

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.

Use MEAP scores well

It's tempting to compare student test scores, isn't it?

Parents want to know their child did better than someone else's, or at least better than average. They want to know their school's scores rank equal to or better than everyone else's. They want their child to do better on college entrance exams than the kid next door.

Competition - it's the American way. But when it comes to the Michigan Educational Assessment Program, we hope parents will avoid that inclination.

MEAP testing helps parents and educators determine two things: whether a child is on track to meet state standards for graduation and whether the school district is meeting its obligation to teach those standards.

MEAP scores are not an indication of whether one school building is better than another or even whether one school has better teachers or smarter students. Every building in the Farmington school district has its own personality, its own strengths. Each is valuable in its own way and shouldn't be judged based sim-

ply on the basis of academic "performance."

Tests can show students are struggling with their lessons, but not why. Perhaps there's a shortfall in an area of the district's curriculum. A child could be suffering from a physical illness, an emotional problem, family discord or trouble socializing at school.

Instead of focusing on the numbers themselves, parents might use their child's test results as a guide for helping with homework or a place to begin the discussion during a parent/teacher conference - maybe a reason to ask a child "what's wrong?"

The numbers show where kids need help, not whether they're intelligent or have the potential to do better. MEAP and other assessments should be the beginning of a search to find the best possible education for our children, a springboard for discussion in families, among teachers, parents and administrators.

Under no circumstance should they be used to lay blame or as a measure of one school or community against another.

Need here is great, too

The outpouring of support for those most directly affected by the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, D.C., has been stunning.

Certainly this is only the beginning of an effort that could take years. But as winter approaches, let's not forget there are people right here, right now, who need our help.

Local events coming up in the next few months include the Farmington Community Library's annual blood drive, co-sponsored by the City of Farmington, on Oct. 12, from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. The event is being held this year in memory of former Library Board President Robert Plummer, who lost his battle with cancer in October of last year, and in honor of all those who lost their lives in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania. To make an appointment, call 474-7770.

The Faxon Society, a charitable organization affiliated with Farmington High School, is hosting an event on Nov. 16 to raise funds for improvements to the school grounds. Tickets for the dinner

and dance are available through Oct. 31.

For information, call ticket coordinator Linda Hellebuyck, 478-6648.

The Farmington Hills/Farmington Community Foundation, which funds programs like the After School Centers, Farmington Families in Action BABES Program and the Boys & Girls Republic Ropes Course, will host its biggest fundraiser of the year, on Nov. 3 at Bosch Corporation. This gala evening requires the help of countless volunteers and donations of auction items to be a success. Call (248) 345-9090.

We've only touched on a few of the local efforts. The Salvation Army will need bell ringers this holiday season, churches and synagogues have on-going programs to feed and clothe the poor and to minister to their own congregations. What we're saying is simply this: As you stretch your hand out to those in need across the country, don't forget sometimes the greatest need can be the one closest to you.

Airport moves fall short

In what strikes us as one of the more bizarre moves coming out of Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport - even on the airport's own supercharged zany scale - it now appears we'll be treated to dueling oversight committees to monitor construction and other contracts handed out by the county executive. Much as we'd like to believe two such groups will provide an extra safeguard for taxpayers and double the integrity of the letting process, we're a tad skeptical.

The Wayne County Commission announced its endeavor last week, calling the group a stakeholder's committee. It will consist of Airport Director Lester Robinson (a county employee), representatives from Northwest Airlines, a smaller airline, concessionaires, employee unions, the Detroit Chamber of Commerce and the state Bureau of Aeronautics and could begin meeting in the next week or two.

The Michigan Legislature meanwhile is set to trot out a similar effort by week's end. Sen. Glenn Steil, R-Grand Rapids, has said he will introduce legislation setting up a group to monitor airport contracts. Steil, you'll recall, is heading up the legislature's ongoing 18-month "investigation" of airport practices.

Let's not dwell on the political timing of these developments, except to note that intelligence efforts by both factions appear to know exactly what the other is planning and when - seem far superior to anything cooked up of late by federal authorities. Their potential effectiveness, however, is fair game. And that's where we see some real problems.

