

Fun Fest tops DDA survey

BY SUE BUCK

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Business owners who responded to a recent survey by the Farmington Downtown Development Authority said the annual Halloween Fun Fest most positively affected their businesses.

Farmington Downtown Development Director Judy Downey said the survey was designed to determine the best way to market the DDA district. Its boundaries are Grace Street to the west, Benchmark and Burger King to the east, Oakland to the north and Slocum to the South.

"We asked merchants and restaurateurs what they thought about current downtown promotions," Downey said.

The survey ranked several downtown events on a scale from 1-10. Of 100 surveys mailed, 21 were returned.

The Halloween Fun Fest, which takes place throughout downtown from 11 a.m.-4 p.m. the last Saturday in October, received 120 points, followed by 68 points for Shopping for Holiday Dollars, held from 10 a.m.-9 p.m. the first Saturday in December and 53 points for the Summer Fun Series at the Downtown Center and the Civic Theatre, held Wednesdays for six weeks during June and July.

In remaining order were:
■ Farmer's Market in the Village Commons parking lot, 9 a.m.-2 p.m. from mid-May through October

■ Winter Fun Series at the Civic Theatre, which runs for six weeks during January and February

■ Evening Concert Series at the Pergola Gazebo on Grand River at 7:30 p.m. Fridays for

eight weeks during June through August

The Farmington Founders Festival wasn't on the list, because it's not a DDA-sponsored event, Downey said.

Ten business owners attended a Jan. 8 meeting to talk about the survey and other topics.

Becky Burns, who owns Farmington Bakery on Grand River, thought Shopping for Holiday Dollars was a good event but suggested it end at 7 p.m. rather than 9 p.m.

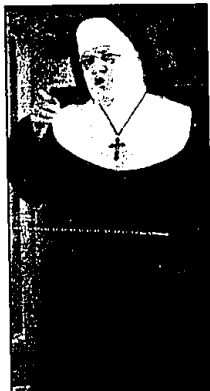
"I don't think Farmington is much of a night town," Burns said. "The Farmer's Market was wonderful. It's just such a great thing for downtown. I think a lot of businesses benefit from the Farmer's Market. It's the best advertising for us. It provides great customer relations. We get people who come to the market who wouldn't necessarily come to our store."

In marketing Farmington, the DDA should consider what people should think about Farmington, said Diane Cassidy, who owns Village Clippers on Grand River. "If you go to a major radio station, tell them what you are looking for," Cassidy said. "It's for them to develop something professional."

Lyle Cuillouette, owner of Simply Yoga on Grand River, wondered what kind of feedback and response is received from the advertising Downey purchased for Shopping for Holiday Dollars.

About \$3,000 was spent to advertise the event, she said, using the Farmington Observer, the Northwest Gazette and WJR.

"Two to one, people come from the Farmington and Farmington Hills area, Livonia and Northville," Downey said. "Very few north of the expressway."



Sister, sister: Maripat Donovan stars as Sister, in scenes from "Late Night Catechism".

BY SUE BUCK

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Students from both Eagle Elementary in West Bloomfield Township and Warner Middle School in Farmington Hills were evacuated Thursday because of a strong natural gas smell in the area.

The smell was reported about 10:45 a.m. and was attributed to work being done on utility lines in that area.

More than 500 Warner students were transported to North Farmington High School as a precautionary measure and because some children reported feeling ill. About 100 children, some of whom have asthma, were picked up by their parents, according to Rosemarie Simon, assistant principal at Warner

Costick series is comedic

BY PAUL R. PACE

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While the Concerts at the Costick series has featured shows of the musical variety since its recent inception, a new twist will be added this month.

The Cultural Arts Division of the Farmington Hills Special Services Department is adding a comedic component, when it presents the national touring group of "Late Nite Catechism" at 6:30 p.m. Saturday, Jan. 26, at the Costick Center on 11 Mile Road in Farmington Hills. Tickets include both the show and dinner catered by Gourmet Express. A cash bar will also be offered.

"We're trying to do a wide variety of things to suit different tastes," said Nancy Coumoundouros, cultural arts coordinator for the city. "We just wanted to delve into comedy. We're always trying to expand and create new things. I think it will be so much fun. It is the

same group that tours nationally."

The director said the dinner theater is unusual, considering the Costick doesn't have a traditional stage and this is the first time dinner will be offered with the show.

Concerts at the Costick is a series begun by the city of Farmington Hills' new Cultural Arts Division. It has featured a wide variety of performances by such popular groups as the Detroit Chamber Winds & Strings and The Chenille Sisters.

This season's concert series started in December, with the Detroit Chamber Winds returning for another show.

Coumoundouros said the series is still in the development stages but so far the response has been positive.

"We're surprised how well it's turned out," she said. "People are very excited about it. One of the things people identified that they wanted in a Cultural Arts

Department was more live performances."

The series continues, offsite at 7 p.m. March 13 at the Civic Theatre in downtown Farmington with a special St. Patrick's concert by Blackthorn.

"Late Nite Catechism" has been deemed an uproarious piece of theater that takes audience members back - sometimes nostalgically, sometimes fearfully - to their childhood. The irrepressible Sister teaches an adult catechism class to a roomful of "students" (the audience).

Over the course of the play, Sister engages the audience in her antics while she goes from benevolent instructor, handing out rewards of glow-in-the-dark rosaries, to authoritative, no-nonsense drill sergeant.

Tickets are \$30 each and may be purchased at the Costick Center or charged by phone by calling (248) 473-1800. Table reservations for groups are also available.

Students evacuated after odor makes some ill

Middle School.

The children were removed from the school "in moments," Simon said.

"It went very smoothly," she said, adding that safe school and crisis plans were activated. "It happened in the middle of lunch. Eight graders ate their lunch at North. Sixth and seventh graders watched a movie in the auditorium."

Students were there for about two hours until they were transported back to Warner at the end of the day.

Farmington Transportation Director Bill Tousey gave credit to "great cooperation by the bus drivers." He put out a call to see what bus drivers were available and also checked the bus lounge.

"We used two special needs buses to take some students

home," Tousey said. "We used 12 buses. It went very smoothly."

This is only the second time in Tousey's four-years with the district that such an incident occurred. He recalled another about two years ago when there was a gas leak at Alameda Early Childhood Center in Farmington. Students were evacuated to Heritage Park in Farmington Hills, Tousey said.

At Eagle, students were outside 20-30 minutes, according to both West Bloomfield Township Police Lt. Carl Fuhs and Arnie

Rubin, Eagle Elementary School principal.

Fuhs said reports indicated the smell came from two locations in the area. One was a relay station.

Diane Bauman, director of school and community relations, said utility employees were working on gas lines in the area of 14 Mile and Northwestern Highways. None of the children were in danger at any time.

"The smell was overwhelming," she said. "Some students reported not feeling well."

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