

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.

City does the right thing honoring Aldo

That more than 400 people kept secret plans to rename the visitors center at the Historic Spicer House after Aldo Vagnozzi is a wonderful testament to the man who is often called "Mr. Farmington Hills."

Those who know Vagnozzi may disagree with his unabashedly liberal Democratic politics, but they still respect the love and devotion he's shown to the community he's called home for decades. First as an active volunteer and then as an elected official, he made a name for himself by standing up for citizens, whether it was in battles with Detroit Edison over reducing power outages or the fight to keep local elected officials in charge of local decisions.

Most importantly, however, Vagnozzi has gone out of his way to welcome people to the community and to promote the beauty and warmth of his community whenever and wherever possible. His quick smile and generous nature are one of this community's hallmarks — making him well-deserving of the accolades he has received.

It's sad that his wife, Lois, isn't here to share in this most recent honor; she, too, was a shining example of Hills hospitality. And perhaps her absence (despite an ever-present spirit) lends even more credence to the hop, skip and jump Hills council and parks committee members took over their "naming policies."

At last week's ceremony, Aldo himself remarked that one usually has to be dead to have a building named after him. In some cases, of course, it can't be helped. When someone beloved dies unexpectedly, such honors are entirely appropriate.

Too often, we leave our accolades and appreciation unexpressed until we're threatened with the loss of someone who has touched our lives, or worse — until that person is gone.

How much more fitting it is to honor someone while they're still around to appreciate the gesture, to enjoy the celebration and know how people truly feel about them. We encourage our readers to



Proud pose: Longtime Farmington Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi and members of his family during the recent ceremony that honored him.

How much more fitting it is to honor someone while they're still around to appreciate the gesture.

do just that over the next few weeks.

If you know someone deserving of accolades, someone who gives a little something extra to the community, someone whose spirit of generosity or caring has touched your life, we'd like to share that good news with our readers. Send us a letter — doesn't have to be anything fancy, you don't have to include a resume. This isn't a contest.

It's just a chance for you to say "thanks" to someone special in your life, to show them the appreciation they deserve. And it's a chance for us to share a little good news, all too often missing from our day-to-day lives.

Send letters to the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48336 or e-mail to jhubred@oe.hometowncomm.net. Don't forget to include your name and phone number, so we can verify your submission.

State needs to quickly sort out MEAP 'fiasco'

Allegations of "irregularities" on Michigan Educational Assessment Program testing at 70 schools have turned into a public relations fiasco for the beleaguered tests.

State Treasurer Doug Roberts, whose agency runs MEAP testing for the state, apologized to school superintendents at a four-hour hearing in Lansing last Thursday. The school chiefs' main complaint: A list of the suspected schools was leaked to the media before the schools had a chance to see, and to respond to, the charges.

In major TV news shows and the daily newspapers "irregularities" became "cheating."

Garden City's usually calm superintendent Mike Wilmet was among the most upset, saying that Roberts' apology doesn't "fix the wrong" done to students and staff at one of the accused schools, Memorial Elementary in Garden City.

Some state lawmakers are adding their opinions to the chorus of boos for Roberts.

State Sen. Gary Peters from Bloomfield Township wants to send MEAP back to the Michigan Department of Education where it was administered before a 1999 executive order from Republican Gov. John Engler sent the testing program to Treasury.

"School districts were unfairly convicted of cheating by the media before they were ever given a chance to respond because noneducators in the Treasury Department mishandled the situation. Education testing is too important to be given to people who don't understand education," Peters said Monday.

Careful readers will note that Peters is a likely candidate for governor in the Democratic primary. But he has a good point — the tests belong with educators, who might have been more sensitive to the consequences of releasing the report.

The important issue here is not bad PR for Treasury or that the Treasury

shouldn't be administering the tests, it is: Did some students and, presumably, some teachers, cheat on MEAP tests? Unfortunately, all the white noise surrounding the recent MEAP events has obscured the fact that test checkers found something wrong with some of the answers to fifth grade science or writing, and eighth grade social science "structured responses" or essay questions.