The set-up for the county's committee is lacking in key areas. To begin with, it doesn't have the power to award contracts or even change the way contracts are let. All it can do is review proposals, suggest changes and hire auditors to do a little Monday morning quarterbacking. This might be sufficient if recent contract history at the airport didn't include charges of favoritism, cronyism and plain old poor financial judgment.

But even if the contracting process was

a model of ethical behavior to this point, the idea that a so-called watchdog group made up almost exclusively of interested parties - whose members benefit both directly and indirectly from its decisions - can meet its stated goal is just asking for trouble.

Finally, there seems to be some confusion over how the stakeholders will reach consensus. Namely, will they meet in private to hash out the good, bad and ugly on airport deals or will those actions be discussed under the full glare of the media and public - spotlight? Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara said the committee would be encouraged to meet publicly and would in any case make minutes of its meetings public.

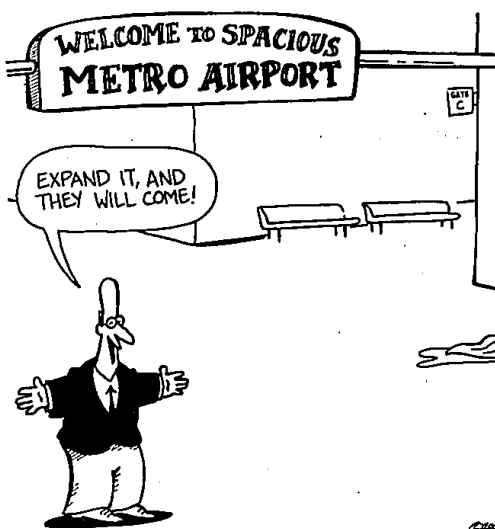
While the legislature is still hammering out the details of its contract oversight committee, there are signs of trouble there as well. For example, we've seen nothing to indicate this latest effort will be free of the us vs. them politics dominating the legislature's Metro agenda.

Also, there is real danger in removing contract decisions from the local level and sending them to Lansing. Not only does it unnecessarily bog down the process, but in the end, it lessens accountability further. Just look at some of the recent school financing decisions for a clue as to what the impact might be on the airport and its primary users.

We'll give this much to the state committee. At least it will be subject to the requirements of the Michigan Open Meetings Act.

The Observer believes both efforts are less than genuine and will ultimately come up short. In particular, the Wayne County Commission should take a level look at its plan, to broaden both the committee's membership and mission.

And it goes without saying that any effort to clean up questionable contracting practices at the airport must be wide open and fully accountable to the public. A lack of timely public disclosure and scrutiny is responsible for much of the airport's contracting mess in the first place.



LETTERS

■ Granholm preview

Jennifer Granholm opposes drilling for gas and oil. She also warned gas stations not to raise prices unnecessarily, but her action does just that. The California crisis was due to gas shortages, and will continue until that state permits drilling. Dollars spent to buy oil in the Middle East support terrorist activities. Now, more than ever, we need to be energy independent.

The Attorney General's job is to enforce laws making them is the governor's prerogative. This preview of Granholm as governor is alarming.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

■ Thanks, John!

As a longtime reader of the Farmington Observer, recently some of your articles that we have enjoyed with great interest have prompted us to write and just say thanks to John Akouri for his work as Congressman Joe Knollenberg's press secretary. He's done great work helping Knollenberg represent our district in Congress.

And quite frankly we are glad to hear that John Akouri is running for state senate right here from his hometown of Farmington Hills.

John has truly done a fantastic job working for us in Washington. He has always shown a real commitment to his community, and for him, it's more than a nine to five job. That's the kind of person we want representing us in government.

It is good to see someone who is interested in our schools, our families and our businesses on the ticket for state senate. He knows this district well and will take its interests to heart as our next state senator.

Congratulations, John, and keep up the hard work. We are glad that though you're moving away from your position in Washington, you're still looking to make a difference for your town.

Dennis and Marilyn Begon
Farmington Hills

■ Active for youth

In response to Cathy Struble's letter in the Aug. 23 edition of the Farmington Observer, I must say that I find myself in total disagreement with Ms. Struble's assertion that the city has no business in the welfare of our young people.

As chairperson of the Farmington Hills/Farmington Commission on Children, Youth & Families, I know that the active involvement of both communities in creating and expanding opportunities for youth is a tremendous benefit.

