

Judge: Planters go

BY SUZ BUCK
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Judge Fred Harris of 47th District Court in Farmington ruled Oct. 18 that the owner of a Farmington health food store must remove her cinder block planters because an acceptable site plan had not been approved by the Farmington Planning Commission.

Christine Meinke and her parents, Herman and Susan, constructed urban planters in stacked, parallel rows, which extend from the door of their business into the parking lot of their store, The Tree House for Earth's Children on Mooney Street. A series of metal arches installed inside the blocks support climbing plants and herbs.

The Meinkes were fined \$100 and are expected to remove the planter boxes in 21 days.

David Trombley, their attorney, said Wednesday he is still researching his next step, awaiting the final written order. "We have to take some further action or remove the beds in 21 days. We should have gotten site plan approval."

Trombley believes the Farmington Planning Commission unfairly and incorrectly denied the approval.

The Farmington Planning Commission has continued its objection to the planters both based on the lack of a suitable site plan and for safety reasons.

The planter boxes, called urban planters, have been a source of controversy since February.

Susan Meinke reiterated last

week that she won't take down the planters.

"The main purpose for the business of the Treehouse for Earth's Children is to educate and demonstrate the use of natural beneficial foods using the principles of organic and biodynamic gardening," said Susan Meinke in a prepared release.

The planters provide both food for the deli located inside the store and plants which can be sold. "It has brought more attention to what we are about," Christine said. "If they take away our planters, it will take away 25 to 50 percent of our business."

Judge Harris previously ordered the Meinkes back to the planning commission for one last "good-faith effort."

"The issue has been settled as far as we are concerned," said Kevin Gushman, who serves as the chief building official for Farmington as well as the director of public services. "They have 21 days to remedy."

If the Meinkes don't remove the planters, the city has options, including writing another citation or asking the judge for a motion in order to remove the planters, Gushman said.

Assistant Farmington City Manager Bill Richards stressed the importance of insisting that applicants follow set standards for site plans. "You can't let people use the wrong materials," Richards said.

Harris also ordered the parking lot repaved by next July and dismissed the ticket for high grass, which had been cut.

Dinner music:
The East Middle School string orchestra plays for senior guests at the Costick Center for the Sixth Annual Senior Forum. The event provides senior citizens with information about Farmington Public Schools.
STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRADLEY



Seniors learn about school security

BY SUZ BUCK
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"I used to say Columbine changed the face of education forever," Estrales Michaelson told a gathering of senior citizens Oct. 23. "Today, as I stand before you, safety and security has a much more important meaning."

In his introduction of Michaelson, guest speaker at the Sixth Annual Senior Adult Forum Breakfast held at the William B. Costick Center in Farmington Hills, Superintendent of Schools Bob Maxfield said, "Our schools and our world will never again be the same as they were on Sept. 10."

He and Michaelson, director of Safe and Drug Free Schools for the Farmington School District, referred to the Sept. 11 attacks at the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C.

A 31-year employee of the school district, Michaelson is chairman and coordinator of the

Call to Action Coalition. About 300 seniors listened to what's new in Farmington Public School and had a chance to offer their opinion. The breakfast was provided by the school district.

In 1998, school district officials were already immersed in a collaborative effort with police, fire, and first responders in preparing for school crises and to update safety school plans, Michaelson said.

The school district remains proactive in protecting its students, she said. "We really do plan ahead. Preparedness is the key. Every one of our eyes are continually vigilant and attuned. We are truly the watchdogs for one another."

Crisis management teams are established in each building. "The most important thing is that no one feels abandoned during a crisis," she said.

Among the safety measures: Key personnel carry cell phones and walkie talkie radios to maintain communication with channels that are directly linked

to main offices. That's important when outside and on the playing fields, she said.

Employees wear name tags. There are visitor and volunteer identity badges. Vendors and construction workers are also clearly identifiable.

"We need to handle anger in our own lives, in our offices, in our workplace and our homes," she said. "We need to fill our local headlines with success stories against any kind of terror."

The purpose of the breakfast was to draw seniors together, thank them and, hopefully, interest them in volunteering in the schools.

"This is our chance to tell you what makes us such a special

school district," Maxfield said, citing a number of accomplishments.

The district's goal is to empower each child to become a thoughtful contributing member of society in a changing world, Maxfield said.

The breakfast ended with each table of guests talking to the school personnel who acted as hosts or hostesses at their table.

Marge Werner, a Farmington resident, told Polly Bachrouche, a counselor at Woodcreek Elementary School who sat at her table, that she sometimes has difficulty learning about the Farmington School District. She didn't think she received all the school materials sent out.

Diversity more than talk

BY KEVIN BROWN
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It's great to recruit minorities and get diversity in your organization, but you must also make people comfortable enough to stay.

"We're all so involved in recruitment plans, but the second piece is we have to create a comfortable environment. If you don't do that you're going to lose them," said Carol Brown, Oakland Community College vice chancellor.

"Recruiting is half the battle," said Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, adding he backs intern programs that assign an employee to the new hire, to get them comfortable.

Keeping new minority hires was one of the messages from panelists speaking before nearly 200 Oakland County business leaders Friday. The lunch meeting at Glen Oaks Country Club in Farmington Hills was presented by the Oakland County Employment Diversity Council.

Rich Viesingardi, executive director of the Oakland County Community Mental Health Authority, told the audience, "What you've been able to accomplish, you never did that alone. You needed help, and so do people with disabilities."

"People with disabilities are no different than anyone else; they are motivated as anyone is motivated," he said. "They really do contribute to the workforce as any other worker would."

Radwan Khoury, executive director and CEO of the Arab-American & Chaldean Council, said Arab Americans must often confront stereotypes. "Not all Arabs are Muslims and not all

Muslims are Arabs," he said, adding 70 percent of Arabs in Michigan are Christians.

His ethnic community "was deeply injured by Sept. 11, it was an attack on our country," Khoury said. Offices of his organization were closed after the attack. He ticked off relief work done by the council, including blood drives and providing grief counseling. "We are not going to let terrorism destroy the social fabric of this society," he said.

Viesingardi said the faltering economy could result in some service reductions. "Sometimes at budget crunch you learn how to be more creative," he said.

Patterson said 19.6 percent of all Oakland County hires in 2000 were minorities. Panel moderator and former TV newswoman Doris Blacoe asked the panel what they're doing to teach kids about diversity.

"I don't know so much if we are educating our kids, or if our kids are educating us," Patterson said. "They live it. They are inclusive, they are accepting."

Audience member Tim Yount, a Farmington native, said he was struck by the comment "that not all Muslims are Arabs and not all Arabs are Muslims. They are as diverse as any other cultural group."

"It's a good discussion," said Jim Murphy of Royal Oak, adding he was interested in "the discussion about the disabled and what some of the challenges are."

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