

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.

Tragedy reminds us: Don't drink and drive

It wasn't just that Kevin J. Perry's life was cut tragically short, leaving his four children to mourn the father they adored. It wasn't only that his family and his parents had all moved into a new house just a month before he died or that he was their primary source of financial support and emotional strength. It was the way Kevin died that filled us with outrage. He was out on a gorgeous evening, enjoying the last gasp of decent fall weather, when a young woman whose blood alcohol level registered .14 allegedly drove her car into the path of his motorcycle.

She's out on bail now, awaiting trial and living a life that is forever changed. Kevin's family said their last, and good-byes to him Monday, just two weeks before Christmas.

The outpouring of support from the communities we serve has been tremendous. The folks at Small World Daycare, right next door to our office, have talked about organizing a benefit concert. Others have offered clothing, food and cash to help make the children's holiday a little less sad.

We hope the Perry family is kept in the hearts and prayers of our readers, and we'd like you all to do one more thing in

his memory.

You see, the ultimate irony lies in the fact that Kevin and his brother-in-law had planned to celebrate Kevin's 40th birthday this past weekend with a night on the town. They'd hired a limousine to provide door-to-door service - because they didn't want to drink and drive.

If you're attending a holiday party or out celebrating with friends, please follow Kevin's lead. Hire a limo or call a cab. Appoint a designated driver.

If you're hosting a party, consider making it alcohol-free. If you do decide to serve up Christmas cheer, cork all the liquor bottles an hour or two before guests head home, then ply them with coffee or soft drinks and a late snack.

Above all, simply don't allow anyone who appears intoxicated to drive home.

Confiscate car keys. Call a family member, a friend or a taxi service - call the police, if it's absolutely necessary - to prevent this life-threatening mistake.

Is it tough to stop someone who's determined? Of course it is. Maybe it's even a little embarrassing.

Is it worth the effort? We believe so.

But if you want to be sure, you could ask Kevin Perry's family.

Farmington schools should take stand on the radio dial

That a few parents have complained about the use of radios on Farmington Public School buses is not necessarily a reason to turn off this music.

School officials and bus drivers agree - kids are better behaved and even keep each other in line a little better when they've got something to occupy their time and attention. But parents have every right to be concerned when their children are exposed to material of which they don't approve.

Schools are supposed to be a partner-

ship - and this is a great opportunity for district officials to partner with parents and come up with a reasonable solution.

It makes perfect sense for the district to come up with a list of appropriate radio stations, to ensure kids aren't unnecessarily exposed to music with explicit lyrics or talk radio that can sometimes seem inappropriate even for adults. We urge district officials to come up with a policy, and take bus drivers, students and parents along for the ride.

State school chief leads public education cheers

Since becoming the Michigan Department of Education Superintendent Tom Watkins has been a vigorous spokesman for public education.

In numerous columns and speeches, Watkins argues that our public education system is good now and can only get better.

In a speech Thursday at the Livonia Chamber of Commerce, Watkins defined his job: "I'm a cheerleader for public education. I do want to stand up and cheer for high-quality education across the state. But more importantly, I want to be a megaphone, where I can amplify the voices of great educators about the good things that are happening in schools every day."

As the economy continues to decline, school systems will be forced to make do with less. Watkins has some ideas for revenue enhancement ... but he also is generating a number of bright ideas to involve everyone in the education process

Public education has been the target of numerous complaints. Public schools have been kicked around by politicians and railed at by religious groups. Every pundit has a secret plan for "saving" our schools.

Watkins has been a consistent voice in support of what is good about public education and a leader in defining what can be better.

Our public schools are facing severe revenue problems. As the economy continues to decline, school systems will be forced to make do with less.

Watkins has some ideas for revenue enhancement, including an education

license plate, but he also is generating a number of bright ideas to involve everyone in the education process.

A brochure, "Thirty Ideas in 30 Days," draws together some interesting ideas about public education and how we can become involved in our schools.

Some examples:

■ The Ladder vs the Hammer. Seek opportunities to lift up public education rather than constantly hammering it down.

■ Create an Army of Involved Parents. Parental involvement is crucial to academic achievement.

