

OUR VIEWS

Donohue's shoes won't be easy to fill

We didn't always see eye to eye with city attorney John Donohue, who worked for the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

When city officials in Farmington wanted to appoint a replacement for councilman Bill Hartsock, and do so without interviewing applicants about the myriad details that go into running a city on a day-to-day basis, he saw both cities through some tough legal battles, including a fight to keep oil and gas drilling out of Farmington Hills.

City attorneys don't always get a great deal of notoriety, but they are an integral element in the machine that runs local government. Officials have said they most admired Donohue's listening ear, his insistence to take in their concerns and present them with solid advice that served them well.

What we admired most was his understanding of what we do. Donohue had tremendous respect for the "sunshine" laws that keep government open and accessible to the media and the citizens it serves. He returned our phone calls promptly and always provided us with complete and honest answers to questions — even if that answer was, "I don't know. Let me look it up and I'll get back to you."

Donohue's unexpected and untimely death, just days after his father passed away, was an incredible tragedy for his family and myriad friends. Our hearts, our prayers and our sympathies go out to them.

We also encourage city officials from Farmington and Farmington Hills to take their time and work together to appoint a new city attorney, as closely as possible as both cities work together, to continue the tradition of having the same person serve both their needs.

John Donohue took with him an incredible amount of institutional knowledge, a deep and complete understanding of the communities he served and the undying respect of those with whom he worked most closely. He leaves behind a big void of a shoe, and we don't envy city officials the task of having to fill them.

A word of thanks to FAFF outgoing president

Four years ago, the Farmington Area Founders Festival's more than 30 years of tradition appeared to be teetering on the brink.

Facing large financial losses and a shift in its overall direction, the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce bucked off its leadership role, leaving the festival in the hands of a community board. The board in 1999 contracted with promoter Watts Up Inc. in an effort that ended with a number of complaints from residents and business owners alike.

One of the people most in the center of this whirlwind history was Jim Stark, who served as festival board president. Stark resigned this week not only as president but from the board itself, citing timing and personal reasons.

Stark publishes the Farmington/Farmington Hills Gazette and his commitment to the festival was part of a life filled with business responsibilities, not to mention the needs of a young family. There may have been turmoil under his leadership, but there was also a great deal of growth and change for the good.

Experimenting with professional management taught festival organizers the value of community involvement. Stark and the board had the guts to face their community in town hall meetings that were not always a pleasant experience as folks vented their concerns and displeasure.

Whether you agree or disagree with the process, there's no denying the end result. Attendance at this year's festival surpassed last year's by at least 20 percent. The Farmington Area Founders Festival has become self-supporting, with a positive, five-figure balance to carry into next year, along with a ton of good will from this year's corporate sponsors. Yes, things went wrong. In an event this size, things ALWAYS go wrong. Certainly, Stark could say the same of the past four years.

What counts is that at the end of the day, Jim Stark and those who have worked so diligently since 1998 have given this community back its festival.

For that alone, they deserve to take a bow.

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Observer

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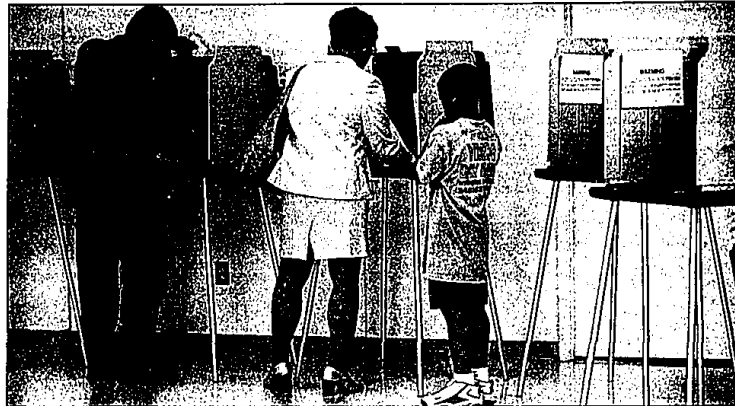
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Bill Bresler / Observer

Voting at First Presbyterian Church, Precinct 15 was steady most of primary election day. In the late afternoon 11-year-old Fred Sharp waits for his mom, Kristi Sharp to finish her ballot. At left, Robert Pielia marks his vote.

LETTERS

Anything goes?

I find it hard to believe that many public school leaders strongly oppose combining "God" and public education for example through the Pledge of Allegiance. Public school administrators salivate when given the opportunity for state funds by entering into shared-time agreements with Catholic schools.

When it comes to money anything goes, especially our values right out the window. In God I do trust.

Denise M. Wood
Farmington Hills

Raising questions

Thank you for your editorial of the 4th of July. It was quite appropriate (City's council, citizens owe each other fair treatment). My involvement with this City Council has grown out of my interest in, and opposition to, the Eleven Pines golf course project. As an environmentalist of some 30 years I was appalled at the city's lack of interest in the environment. I have found that not one voice on this council has found any measure of agreement with my statements.

My curiosity has caused me to look into things I would have not even have considered before this issue. When the council walked out, the city manager Steve Brock, to his credit, realized that some form of damage control was in order. Therefore, his offer to go over the budget.

