

Founders Festival welcomes 'Survivor' as Grand Marshal

Plans for the 2002 Farmington Area Founders Festival include the scheduled appearance of hometown celebrity Michael Skupin of CBS-TV's "Survivor II - The Australian Outback."

Skupin will join the Founders Festival Parade as Celebrity Grand Marshal.

A former Farmington Hills resident, Skupin attended St. Fabian for 4th-6th grade and graduated from North Farmington High School.

"As a kid, I remember taking the bus every morning down Farmington and sliding down that great sledding hill now known as Shiawassee Hill," Skupin commented.

Growing up, Skupin worked several odd jobs... everything from paperboy to dishwasher at the Buggy Works (Family Buggy)

and the (then) Boron gas station, at Orchard Lake and 13 Mile. He also has fond memories of playing baseball for the NFWB summer leagues and football for the Farmington Vikings.

A success in life before "Survivor II - the Australian Outback," Skupin sold photocopies and became the top salesman with 3M (over 7,000 salespeople). By the age of 30, he reached his lifelong dream, to start his own business with longtime friend Greg Swan.

Together, they began Rhinoceros Interactive Software, which has become one of the world's largest publishers of Inspirational Electronic Media with over 20 million CD-ROMs in circulation. Along with the software business, Skupin has become one of the most sought-

after motivational speakers as he has overcome some unusual challenges over the past year.

He is scheduled to appear at this year's Founders Festival with wife, Peni; Michael, 12; Katelyn, 9; Emily, 3 as well as their newest family member, due in March.

"My family has attended many Founders Festivals over the years," said Skupin. "It is an honor to be a participant in this year's parade."

Community groups, service organizations and businesses are encouraged to participate in the 2002 Founders Festival Parade. Applications will be available the first week of April through the festival web site at <http://www.foundersfestival.com> or via the festival offices at (248) 932-FEST.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BAKER

Promotion: Director of marketing services Tricia Jepsen works with multi-million dollar ad campaigns right on down to in-house promotions.

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town," she said. "We're working with the city to bring people to the area."

Does she gamble?

"Yes, but just for fun," she said.

Jepsen said she likes living in Farmington because of its proximity to the major roadways and its natural settings.

Susan Randall, 32, of the Hills, is pit manager, overseeing the

traditionally male-dominated table games. She said she always felt good about working for MGM as two of her bosses were women.

"A true role-model for me is my vice president," she said of Becky Meade, vice president of table games. "Since I've been here, I see that MGM is an advocate for women in higher roles. I want a company I can advance

in." Randall has been promoted twice since she first arrived at the casino two-and-a-half years ago. She started out as a floor supervisor, monitoring dealers on the card table, and was then promoted to dual rate pit supervisor, and most recently promoted to pit manager, where she is responsible for overseeing all of the operations of the gaming pit.

Akouri eyes 37th District House seat

By JONI HUBRED
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State Senate candidate John Akouri is now a State House candidate, but the Farmington Hills native says he's still running for the same reason.

"Initially, when I announced my intent to run for state legislature, it was to represent the cities I love so much, Farmington and Farmington Hills," he said. "I am now able to focus solely on those cities."

Akouri announced late last year that he was running for a seat in the newly created 14th District, which included about a dozen communities. As he considered his position, a number of people expressed surprise that he hadn't chosen to run for the 37th District House seat, whose boundaries remained unchanged

in the post-census redistricting process.

"I've talked with my family, I've talked with my committee, and everybody was very supportive," Akouri said, adding his gratitude for their understanding. "My base of support has always been from the cities I'm from."

He expressed his thanks also to Hills Mayor Nancy Bates and Farmington Mayor Bill Hartsock, who have expressed their continued support for his House run.

"My goal has always been to have fair, honest and decent representation in Lansing for Farmington and Farmington Hills," Akouri said.

Akouri, a Republican, will likely face a primary challenge from Valerie Knol, a Farmington resident. Democrat Aldo Vagnozzi



John Akouri

has also kicked off his campaign for the House seat.

Blackthorn comes to the Civic Theatre

The locally renowned Irish group Blackthorn will perform at 7 p.m. Wednesday, March 13, at the Civic Theatre in downtown Farmington, just in time for St. Patrick's Day.