■ Students as Teachers. The best way to learn and master a subject is to teach it. Encourage upper-level students to tutor or mentor younger children in their school district.

■ School to Work or School at Work. Promote alternatives to traditional high schools by creating schools attached to and integrated with leading businesses and other employers as well as cultural and learning institutions.

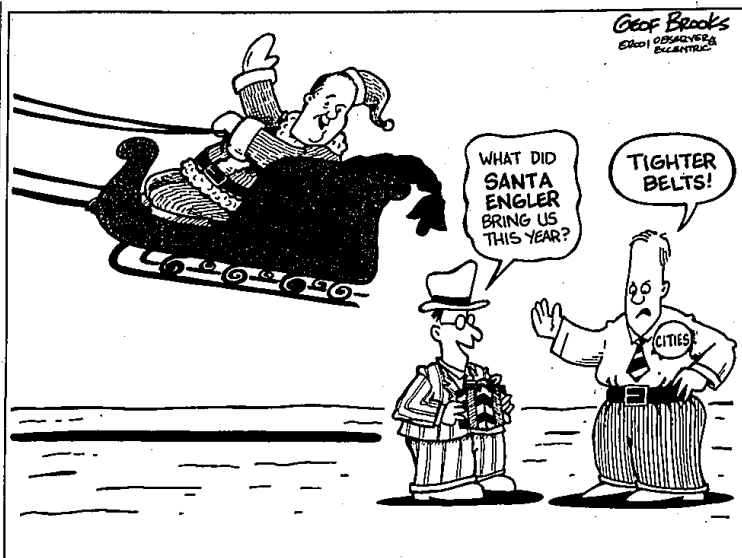
■ Walk a mile in Someone Else's Shoes. Once each quarter, arrange a two-day job shadow between school superintendents and principals and key executives from the local community.

■ Maintain a Solid Foundation. Protect the Foundation Grants to our schools at all costs.

■ Teacher recognition. Celebrate the accomplishments of educators with a Teacher of the Year awards program, sponsored by a leading business organization.

■ Listen to the Public.

We support Watkins in his enthusiasm for public education. We agree that it is the responsibility of all of us - educators, parents, business leaders, legislators - to understand how important our public schools are and to work together to improve them.



LETTERS

Post office thanks

The Farmington Hills Post Office - Indoplex Carrier Annex would like to thank the many local merchants for their donations and contributions.

With your assistance we were able to raise over \$4,000 during our Combined Federal Campaign which will aid various United Way organizations both locally and nationally to meet their needs during these trying times. Best wishes to you in 2002.

Jan Pebley

Bette Burt

Donna McCullough

Farmington Hills Post Office

Arafat

Yasser Arafat has practiced terrorism against Israel all of his life. He sided with Iraq in the Persian Gulf War. The U.S. sponsored his takeover of the Gaza Strip in 1994, and it is now a terrorist base. Mrs. Clinton hugged Mrs. Arafat after anti-Semitic remarks. President Bush seeks this man's help in the war on terrorism. Arafat is an expert - he wrote the book on skyjacking and suicide bombing.

Hank Borgman

Farmington

Diversity

A couple letters recently published in our area having to do with diversity and unity are of great interest to me.

The rallying cry by the writers, identifying the reason why our country is so productive, prosperous, healthy and strong, is unity. Diversity, especially color diversity, is not the reason, any reason, why our people are envied by the rest of the world.

We are one, unified. It is amazing that the many diverse peoples, with diverse backgrounds, religious preferences, and different tongues are today a most patriotic lot, strong and proud. We are unified. Despite our diversity.

It's freedom, people, freedom. Because of freedom derived from our Constitution, our Bill of Rights, and all the other directives handed to us by the Founding Fathers, we are able to pursue happiness knowing we are free to do so. Mobility is greater in our land than anywhere in the world. Educational opportunities abound and jobs are plenty.

The aura of freedom permits us to work where we want and to live where we wish. In spite of diversity, we congregate into the American oneness that makes life worth living. A Country that we will fight for and protect. And many among us have given their lives.

We are strong, and we are admired by other peoples because we are free. All boats are still headed in our direction.