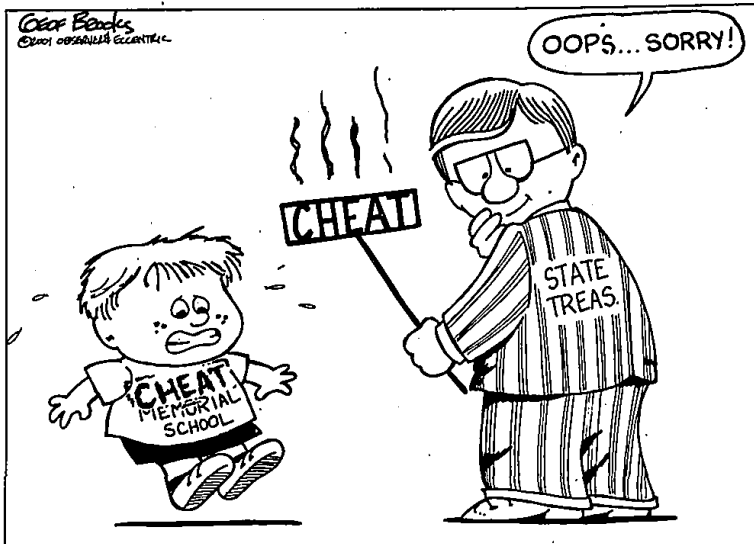
Test checkers documented cases where it was apparent these essay questions had exactly worded answers repeated by several students.

Many superintendents told a joint meeting of the House and Senate education committees last week that test answer similarities were the result of good preparation of the students for the test. Wilmet even walked legislators through Garden City's fifth grade textbook showing the source of a phrase about descendants of native Americans. His point: His kids had been taught well. Stakes are admittedly high in the MEAP testing sequence. Schools can get a \$50,000 Golden Apple Award for good results; high school students can earn a \$2,500 scholarship. Good district MEAP scores are reportedly being used by Realtors to help sell homes in certain ZIP codes.

All 60 states are involved in some kind of performance testing of their public school students, according to Education Week Web magazine; 27 states hold schools responsible for results. Governors argue that the states are paying billions of dollars a year for an educational system and there must be some accountability.

Any uncanny sameness in what students wrote cannot go unchallenged by the state. While Roberts continues to deal with press leaks and bad publicity for the MEAP, the state must get full responses from the suspected schools.

Settling the nagging unrest about the MEAP depends upon it.



LETTERS

■ Sad about outcome

I am writing to express how sad I was to learn the outcome of the School Board election. The four candidates who were not elected are to be commended for their desire and courage to run in the election. Each of these four candidates was bright, articulate and had very impressive educational and employment backgrounds.

Dr. Charleston-Lyons presented her issues with such poise and grace. She undoubtedly knows about the education of children as she holds a doctorate in education from the University of Michigan. She works full-time on behalf of children.

Mr. Elsey, also a graduate of the University of Michigan, seemed so knowledgeable about how to improve the education in this system, as well as how to prepare your child for college. It's wonderful to hear about FPS graduates, like his daughter, attending Harvard. Though many didn't like his candor, some of us appreciated and learned from it. I truly believe he wanted to ensure the best education for all students in this district.

Mr. Goshorn has such an exceptional academic history graduating from both West Point and Boston University. I was astounded by his years of volunteerism in so many different areas. What an exemplary role-model he is as a father and citizen. I also was impressed with, and proud of, his son's recent graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy.

Last but not certainly not least, Mr. Neuman, who obtained his law degree from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was harshly criticized for intervening when his fourth grader had four different teachers. Unbelievable. If this is an excellent teaching methodology then why is it not practiced in all of the elementary schools? Because common sense tells us that four teachers for a fourth grader, with the child switching classrooms frequently, is not a wise teaching practice. Forest will likely have the best language arts curriculum because of Mr. Neuman's and other proactive parents' efforts.

