

## 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.

## 'Pay it Forward' passes on Dr. King's legacy

I'm a junkie, Charlotte. I'm always gonna be a junkie. I ain't never gonna be no fine, upstanding citizen. But then I thought, hell, just pay it forward any way. Kid tried to help me. Okay, it didn't work. Still, I'm trying to help you. Maybe you'll jump. I don't know. But I tried, right? But let me tell you one thing, I woke up one morning and somebody gave me a chance. Just outta nowhere. It was like a miracle. Now, how do you know that won't happen to you tomorrow?

— from "Pay It Forward" by Catherine Ryan Hyde

Twelve-year-old Trevor McKinney and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. don't appear to have much in common.

Trevor's a young, white child growing up with a single, alcoholic mother and an abusive father who's rarely around. A seventh grader, he seems quiet and shy, unlike the outspoken civil rights leader.

While Dr. King is a real American hero, Trevor's a fictional character, created by author Catherine Ryan Hyde for the book "Pay It Forward."

But they share the common belief that one person can make a difference. Thanks to the Farmington Community Library, local folks are going to have the chance to learn more about that idea, beginning Jan. 21.

In cooperation with Bloomfield, Canton, Independence Township, Southfield and West Bloomfield libraries, "Every-one's Reading: Pay It Forward" will include an online discussion group and multiple copies of the book will be available for those who want to participate.

Trevor's idea is simply this: If someone did you a favor, something big, something you couldn't do for yourself, and instead of paying it back, you paid it forward by doing the same kind of favor for three people, and the next day those three people did it a favor for three more people, and the day after that, those 27 people each did favors for three people — in two weeks' time, there would be 4,782,969 people paying it forward.

It's a child's wisdom, rooted in a child's belief that people will do something good simply because they're asked, that makes this idea so intriguing.

## Racial progress is slow

"When we let freedom ring, when we let it ring from every valley and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual, 'Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!'"

Martin Luther King Jr.  
March on Washington Speech, 1963

The world seems to move at breakneck speed.

We send messages around the world in the blink of an electronic impulse. Satellites circumnavigate over our heads reducing distance to insignificance. Computers and military hardware are obsolete before they go on the market.

Yet, some things seem to resist modern speed. Human relationships, friendships, tolerance and understanding all move on a different timetable, slow and hesitant, resistant and suspicious.

As we prepare to once again celebrate the life of Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, we need to reflect on that slow progress and what it means. King's life and his dedication to racial justice, economic justice and international peace have, rightly, become a measure of what it means to be a great American.

The 2000 Census has provided us with an interesting picture of America and its continuing struggle to be made good on the promise of those ideals that King finally gave his life defending.

African-Americans are more prosperous than ever before. They attend and graduate from college in ever greater numbers. They have begun a true exodus from the inner cities and rural poverty to the middle-class suburbs.

But the census also shows that progress, however real, has been slow. The Detroit metro area continues to be one of the most racially divided communities in the United States. The city of Detroit is primarily black, the suburbs predominantly white.

The abandonment of Detroit by the business community and middle class resi-

Most adults have stopped believing they can change the world. We've been hurt or taken advantage of, betrayed by friends, hurt by family members. We've witnessed all manner of debauchery and hubris via news reports from around the world and even in our own backyards.

Mothers murdering their children, fathers slaying entire families, whole cultures treating human beings like animals — doesn't it sound like evil is winning out over good more often than not?

If you think so, then it's time to take a closer look. We all have a great many reasons to pay it forward. Every week, we publish stories about people with big hearts doing great things. Every community newspaper does — because in towns across the United States, people reach out to those in need every day.

They're paying it forward.

Certainly, every American felt powerless against the weight of the airliners that toppled the World Trade Center, but we now have evidence a small group of passengers prevented one plane from reaching its target. They did something for people they didn't know, something big those people couldn't have done for themselves.

That's paying it forward.

This month, we celebrate the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., who lived his life understanding and believing in this concept, now re-popularized long after his death. He spoke of it when he said, "Life's most urgent question is: what are you doing for others?"

No one would argue Dr. King's life left all of us an important legacy. He did a good turn of epic proportions with his lifelong devotion to the cause of civil rights. It's absolutely appropriate the libraries have chosen Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Jan. 21, to begin their special program.

Because he paid it forward.

Imagine if we all, just once in our lives, paid forward his generosity of spirit. Imagine if we all, just once, paid forward the many kindnesses we too often forget when we end our day with the nightly news.

What a wonderful world that would be.

dents has created a deeply scarred, poverty ridden city. The city's children are attending sub-standard schools. Those schools are incapable of handling the staggering educational and social problems faced by their students.

As the economy sours, black Detroiters who were among last to be employed are again the first to be unemployed. A declining crime rate is creeping up again.

The harsh racial epithets of the past don't pass muster in polite conversation anymore. But the attitudes linger on, the misunderstandings continue and sometimes even the language blurs out.

The distances and differences caused by decades of racial discrimination and denial continue to trouble blacks and whites alike.

An African-American has been the leader in the fight against affirmative action, arguing that such preferences only exacerbate racial tensions and reward incompetence. But others oppose affirmative action for all the old racial reasons while cloaking their opposition in a language they have cynically borrowed from the civil rights movement.

Proponents of affirmative action, including the newspaper that administration the University of Michigan, argue that we have not yet reached a point where African-Americans can compete on a "level playing field."

On the international scene, where Dr. King had been a clarion for peace, cultural and religious intolerance and misunderstanding continue. The events of the last few months are only the most recent horrors in battles that have been going on for hundreds of years. Old grudges seem to never die. For some tolerance is no better than surrender. Men claiming the support of God have brought great violence to the innocent.

