

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.

Our picks for the 47th: Brady, Brickner, Leib

As the field of candidates for the 47th District Court judgeship vacated by The Honorable Fred Harris is narrowed in the August primary, we recommend voters take a careful look at all seven candidates seeking the post.

Observer staff members sat down with all seven candidates — Paul Blizman, Jim Brady, Barry Brickner, Sid Kraitzman, Larry Leib, Annette Raczkowski and Alan Vosko. We asked them questions about background, education, experience, community service and solicited their ideas for streamlining a heavily burdened court docket and making the court more user-friendly as the new facility at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake Roads goes on line.

Based on what we've seen and heard, we're recommending voters endorse Magistrate Jim Brady, Hills councilman Barry Brickner and attorney Larry Leib.

Brady's qualifications and experience place him squarely in line for this post. As a magistrate, he is already familiar with the 47th District's facility, its communities and citizens. He has worked with four judges and three court administrators and carries with him a historical understanding of the system, but also advocates progressive procedures like video arraignments.

We liked Brickner's ideas about streamlining the docket by making greater use of computers. Other candidates also suggested allowing electronic payment of fines and document filing.



But he takes the concept a step further, suggesting judges key in certain data themselves.

Finally, Larry Leib, who has been endorsed by everyone from Congressman Joe Knoltenberg to the Michigan Regional Council of Carpenters, gets our vote, despite his relative youth.

The 34-year-old new father may not be as experienced as some candidates, but his temperance and common sense

approach make him a good fit in the 47th. He advocates holding court early in the morning or later in the evening, making access easier for citizens, alternative work programs and putting domestic violence offenders on an electronic tether to protect their victims.

All of the candidates with whom we talked had great ideas for improving and streamlining the court, which we hope will be taken into consideration even before the new facility opens. Mediation, more use of computers and Internet, drug courts and a more flexible schedule all deserve further study.

Whoever earns this spot will face an exciting time of growth and innovation, a time of opportunity and adjustment. But perhaps the biggest challenge will be trying to live up to the standard of dignity, fairness, justice and community service set by Judges Fred Harris and Marla Parker.

Hardy leaves behind a very large set of shoes. We believe Jim Brady, Barry Brickner and Larry Leib have the best chance of filling them.

QUIETEST OPINION

Vouchers level the field

I think it is about time that the Supreme Court recognized that school vouchers are not unconstitutional.

The idea of the separation of church and state is not even in the US Constitution. The constitution only says that Congress should make no law establishing a state religion. Those people who choose vouchers are only taking their tax money for education to pay for their children's schooling. They are also removing their students from the public schools, so it does not cost the state to educate them.

Many people these days who send their students to private schools are not simply trying to get the absolute best for them, or trying to put them in an environment more to their liking. No! These folks are removing them from mediocre learning institutions which are very often hostile to their beliefs.

Schools are not under-funded, and yet they are turning out woefully under-educated students. Colleges are having to organize remedial classes and they had to re-scale the SATs. Surveys show that many Americans cannot tell where Alaska is let alone, Guyana. A Michigan store will show you that many high school grads working as cashiers do not know how to make change.

Maybe this dumping down of America came after the quest for positive self-esteem. Kids didn't feel good when they flunked it?

That's true, but the cure is not lowering the bar, but raising the failing students up. They will feel good about themselves when they have really accomplished something. There seems to be almost an "anti-intellectual" bias in public schools. Have they forgotten that their purpose is to teach? They are not teaching successfully if the students are not learning.

Sure, there are many good teachers left in public schools, and Farmington schools have a good reputation compared to the schools around here. But, Michigan schools are not ranked the best and more importantly, US schools are way behind the educational levels of other developed countries. Can you blame people, then, for trying to find a decent education for their children without having to pay twice for it?

Vouchers are now a moot point for my family. We have chosen to home school for six years and then pay for two students for five years each at a private school at a cost of nearly \$40,000. While home schooling, we also had to pay \$100 per year to join a legal defense group which would fight our legal battles

should the government take us to court for teaching our own kids.