Blackthorn, regular performers at Cowley's Village Inn next door to the Civic, are looking forward to sharing the depth and variety of their talents with a concert audience. A special afterglow will be offered at Cowley's following the concert.

This marks the first time a major concert will take place in

the Civic, whose restoration was completed last year.

Blackthorn, known for their annual appearances on WJR every St. Patrick's Day with Paul W. Smith and the late J.P. McCarthy, perform a wide variety of traditional and contemporary Irish music. Using ten instruments including the mandolin, tin whistle, and bodhran (an Irish goatskin drum), Blackthorn's music covers a vast repertoire from haunting melodies to hand-clapping comedy.

These instruments are com-

plemented by the lead vocal of Belfast native Richard McMullin and a tight blend of four-part harmony from the group collectively. The camaraderie and good-natured jokes flung across the stage add to the evening.

Tickets are \$10, and are available from the Cultural Arts Division of the City of Farmington Hills, located at the Costick Center, 28600 W. 11 Mile. Tickets may also be purchased by phone by calling (248) 473-1800.

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clean up contamination or blight. Brownfield funds will be used to help cap a contaminated landfill on the 11 Times property. Officials can only capture tax dollars until 2007; after that, the city could opt to reserve only its portion of revenues.

Council members agreed to make revenue discussions a part of their budget talks this spring.

During the regular meeting, they expressed confidence in construction manager Albert Ludwig, who has followed the project for four years and took it with him when he left Centex. He said the company's business wasn't developing for a fee - they just want to build the condominiums.

"This project turned into a labor of love," Ludwig said, as officials tried to gain assurances about what would happen if he wasn't able to continue. "It's certainly not about the money. I'm not leaving it."

"Take good care of yourself," said Mayor Nancy Bates.

Construction will begin soon

on the first phase, which includes 28 condo units. Ludwig said Centex expects them to sell out in four to six months.

Total project cost, including consulting fees, capping the landfill, golf course improvements, the new club house and parks facility, driving range and utility installations (including construction of the tunnel) is \$17,350,000. Revenue sources include the brownfield tax capture (\$1.5 million), sale of the land to Centex (\$3.6 million), northwest water district (\$157,000 for a new loop system), capital improvement fund (\$670,000) and \$3.9 million in park millage funds.

Council member Chris McRae pointed out that a few years ago, the city purchased 20 acres from the school district for this project, at a cost of \$1 million and was now selling 18 acres to Centex for \$3.6 million.

"The city made a wise decision then, and is making a wise decision now," he said.

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will offer casual dining; the upstairs will be set up to accommodate entertainment. The space upstairs will also be flexible enough to use for catering and special events.

The Masonic Temple has offered the use of their lot for 200 days or evenings for exclusive valet parking.

"That will be used during peak periods to relieve some of the pressure on the parking situation," Greg said. "That parking will be at our expense, and it will be built into the cost of the service delivery. We intend to use it during the lunch hour and the dinner hour, four nights a week."

The plan is to drop cars at the back of the building. "Grand River is far too busy to accomplish that kind of task," Greg said.

Employees will shuffle cars onto Thomas Street, to Grand River, right to Farmington Road and then left into the lot.

Cowley's will assume insurance and liability costs, Greg said.

The Masonic Temple lot, which is across the street from the Heene Sundquist Funeral Home, will be used, in exchange for an annual donation. It holds about 25-30 cars.

The building's design and motif is similar to the Irish establishments the family saw in trips to Ireland, Mike said.

Planning Commissioner Jim Pogue asked if there were studies to show the ground floor will support the second floor.

"Absolutely," Greg said. "We over-engineered it."

Pam Cowley, Mike's wife, helped select the color scheme for the renovations.

The family plans to hire a chef with experience at Disneyworld, Pam said.

"We will serve a traditional Irish breakfast: two eggs, fried tomatoes, and imported Irish sausage and bacon," she said.

Mental health town meeting planned

The Interim Executive Director of the Oakland County Community Mental Health Authority, William J. Allen, will speak and listen to the community at a town hall meeting 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 20. The seventh in a monthly series will be held at the Costick Activities Center, 28600 11 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

This is an opportunity for peo-

ple who have questions about issues and services for people with mental illness and developmental disabilities to speak directly with the authority, its service providers and board members.

Locations for subsequent meetings will rotate between all areas of Oakland County. For more information call (248) 858-1235.

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