

Cafe owner is 'baffled' by school illnesses

BY SUE BUCK
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The co-owner of a Southfield cafe said there will be no charge for meals delivered to the Farmington Public School District following reported instances of sickness.

But Erica Wassser says she has no idea what might have caused the stomach upsets that plagued at least 26 people who attended Students Operating Schools Day March 8.

The sandwiches prepared by Smooth Moves Juice Bar and Cafe, 30333 Southfield Road were delivered about 10:45 a.m. to the Farmington Training Center. Participants had gathered after a morning when students shadowed teachers and administrators to learn about a career in education. About 90 people were involved, half students.

"We don't know what happened," said Wassser who co-owns the business with her husband Jeff. "We got cited for nothing. Everything was up to code." However, Larry Harris, environmental services supervisor for the Oakland County Health Division, said several violations were issued to the cafe following

an inspection in connection with the school incident.

A report was expected to be finalized this afternoon (Thursday).

"The number one thing was that bare hand contact was being used," Harris said. That means employees didn't don gloves while handling food.

Other observations that will be mentioned in the report were that one hand sink didn't have paper towels and the dishwasher wasn't properly sanitizing, he said.

Erica Wassser said that her business, located in a health club, has never before been cited. Also, people who frequent the health club ate the same sandwiches March 8 and no one became ill.

Interviews, testing

Dr. Carolyn Bird, chief of medical services for Oakland County Health Division, said Friday that the cafe was inspected after the incident. Of 37 people picked for sample interviews, Bird said that 26 reported being ill. Of those, 20 people ate the chicken salad sandwich. The others ate tuna salad, turkey and cheese and vegetarian sandwiches.

'He's a tough kid, but he was white,' mom says

At least one Farmington Public School District parent is grateful to school officials for more closely examining what caused illnesses in staff and students who attended Students Operating Schools day.

Linda Stulberg, whose son Bradley is a North Farmington High School sophomore, said she called both the school district and the health department to report her son's illness. He ate the chicken salad.

She expressed her gratitude to school district officials, who sent a letter informing her of the incident. She wouldn't have made the connection to the cause otherwise.

"I'm sure this was nothing intentional, but my concern is for my son's well being," Stulberg said. "My son was sick all weekend. He's a tough kid, but he was white. I hope it doesn't have a long-term impact on his health."

"The food eaten was contaminated but we cannot tell the precise mechanism. We can't say 100 percent what contaminated it or the factors which contaminated it. The chicken salad was contaminated. There was some organism in it. We don't know the organism yet," Bird said.

Stool samples were obtained from four or five people. Bird

said it is possible to obtain good samples from people who are already feeling better.

The culture results are still pending and can take up to three weeks, Bird said.

That doesn't negate what needs to be done in terms of any improvement, Bird said.

She explained food products can be contaminated if the per-

son preparing the food didn't use gloves or if the food handler was ill. Eggs and chicken are known to carry salmonella, she said.

The Oakland County Health Division questioned preparation and food temperatures, Erica said.

"They said the preparation was fine," she said. "We talked to Farmington Schools and asked if there was anything we could do to resolve this. We've been in business for over four years. I have no idea what happened. The flu is going around like wild-fire."

Prepared fresh

Everything was prepared fresh, Erica said. "The chicken was freshly delivered and the mayonnaise was fresh. Everything was freshly opened. The chicken came in the day before. I'm very baffled."

Erica said she didn't find out about the complaints until the afternoon of March 12. The district sent out letters to parents and staff on March 13. The health division interviewed students with the permission of their parents Thursday evening.

While the food was delivered to the Farmington Training Cen-

ter in coolers, there was no refrigeration in the building. "I understand some people took the sandwiches home," Erica said.

Maxfield said students began eating lunch about 11:15 a.m. so he didn't believe refrigeration was an issue. "We've been entering meals there forever," Maxfield said. "I'm sorry for them (the business) that it happened, but it is their responsibility."

Bird said it isn't probable that the contamination took place at FTC because each sandwich was individually wrapped.

"It's hard when you don't know what happened," Erica said. "We have no idea where it came from. This is our life. Our business is family owned. It is a major thing for us."

This was the third time the cafe delivered to Farmington Schools. The first time was in February, Erica said, when some female employees took advantage of coupons Jeff had handed out for five free lunch sandwiches, like those delivered March 8. The cafe also catered a meal served before a school board meeting.

Oakland County sanitarian Keith Krinn didn't return several requests for more information.

Gill student steals contest by spelling 'burglary' right

Gill Elementary fifth graders Niharika Shastri and Christopher Lavallo were the top spellers in the Feb. 18 spelling bee.

Shastri came in first place and Lavallo netted a close second place ranking. Shastri won on the word "burglary," according to a school spokesman.

Kevin Pilczak and David McIntee are alternates.

The judges were parent Lynne Halton, Elaine Carlson, a media center specialist, Carol Roble, a Reading Recovery teacher and Carolyn Rittner, a teacher leader.

Shastri and Lavallo will go on to the March 17 regional competition sponsored by the Oakland Press.

Finals are May 26 in Washington D. C.



Niharika Shastri and Christopher Lavallo

DDA director Downey will retire

BY SUE BUCK
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Downtown Development Authority Director Judy Downey's last day isn't until Jan. 2, 2003, but she decided to announce her retirement early.

Downey, 65, and a long-time Lapeer resident, plans to help raise her grandchildren. Her son, Scott, a head golf professional at Currie Golf Course in Midland, has two children, Kyler, 7 and Ethan, 5.

She is also pursuing her decision to become a deacon in the Episcopal Church, a part-time position. She will assist the priest and work with the bishop in the Eastern Michigan Diocese. She's been studying Monday nights at St. Paul in Saginaw and should finish by the end of next year. Field work will follow.

"Just as I am the liaison between the DDA and the city I

■ 'It's been a wonderful time in my life. It has been interesting, challenging and rewarding to work for this municipality.'

Judy Downey
DDA Director

will be the liaison between the community and the church," Downey said.

She will be ordained in 2004. Family is important to Downey, who lost her daughter, age 20, in a drowning accident at a small lake in Lapeer. The accident left lingering sorrow.

"I have to be very busy," Downey said.

Having held her position for 10 years, she predicts that a new DDA director will need to be hired by November, because the

city and DDA plan to again apply for the National Main Street Technical Assistance grant, an Oakland County grant which helps provide expertise to cities with downtown business districts. She hopes to assist the new employee in that process.

Downey's salary is \$54,500 and her duties also include managing downtown event.

"It's been a wonderful time in my life," Downey said. "It has been interesting, challenging and rewarding to work for this municipality."

DDA President Ron Oglesby told Farmington City Council members Monday he reluctantly accepted Downey's retirement notice. "I think she has her mind made up," he said.

Revitalizing the Downtown Farmington Center and developing a community pavilion are part of the DDA's three-year action plan, Oglesby said.

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