During our budget discussions he assured me that this project was "going forward no matter what" therefore rendering moot any questions anyone had to say in opposition. He also chastised me for saying at the council meeting that the cost of the \$18.45 million golf course was \$20 million. Asked about possible cost overruns he said "there would be any." This in the face of a golf course whose original estimate was \$8 or \$9 million and is now officially twice that amount.

Mr. Brock also told me that the way I presented my questions caused an instant and spontaneous negative reaction. That much I will agree upon. He felt that I impugned them personally by calling their actions unethical. That, however, I don't agree with.

When a city council buys property from the schools for \$1 million and then turns around and sells it to a developer for \$3.9 million and uses the \$2.9 million for a golf course, then I think I have the right to point out that such a transaction is unethical, especially since the Farmington schools have a \$5.2 million deficit.

Mary Johnston
Farmington Hills

Take a deep breath America

The Pilgrims tried socialism and failed. But you will never hear that taught in a classroom in a public school. It is of great significance to know this for two reasons. The first is the obvious, it failed and we know that when we fail to learn from history, we are doomed to suffer through it all over again.

The second reason it is important to know this is because this is the very

experiment that directed our founding fathers to establish "property rights" in the American Colonies. For the first two years after landing at Plymouth Rock in 1620, the Pilgrims lived under a system of communal property. They had known before they left for "the new world" that this would be the way things were. After two years of dismal harvests and two consecutive winters of people freezing and starving William Bradford, the Governor, knew this system was not going to work. It had noble intentions and was demystified by good Christian men and women but the best of intentions paves only one road.

After much discussion, Governor Bradford assigned every family a parcel of land in conformity with the size of the family. More than substantial productivity gains showed from the very first year. Prior to the privatization of the lands, the people professed weakness and inability to produce.

Afterwards they had a different assurance.

Governor Bradford's own words tell us the true story about the socialist/communist experiment that failed before the United States was born. Liberals never seem to learn from their mistakes.

"This experience that was had in this common course and condition, tried sundry years and that amongst Godly and sober men, may well evince the vanity of that conceit of Plato's and other ancients applauded by some of later times; that the taking away of property and bringing in community into a commonwealth would make them happy and flourishing; as if they were wiser than GOD. For this community (so far as it was) was found to breed much confusion and discontent and retard much employment that would have been to their benefit and comfort."

The ever enduring truth established here and the lesson learned was this: "Our founding fathers learned to cherish the ideals of private property, individuality, self-sufficiency and saw this as true liberty, and was to be preferred over any other organization." How far we have been expelled from this ideal is becoming more apparent with increasing "security" needs every day.

When speaking of the attitudes of the people who had just won the American Revolution, Professor George Friedman said, "The revolution is over. It is time to go home, fall in love, raise children, make money, and see the sacred in the banality of everyday life."

It is time to reassess and reconstruct this original standard of Liberty. Take a deep breath and get ready to make the effort America. Nothing less than the liberty or enslavement of your children and grandchildren is at stake here.

Ron Oliverio
Farmington Hills

Democrats need reform

Phil Power in his column of July 18 said the Republican Party "...is in need of centrist reform."

He quotes State Sen. Joe Schwarz as saying, "My party is increasingly in the control of single issue groups like the Right to Life and the gun folks..." Sen. Schwarz is upset that he cannot get the backing of the Republican Party in the governor's race because they do not

think he can win.

He should be thankful instead that he is not in the Democratic Party. Talk about special interest groups and single issue factions. On education issues they take their orders from the teacher's unions. They are completely beholden to the pro abortion movement. If Emily's List isn't a single issue group, then what is?

They also move in lock step with the radical leadership of the feminist movement, the gay and lesbian lobby and the more radical environment groups like the Sierra Club, to name a few.

And then there are the labor unions. Jennifer Granholm had the audacity to run against their hand-picked guy, David Bonior. Sen. Schwarz should be happy doesn't have to fend off nasty attack ads like union backed PACs are running for Bonior against Granholm.

Jim Collins
Farmington Hills

Congrats to Zander

We recently returned from vacation and were pleasantly surprised to see your front page with the wonderful picture of Kelly Zander being crowned Miss Farmington/Oakland County.

We couldn't have been happier! Kelly was a part of the drama program during all four years at North Farmington and an extremely talented dancer in our productions. She was always a devoted participant, dividing her time between her duties with the Pom Pon squad and musical rehearsals, while maintaining a positive and proud attitude as a lead dancer in those productions. She was never without a smile and a true interest in the other cast members and directors.

We may not have been able to attend the Miss Farmington pageant, but our votes would have been for Kelly, also. Farmington won't be disappointed by the judges' decision.

Dean and Sue Cobb
Hartland

Festival memories

Picture this: Happy people, happy pets, plenty of food, great music, many things to see and buy. A perfect summer evening in downtown Farmington, U.S.A.

Jeanne Webber
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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QUOTABLE

"If this pipe failed, maybe 80 percent of the toilets in this city wouldn't work. That's how important this pipe is."

Farmington City Manager Frank Luiboff on the Farmington Interceptor