We weren't so much worried that they might make us stop home schooling, but that they might take our children away from us by charging us with neglect. It was done many times. And all because parents are struggling to get a decent education for their kids. We are not wealthy people and these decisions have made real lifestyle differences for us. But they have been worth it!

Even more important than the quality of education in our homes is the philosophical atmosphere of the public schools. In an apparent effort to maintain a separation of church and state, the schools have tried to eradicate all religion from education. This, however, is not possible, and the "religion" of secular humanism in the public schools which are openly hostile to Judeo-Christian values.

In first grade at Highmeadow, little circles of six year old kids met to discuss and deal with problem classroom behavior. Whatever the group decided was the policy was handled. Is this the message they need to receive, that at six, they should be in charge?

In the teachers' manual for health education at the same school I read "No one of us is completely heterosexual or homosexual, but we all fall somewhere on a continuum between the two extremes." How many of you believe that? How many of you want people who do believe that teaching your grade school students about sex?

In third grade, we received a note home stating that the school did not have time to teach the students the multiplication tables, and that we should teach them at home. This happened the same semester in which the school spent an entire day studying recycling.

I'm all for recycling, but I taught my kids about that at home. I thought I was paying taxes for them to be taught math. Public schools are failing to educate students successfully. They are apparently spending their energies on social experiments which are philosophically hostile to Judeo-Christian values.

Forcing us to pay for this, let alone forcing taxes for them to be taught math, is grossly unfair.

Vouchers only seek to level the playing field a little and allow citizens to spend their tax dollars on an education that will be suitable for them.

Holly Giannola is a resident of Farmington.

I KNOW WHAT YOU'RE THINKING, BUT OL' ED HERE STILL HASN'T MADE AN ENDORSEMENT FOR WAYNE COUNTY EXECUTIVE...



Chris Cummings & Geoff Bracks

LETTERS

Chamber disappoints

It is disappointing to see the recent recommendations from the Chamber of Commerce, in regard to the candidates for office.

I think this recent round of endorsements strips away the thin veneer of legitimacy of the Chamber endorsement process, and shows them to be nothing more than a political arm of the Republican Party.

This is not good for our city or businesses, as we all lose when such an important organization with the public trust tries to appear independent, when in reality they have their own hidden agenda.

I fail to understand their continued endorsement of individuals that have never owned or run a business, while passing on candidates that are business owners.

The endorsements of Valerie Knoll and Mike Rogers, while giving "no opinion" and "not qualified" ratings to Ryan Gouard and Aldo Vagnozzi, respectively, are ludicrous.

Ryan and his family own and operate a successful large business in this and surrounding communities.

To rate Aldo Vagnozzi as not qualified is a slap in the face to every voter in this city.

No one knows this city better than Aldo, and the high regard this city has for him was shown in his landslide victories mayor twice, and before that his many terms on city council.

He has worked and fought tirelessly for this city, and through his direct efforts has helped the business community by making this city a great place to live and do business.

When I ran for city council last year, as a business owner myself and as chair of the Zoning Board of Appeals, I was the lone candidate that did not get the Chamber's endorsement, even though I helped businesses significantly and introduced business friendly ideas to the Planning Commission that have since been passed as ordinances.

Why the snub? Because I was the lone Democrat out of seven. To ignore someone's actual business record and their achievements strictly because of party affiliation makes a mockery of the endorsement process by the Chamber. Shame on them.

Randy Bruce
Farmington Hills

Stop SBT

Several weeks ago Phil Power wrote an article about State Sen. Joe Schwarz and both his campaign for governor and our state government's projected revenue problems.

One of the issues that has been coming up with all of this is whether or not to halt the scheduled rate reductions for the Single Business Tax (SBT). This particular article got me thinking.

I cannot find a single more damaging instrument to our state's economy than this regressive tax.