Were Dr. King to return he might be heartened by the progress he sees in racial relations. But he would also see that we as a nation and as a community of nations have a long way to go before we can sing that old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last."



## LETTERS

### Special heroes

When 344 fire fighters from the Fire Department of New York died in the line-of-duty on September 11th, the people of the world called them heroes, grieved for their families and felt compelled to demonstrate their support anyway they could.

People donated millions of dollars to fire service-related charities, children drew pictures and mailed them to fire departments throughout the United States and some people simply walked into their local firehouse and said "thanks".

The citizens of Farmington Hills and Farmington were no exception. Fundraisers such as a Fill the Boot campaign at Busch's Market and the Gateway Office Building, a Family Fun Day at Computware, a car wash at Fire Station 5 and the Bridge to Bridge - Side by Side walk raised almost \$100,000 for the survivors of New York City's "bravest and finest".

On behalf of our brothers and sisters in New York, we offer you our deepest appreciation for your support of our "family" and remain eternally indebted.

To help show our appreciation, the Farmington Hills Fire Fighters Association has decided to dedicate our participation in the upcoming Team Farmington Special Olympics bowl-a-ton to members of our very own community.

For the past few years, our association has proudly participated in this worthy event and sought pledges from our families and friends. This year, we'll also ask for your help in pledging whatever you can to this extremely worthy local charity.

As has been written in this very newspaper, local charities have recently "taken a back seat" to the September 11th-oriented charities and your local fire fighters want to do what we can to "pay it forward".

This bowl-a-ton is scheduled for Saturday, February 23rd at Drakeville Lane in Farmington Hills. If interested in contributing, checks should be made payable to "Team Farmington Special Olympics" and can be mailed to the below address:

Team Farmington Special Olympics  
c/o Farmington Hills Fire Fighters Association  
P.O. Box 184  
Farmington, Michigan 48332-0184

May we all celebrate in the Olympic spirit and support these very special local athletes. For they are the true heroes within our community.

Jim Etsin  
Farmington Hills Fire  
Fighters Association  
International Association of  
Fire Fighters - Local 2659

### Darts to McNamara

I can't believe that you gave a "Heart" mention to Ed McNamara on your editorial page last week.

While I realize that freedom of the press belongs to those who own it, must your paper constantly be promoting this guy? Detroit Metro Airport has a terrible nationwide reputation. McNamara's reputation for cronyism and corruption is becoming legendary.

He's created a political machine that is the antithesis of good government. Our major daily newspapers are con-

stantly writing articles about the ethical problems of his administration.

However, the Observer gives us a "Nope, nothing wrong here" view of this sleazebag. I am truly disappointed with your newspaper.

Christopher M. Cummins  
Farmington Hills

### Time is money

The plan to spend \$400,000 on 4 new buses and drivers based on a minor study on "Adolescent Sleep Time Research" is simply not a good idea for a district \$5 to \$6 million dollars in the red.

This idea sounds more like a candidate for a Senator William Proxmire "Golden Fleece" award than a responsible program for improving the overall educational landscape in Farmington.

High school students would find learning easier if they were better rested. I have a news flash. Take the same approach I use every day when I feel tired after getting up for work every day; go to bed earlier.

I would hope that those we entrust with spending our tax dollars would consider more meaningful uses for those monies. For example, I hear rumblings about the possible closing of Alameda as a kindergarten and first and second grade option. My son already has 25 kids in his kindergarten class and projections indicate with the closing of this (and potentially other schools), he could be looking at 30 kids in his first grade class. I've been to his classroom and I don't understand how they can even manage what they have today.

We need serious people making serious decisions in these times of shrinking government funding. I for one, feel compelled to get involved in more fully understanding how we can have such a deep deficit when Farmington taxes are so obviously high already.

I realize that you can't really understand someone's problems unless you walk in their shoes. Still, if the powers that be are willing to spend money on a frivolous program like this, how can we be confident in their judgement on other issues.

Robert Hanley  
Farmington

### Thanks to FHPD

Special thanks go out to the Patrol Officers of the FHPD who, through their courtesy and professionalism, made it safer for both the residents of Farmington Hills and the mourners attending the funeral services for Bogdan Raczowski this past Saturday.

With almost a mile long procession leaving St. Fabian's and processing to the cemetery, their work in escorting the procession through several busy intersections made it safer for everyone.

Bill Smith  
Farmington Hills

### Supports Dwyer, FHPD

Shortly after Police Chief William Dwyer came to Farmington Hills in 1985, I had the opportunity to meet

with him regarding Farmington Families in Action, which is a community drug awareness group. Since he was very involved with the narcotics division in Detroit, he was extremely receptive to our goals and has always been supportive of our projects.

Through the years I have met and worked closely with a number of officers. In every situation, the officer has been professional, courteous and caring.

As a member of the Chief's Crime Prevention Committee, my positive attitude towards the department has only been reinforced. Each meeting addresses new and advanced methods of insuring our safety in a professional and expeditious manner.

I am proud to say I live in Farmington Hills, a city that puts the safety of its citizens first.

Betty Nicolay  
Chairperson,  
Farmington Families in  
Action

### How much loss?

Careers were cut short and hopes and dreams were unfulfilled for the men and women working in the Trade Centers.

A sympathetic Congress would now award \$3,000,000 to heirs of a father who earned \$200,000 a year, but only \$777,000 to heirs of a single person earning \$40,000 a year. It's not that poor people suffer less, but their life's earnings were calculated to be lower.

Charities are trying to determine who is entitled to these contributions, and how much. The victims would probably not have recognized some of the people now holding their hands out.

America rightly honors the dead, but a new class of reparation demands is being created. Why not divide the entire sum by the number of victims and write checks to their legal estates?

We do teach, "All men are created equal".

Hank Borgman  
Farmington

### 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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