One reason I chose to both live and work in Farmington Hills is that it is more than a city; it is a community that works together to improve the quality of life for all of its citizens including our children, youth, families, and seniors. It is also a community that works well in partnership with businesses, community organizations and consumers.

It is the role of the Commission to be an advocate in providing services that make this community a great place to live and raise a family. The programs sponsored by the Youth and Family Services provide a wide variety of activities and programs for youth, including after-school programs at four different sites. This year, (2001-2002)

already over 1,900 middle school youth are enrolled. It is clear that the youth program meets the needs of many families within our community.

The cities of Farmington Hills and Farmington make only minor budget appropriations to support the program. A large majority of its support comes from private and corporate contributions, as well as foundation donations and grants.

The commission also produced a widely acclaimed video this year on teen depression. The video helped a number of teens and families in our area recognize the symptoms of depression and seek treatment.

While projects like this may fall outside of what some would consider the role of city government, I am personally thankful to live in a city that is proactive in responding to the real needs of its citizens.

Ms. Struble and I have very different ideas about "the fundamental concept of running a city." We should feel "blessed" to live in a community that is serious about quality of life issues as well as providing roads, sewers and essential services.

As a parent of a middle school youth, as pastor of a local congregation, and as a concerned citizen of this community, I am thankful that we have leaders such as Mayor Bates who realize that a community is made up of more than brick and mortar and that the city along with other organizations has a rightful place in assuring the quality of life for all its residents, including youth and children.

Dr. Mark Sommers, Senior Pastor, North Farmington Community Church

■ Despicable acts

I am writing now, after the tragedy of the attack on New York, in response to your article, *Youth suspected in church vandalism*, which left me deeply disturbed but unmotivated to write, until now.

I was offended as a human being, a citizen of Farmington Hills, a teacher in the Farmington School District and as a Jewish woman and mother. I hope the members of the St. Thomas Syrian Catholic Church know that such despicable comments and cowardly acts are not reflective of Jews in the community that welcomes a new house of worship to our neighborhood. Intolerance of any kind inevitably leads to cruel deeds which may be eventually regretted but never undone.

Let us hope we now see, with the juxtaposition of these two seemingly unrelated events, that stupidity and fanaticism is alive and well in all groups of people, but will not be tolerated.

Aleene Johnson
Farmington Hills

■ Faith in God alone

My heart goes out to Bonnie Bertrand, an obviously intelligent and articulate woman with great courage to speak out and express her beliefs, though they are in obvious opposition to the mainstream.

I understand and share her anger toward those who perpetrated the heinous attack on our great country; however, while I applaud her bravery, I must take issue with her reasoning. I have faith in God, and God alone, I did not come by this faith blindly, but by careful examination of evidence. I

studied many spiritual points of view, read books and articles examining the varying faiths, and listened to the voices of the faithful. I had, like Bonnie, placed my faith in man and learned that man is fallible.

It is true that "man has created much good on this earth," it is also true that man has historically perpetrated great evil. It was men, who of their own "volition and conscience" chose to take the lives of thousands on September 11. It is God who will, by his grace, bring about restoration to our country. It is God who will triumph over evil.

My beliefs are not irrational but based on reliable historical evidences that cannot be ignored by the intellectual mind which possesses the courage to seek. Through Christ, I have found amazing freedom, no longer can I be swayed by the irrational acts of men because I have a risen Savior who is my rock in times of trouble. This is true freedom.

I sense that you are on a journey, Bonnie, and it is my prayer that in your quest for "independent thought" you will seek God's face. The doors of my home church are always open and you are welcome there. Ward Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Northville welcomes seekers. We even have a class for persons as yourself where no question is too controversial or volatile to be examined.

You are right, Bonnie, faith without "reasons" would be imbecile; faith wrought by intellectual, logical, rational exploration of the facts makes perfect sense.

Carol J. Lucas
Farmington Hills

■ Youth centers

We here in Farmington/Farmington Hills are extremely fortunate to have the Middle School Youth Centers available for our youngsters. We are the envy of many people from other areas who would love to have this advantage for their children.

For parents who find it necessary to work it provides a safe, positive, supervised environment for their children. The fact that the programs offered are a result of input from the teens encourages them in leadership, cooperation, problem solving and flexibility. This is a much needed and much appreciated program.

Mary Einhaus
Farmington

Share your opinions

We welcome letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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