It is a tax that has nothing to do with a company's profit, and many businesses that lose money still have to pay the SBT.

The relationship of our state government to the SBT is similar to a junkie's relationship to heroin. There is a physiological need for the SBT's monies, but at the same time it's killing us.

We have to create a healthy environment as possible for our small businesses. The Legislature passed scheduled ratebacks during the 1990s and now there are a number of political candidates and office holders from both

parties who are skittish about staying the course.

My preference has always been for the immediate elimination of this onerous tax. I'm in favor of quitting it cold turkey. Doing that would create some short term difficulties, but would also force our state government to reevaluate its priorities.

I know the long term effects would be beneficial to Michigan, as we would finally have flushed this poison from our economic veins.

The SBT really should be kicked to the curb.

Christopher M. Cummins
Farmington Hills

Something's not right

Depending on perspective, we are in or soon to be in crisis with our democracy. Specifically, our publicly elected officials increasingly serve those who contribute to campaign coffers instead of serving the public good.

It goes on at the federal, state and local level.

The situation involving the Treehouse for Earth's Children and Farmington City Hall was brought before us by members who live in Farmington.

Sometime's not right. The Treehouse planted a garden to beautify their periphery and augment their business. This modest endeavor brought together senior citizens and young people with disabilities to create a labor of love.

The garden won civic awards for it is pleasing to the eye.

Along comes Farmington City Hall and the garden is designated a community blight.

This is quite a startling contradiction. After some well deserved bad publicity, the City changed gears and declared the garden a safety hazard.

On the surface, the City's posture is preposterous. One can reasonably deduce there's something going on behind the scenes. What that is, what the citizens of Farmington are entitled to know.

There is no question the Meinke family is committed to serving the people of Farmington and the region.

This is a locally owned family business dedicated to socially responsible practices. What an excellent community asset.

Now the situation is headed for court. The Meinke's are people of high principle. They plan to defend themselves as best they can from City officials with questionable motives.

The garden has existed for quite some time and the City had no problem with it.

There can be no claim that the City wasn't aware of the garden due to the positive publicity it had received.

The City is in the position of using local tax dollars against a responsible, locally-based business to litigate a ridiculous position.

What a waste of limited community resources. What a shame for the good people of Farmington.

Scott Heinzman
Alliance for Democracy,
Co-Chairperson
Metro Detroit Chapter

Disappointed

Graduation season has come and gone for graduated this season, and that means a lot of parents, relatives, friends, neighbors, and even former teachers might be interested in the particulars of these graduation ceremonies

and the events that surround graduation (i.e. prom, All Night Party). Taxpayers might like to read about their local graduates, and maybe some "data" regarding the classes of 2002.

Besides honoring the graduates, students in grades 11 and below can look to this type of coverage as an indication of how the community supports its youth and celebrates education.

Each Thursday and Sunday, we have a whole section devoted to local sports. I am the parent of a student-athlete and I get a big kick out of the articles that cover our local athletes.

It's not unusual to have a whole article dedicated to each sport, at each school, at the start of each sport season. I think that a whole class of graduates from each high school would merit similar coverage.

The sports coverage only refers to the athletes, whereas the graduation coverage refers to all students regardless of involvement at their high school.

While I know that school related topics are not interesting or important to many people, they are to me, and many of my peers.

I would enjoy more articles highlighting the positive things our local youth are doing, and anything that helps celebrate their endeavors is newsworthy to me.

Even though I am not the parent of a graduate this year, I would enjoy more than a thumbnail sketch of each of our schools, their ceremonies, accomplishments and celebrations.

Cynthia Heltsch
Farmington Hills

Chamber criteria

While it is not likely that our highly politicized and very Republican Chamber of Commerce would give any Democratic candidate a rating other than "not qualified," it would be interesting to know, based on this record, what criteria they used to rate Aldo Vagnozzi.

There must have been a great deal of squirming, ducking and weaving on this one!

James Dermody
Northville

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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