

Tree House supporters hold peaceful protest

BY SUE BUCK
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About 30 customers of the Tree House for Earth's Children in Farmington brought picket signs Monday evening to a peaceful protest in support of the health food store.

The protest was held outside Farmington City Hall during the time the planning commission met Monday, though the issue wasn't on the agenda.

The store is owned and operated by Susan, Christine and Herman Meinke.

This is the second year The Tree House owners have argued to keep their cinder block planters in the parking lot of their health food store on Mooney Street.

The issue escalated from initial discussions at the Farmington Planning Commission last year.

Farmington City Attorney John Donohue said Tuesday no

date has been set for the court case, which is now in Oakland County Circuit Court, and no briefs have been filed.

City Manager Frank Lauhoff had only one comment about the protest: "That's their right."

David Trombley, the Meinke's attorney, couldn't be reached for comment.

Safe or a hazard?

The city maintains the planter boxes fastened together by rebar rods aren't safe.

The owners say they are beautiful, safe and provide food for the deli inside their store.

They also produce enough food to give away, according to Susan Meinke.

Her daughter, Christine Meinke said the planters do not represent a safety, health or blight issue. There isn't a code to support the city's complaint, she said.

Christine Meinke pointed out information contained in a book,

"Cinder Block Gardens" by Lynn A. Gillespie, which she found at Borders Book store. Gillespie, a Southern woman, uses the same cinder block planter design, three blocks high, as the Meinkes.

"People are planting them around the United States," Christine Meinke said. "The book came out a year after we put them in."

The article pointed out the case disabled people have in gardening at that height.

"If you are not able to bend over very much or are in a wheel chair, a bed three blocks (24 inches) or four blocks (32 inches) high is a comfortable height," Gillespie wrote.

"Heights over 16 inches you will need to add extra stability so the bricks stay in place. Use a rebar stake down through the blocks or have the blocks nailed together."

During the protest Dan Karam, a Royal Oak resident, who used to be in the natural foods business, played his drum as a demonstrative statement.

"I'm interested in supporting people who are standing up against bad laws," Karam said.

He said he is a Green Party candidate for the State House.

Christine Tarnowekyj, a Farmington Hills resident, was among the picketers.

"I love them," she said of the Meinkes. "They helped me get healthy. They are great healers. Everything is organic there. They spend time with you. They spend a lot of time volunteering for festivals and stuff. There isn't anyone they wouldn't help. They are a great family-oriented business."

A customer for seven years, she received acupuncture. "I barely could walk at one point and with several treatments I was able to walk without using meds."



Bang the drum slowly: Dan Karam keeps a steady beat for the marchers. Frances Phillips brought her three children Georgina, Dominic and Oliver.

Acupressure is like acupuncture but hard pressure is applied, she said.

"They can look in your eyes and tell you what's wrong without you saying a thing," she said.

Living the name

Others came from outside the city.

"It's time the city lived up to its name — Farmington — the city of farms," said John Little, a Detroit and a Green Party supporter. He said he ran for

Congress on the Libertarian party ticket in 1990.

"The Tree House is truly promoting Mother Nature," Little said. "The Tree House is on the cutting edge for educating children. We call it 'edutainment,' educating children in an entertaining way. In some ways, it's the best kept secret."

He held a "Stay Natural in Farmington" sign.

Detroit's Chris Scanlan held a "War Against Greed" sign. He knew little about the Meinke's

legal battle with the city. He knew it's gone on for years.

He called the store "Mother Nature." "You can't put a price tag on Herman's intelligence," he said. "It's invaluable."

Susan Meinke and her band, Herman, recorded songs on gardens in their class at Farmington School. Rogers is a teacher, she said.

Christine also gave massages at festivals and school parties.



Tree House advocates: Lizzy Oliver, Cynthia Nowicki, George Gemmer and John Little were in a group of at least 35 who carried protest signs.

City dedicates new flag pole

A ceremony to install a new American flag and flagpole will be held at 5:30 p.m. Friday — Flag Day — at Shiawassee Park.

The lighted flag will be located just north of the playscape.

"It will be on the road side, not the river side," said Bill Richards, assistant Farmington city manager.

After the Sept. 11 tragedy in New York City, the playscape committee felt an impetus to have a flag in the park, he said.

The public is welcome to attend the ceremony. The date selected seemed preferable over the Fourth of July because many people are out of town on that day, he said.

The flag flew over the Capitol, Richards said. Congressman Joe Knollenberg (R-Bloomfield Hills) will present it to the Farmington Elks and the city.

Other officials, including Farmington Mayor Jim Mitchell, will be present.

--by Sue Buck

Exhibit comes to Benchmark

A photo exhibit of the works of Karl Overheul will come to the Benchmark on Grand River in Farmington at 6 p.m. Friday, June 14.

The exhibit's subject matter

will include recent landscapes of the Yellowstone, the Teton and San Juan mountain ranges along with scenes from the dunes and trails of the Great Lakes.

Karl Overheul is an experi-

enced outdoorsman and a professional photographer who has spent last year recording the vast and intimate locales of some of America's most beautiful places.

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