Mr. Elsey, Mr. Goshorn and Mr. Neuman articulately provided concrete ideas, plans and goals that they had for the district. The four candidates who were not elected worked and campaigned tirelessly to receive their votes. A School Board member did not personally escort them around by the arm at every function, nor mail out hundreds and hundreds of letters for them. What a significant waste when you look at the breadth of qualifications, wealth of knowledge, ability to articulate their positions, employment histories, volunteer activities and number of years residing in the district that these four candidates possessed.

It really is a shame...the School Board and school unions may have won, but this certainly was a loss for the district overall. The voters who cast over 3,100 votes, for Dr.

Charleston-Lyons, Mr. Elsey, Mr. Goshorn and Mr. Neuman, thank each one of you candidates immensely. You are all to be admired.

E.K. LaBurn
Farmington Hills

■ They made choice

As stated in the article June 14, Waldeus Kennels has been open since 1951. What were those people thinking when they chose this location for their homes? Did some one force them to build or buy homes next to the kennel? Blaming "stray pieces of dog food" for causing insect and rat problems in a wooded area is really weak.

While I can sympathize with the home owners, they made the choice to live there. Please note, I do not have dogs or any other pets.

I also found the statements of City Manager Steve to be particularly frightening. If the business has complied with the law, how can he vow to "close them down." Sounds as if they are on his hit list — who is next?

V. Feeley
Farmington

■ Thank you

The Farmington Community Band is just completing its 35th season of providing concerts and musical entertainment. On behalf of conductor Paul Barber and the 60-plus members of the Farmington Community Band, we would like to thank the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers for coverage of our events during this past season. Your coverage and listing of our concerts helped to communicate to the community the support and cultural enjoyment the FCB brings to the Farmington and surrounding areas.

Thank you again for your support. We look forward to working with you again during the next year, which will be the 36th concert season for the FCB.

Robert V. Whaley
Farmington Community Band

■ Cheap shot

I found Patricia Alepsch's letter in your May 24 issue both disturbing and rather a cheap shot at Observer reporter Tim Smith.

In my dealings with Tim over the years, I believe his coverage has been quite fair and objective. I certainly do not consider him to be "a public relations hack" for our local public schools.

I distinctly remember his coverage on Mark Mergener's crusade against Farmington High School's faculty regarding reading materials for students — and the way in which he honestly and objectively covered that assignment.

What about his reports regarding MEAP testing or parents opposed to

four-by-four block scheduling at Harrison? Or the pending demise of Gill's year-round program?

Tim was always fair and unbiased in his coverage regarding Farmington's educational system. What reason would he have not to be?

Reporting is not an easy job; it's like being an umpire or a referee. There's always going to be someone who disagrees with the call. But to be so blatantly cruel to someone who is only doing his job (and doing it well) is unjust and uncalled for.

I would like to congratulate Tim Smith on his well-deserved writing award. If the district's superintendent had not nominated him, I most certainly would have. Thank you, Tim, for your commitment in always doing your best and for representing the community with your talent and professionalism. I wish you continued success in your career.

Kathy Tosoian
Farmington Hills

■ Thanks for help

Crossroads Pregnancy Center recently conducted their 11th annual "Walk for Life", at St. Andrews Church. The walkathon brings families together to celebrate Life and also helps financially support the Center. Crossroads promotes alternatives to abortion while providing free services. The center provides free pregnancy testing, lay counseling and material assistance for babies and pregnant mothers. Crossroads also provides support groups for young moms, post-abortion healing and sexual abuse. This year, we have added a staff nurse, who will teach health education and conduct limited ultrasounds for our clients.

We wish to thank the 180 walkers and their sponsors. Crossroads is thankful for people in the surrounding communities and churches that support us in helping us help hurting women and children of this area.

Colleen Brislar
Crossroads Pregnancy Center

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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