Nell Goodbred

Livonia

Big kids were there

I saw the front-page coverage of the Hills holiday lighting ceremony on November 25.

The little kids were cute, but there were some great big kids there too. The state finalist Farmington High School Marching Band postponed their dinners so that they could perform

their terrific holiday show for the occasion.

The band was supposed to be in Great Britain at the time, but world events kept them at home and the community was the beneficiary. It would have been nice to see them mentioned.

Mary Power

Farmington

OAA decision poor

In the fall of 2002, Farmington high schools will begin competing in the Oakland Athletic Association (OAA). This is just one more in a long list of poorly thought-out changes made by our school district.

Consider football. Harrison will be playing in the top league. This is fine - except that the JV and freshman squads will play the same top division teams. One of the things about schools with big enrollments is that they usually have more depth to their teams, while at FPS our talented underclassmen are already on our varsities.

How about Farmington High? Based on their fine regional championship team from two years ago, this year's 9-9 team would have played in the next higher division. My guess is that Mr. Swinehart does not realize that at schools of our size, our teams can change from very good to...well, you know, with the graduation of only one or two star players.

One of the worst things about this moving of a team up and down divisions within the league is that it rewards the not-so-good coaches by moving their teams down until they reach a point where the team can win despite the coach. At the same time, a coach who experiences positive results is penalized by being moved up into increasingly tougher divisions (sorry, Coach Herrington, your next opponent will be the Chicago Bears).

Mr. Swinehart's biggest selling point is that our teams will be playing schools of about the same size. Did he forget to mention that those teams in the OAA of about our enrollments include Pontiac Central, Pontiac Northern, Oak Park, Ferndale, and Southfield? I bet you can't wait to send your 16-year-old daughters on night road trips. Why didn't we move to the Kensington Valley Conference with Hartland, Lakeland, Milford, Novi, Pinckney, and South Lyon? All those schools are very close to our schools in enrollment.

I would have gone to Mr. Swinehart's "open meeting" regarding the move to the OAA, however, the time and location were a well-kept secret. In fact, when I called the FPS athletic office they were unable (or unwilling - perhaps I shouldn't have given my name) to provide this information. One parent (who found out about the meeting just the day before) asked Mr. Swinehart if he should attend, and was told "only if you support the move."

I agree that it would be nice for our high schoolers to have more athletic success. But to do so by playing increasingly easier competition seems to send the wrong message to our students.

What if we had a real middle school athletic program? What we have now is little better than intermural. Harrison's football team did not come from the programs at East and Warner (can you say Farmington Rocket?). Our middle school basketball teams play six games. Do you call that a season?

The Parks and Recreation season is nearly twice as long.

I know a great number of FPS coaches, and most of them are wonderful teachers and truly nice people. However, not every history teacher is a great football coach. We should start looking for the best qualified coaches and not limit our athletes' potential by preferring a teaching certificate over coaching ability. Presently we only solicit outside candidates if no one in the teachers' union wants to coach a particular team.

About the same time as Mr. Swinehart's announcement of the move to the OAA, an article appeared in the Detroit Free Press about the possible breakup of the Mega Conference. It seems that the lack of close rivalries, poor facilities at a number of schools, and the travel distances were cited as major reasons. Why was Mr. Inch the only member on the school board willing to oppose this move, naming the same reasons? Perhaps he was the only one on the board who had done his homework or cared enough.

It seems like FPS is about 10 years behind the times. We move to a mega conference just about the time those conferences are about to break up. But then, we went to block scheduling over the last three years, something many schools tried in the '60s and abandoned in the '80s. Why should our athletic department be any more progressive than our academic department?

Terry Elsey

Farmington

Queens airliner

Both engines and the vertical tail section fell off in flight? No signs of sabotage? Birds in the engines? How about the possibility an airline mechanic planted plastic explosives in strategic places on or near the engine and vertical stabilizer using ultimate detonators?

Wouldn't that cause an airliner to come down in the manner of the one that crashed in Queens, N.Y.? No amount of turbulence from a bigger jet means likely.

Kenneth Kemp

Farmington Hills

Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your 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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Letters to the Editor

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