calls about sirens, he said. "They got at least 15 calls."

Garr said preparedness is the key. "You need to think about it ahead of time. You may not see the tornado until it upon you."

He said the Farmington Hills Fire Department has several

Your emergency supplies should include: Food and water for at least three days, flashlights, battery-operated radio and extra batteries, blankets, first-aid kit, sturdy shoes and any special supplies or medications family members might need.

brochures available to help people plan for weather emergencies.

"They can stop by, or we'd be happy to mail them one."

Tornado safety and preparedness information can be also

found online at the Federal Emergency Management Agency Web site at www.FEMA.gov/library/tornado.htm.

Garr said that the last tornado to actually hit near Farmington Hills was the one that tore up West Bloomfield in the late 1970s. "We were called in to assist on that one."

Garr encourages residents to have emergency supplies ready, in case a tornado strikes.

Supplies should include: Enough food and water for at least three days, flashlights, a battery-operated (or wind-up) radio and extra batteries, blankets, sturdy shoes, a first-aid kit, any essential prescription medication and special supplies for infant, elderly or disabled family members.

Ideally, the supplies should be stored in an sturdy and easy-to-carry container and kept near the emergency shelter.

"We're prepared, and we want the public to be prepared."

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Height Requirements on Some Rides