

## OUR VIEWS

## Drug death shows no place is safe

Farmington Public Schools won an award recently for its Safe Schools programs, but the district wasn't safe enough to keep Jason Starling alive.

The Call to Action Committee couldn't do it, even though the group has held numerous workshops and programs to provide parents with resources and tools to combat chemical abuse.

No program, no therapy, not even getting into trouble earlier in the year saved Jason from ingesting heroin, the drug that killed him. He died at home, in his own room, in his own bed.

Jason's parents weren't just devastated, they were stunned. Their son was a good kid, described as kind, intelligent and fun-loving. He simply made a very bad choice. And he did it within the confines of an affluent community, in an award-winning school district, in the arms of a loving family.

Heroin used to be associated with back-alley addicts slouched against the side of a dilapidated building. Today, it's available right here, to children you know, children you love.

In an open letter to students at Farmington High, Jason's parents asked his friends to honor their son's memory either by making lifestyle changes if they take drugs or by remembering his tragic death when confronted with temptation. We'd like to take that message a step further, to include everyone in our community who has struggled with chemical addiction, either personally or with a loved one.

When drugs enter your bloodstream, death might be only seconds away. No one knows that better than Jason Starling's family. He probably didn't expect to die. Certainly, his friends and family didn't expect to have to arrange a funeral and burial for a 17-year-old young man who appeared to be moving in the right direction.

His tragic death reminds us that no place is ever safe enough, no community is aware enough to keep our children from life-threatening bad decisions. We must continue to learn all we can and to share stories like Jason's with our children, then pray they make the right decisions.

It's not nearly enough. But it's all we can do.

## Truck enforcement should be kept local

We have to hand it to folks in the trucking industry—they're persistent.

They've gone through the courts twice now trying to wrest control over motor carrier enforcement from the hands of city officials. Judges have ruled in favor of local enforcement both times, and we hope now the industry will just keep trucking along.

Two years ago, cities prevailed in state appellate court when truckers fought their authority to collect fines. The most recent lawsuit, a class-action filed to recover fines paid since 1996, was tossed out of U.S. District Court after cities in Ohio won a similar case.

The industry contends some municipalities use motor carrier enforcement as a "cash cow." Leaving enforcement authority with the state patrol, said Walter Heinrich, Michigan Trucking Association executive director, would make the whole system more "consistent."

He's right. With the Michigan State Police in charge, enforcement would be consistent. It would also be virtually non-existent, because the state patrol simply doesn't have the resources to do the same job local law officers are doing now.

How important is motor carrier safety? Consider this: According to the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, last year, more than 5,000 people died and 131,000 were injured in large truck accidents.

Let's face it—under the best of conditions, driving a semi is a tough job. If the truck driver has been on the road too long, if his load is too heavy, if his vehicle's not safe, his rig is a disaster waiting to happen.

Just ask the family of 5-year-old Christian Sanders, a Sanilac County child who was killed in 1999 after a semi hauling two trailers of steel coils rear ended the car in which he was riding. Last year, his family settled a \$1.3 million lawsuit with the trucking company, after the driver admitted guilt. Investigators later found he'd been on the road 16 hours that day.

We're not trying to indict the entire trucking industry, which has made a concerted effort toward improving motor carrier safety. It simply makes sense to have more specially trained officers keeping track of those few companies that allow sleepy drivers and overloaded trucks.



As members of the Multicultural Multiracial Community Council continued meeting this week to help develop a new strategy for their organization, the Metro Detroit Diversity Quilt (pictured with AAUW member Diane Hardin) went on display in the gallery of the Costick Activities Center.

## LETTERS

## Reactions to column

The Nov. 21 Observer mentioned chairman Phil Bower "could be pleased to get reactions" to his column. Here are mine:

"Universities can't match the lobbying muscle flexed by the labor unions or big corporations or the trial lawyers." Educators have much support from classrooms and communities. Universities are politically correct and very popular with voters.

"Michigan spends an average of \$5,795 per student at our public universities. This is hardly generous." I graduated from Detroit's Cooley High in 1943, ineligible for scholarship funds because my father owned a small business. During the '60s and '70s my wife and I put three children through MSU and one through U of M. We paid an average of \$3,000 per student, including room and board. The combined earnings from our two jobs made them ineligible for scholarships.

"Cut state support and tuition goes up; increase state support and tuition increases go down." Deficits and rising tuition are not newsworthy. I never read of surplus funds or tuition cuts. Budgets are adjusted to spend available money. Students signing vouchers for the state to pay have little reason to reduce needless costs.

"The \$1.5 billion appropriated in 1999 produced an economic impact of \$39 billion." What mail created these figures? Bill Gates has no university degree and does not require them of Microsoft employees, yet they are among the best paid anywhere.

"Taxpayers are spending \$1.8 billion on honoring our best and brightest kids in college." It's not entirely accurate. Based on preference takes precedence over bright at U of M.

"\$30,000 per year per inmate versus \$5,795 per college student is a compelling sign that our spending priorities are seriously out of whack." Sending inmates to college might be the solution. Their parents don't earn too much, in my area minorities and if they don't show improvement, give them a whack.

Hank Borgman  
Farmington

## Not the first

I read with interest your recent article "First-ever OLS musical sold out" published on Nov. 14. But the story was just not true.

Sorrows has presented student musicals in the past. In fact, it has even presented "The Wizard of Oz" in the past. I know because I was in the original production of "The Wizard of Oz" in 1973.

Our cast included Ellen Patton as Dorothy, Mike Scanlon as the scarecrow, Lynne Walshe as the cowardly lion, Mike Elwell as the gangly scarecrow, and Debbie Nymshack as the Wicked Witch of the West. One of Nymshack's sisters directed the play. I was the mayor of Munchkinland.

While I applaud the present production of "The Wizard of Oz," it's important to realize that many other Sorrows people did great things in the past, too. I guess history is just repeating itself.

Diane Hefness  
Farmington Hills

## Reprehensible attack

Your article in the Farmington Observer on Nov. 14 in which you characterized Mr. Andrew Raczowski as a nothing was mean-spirited, vicious, vehement and vitriolic.

Mr. Raczowski has been a fine state representative. He is also a captain in the U.S. Army Reserve and has a law degree. I can hardly characterize these accomplishments as a nothing. He is indeed a true American patriot.

Mr. Levin, on the other hand, voted against the Flag Amendment that would have made it illegal to desecrate our American flag. He also is an obstructionist in approving judges for the 6th Circuit Court.

I enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps at age 18 on April 7, 1942, and served in the Pacific campaign. I was also in the Marine Corps Reserve and recalled to active duty for the Korean War. The men I knew who served and died in both of these conflicts would take serious exception to Mr. Levin's jaundiced view that permits flag desecration as a means of protest. Frankly, Phil it is just plain sick.

In retrospect, your character assassination of Mr. Raczowski is indeed reprehensible, and I can only conclude that you are a pestiferous personification of persistent perversity.

George M. Kuzmanovich  
Farmington Hills

## Must-see concert

I'm always reading in this forum about concerts that were great - after they are over! I thought I'd share with you the concert that is the highlight of my Christmas season each year.

The Farmington Community Chorus gets better every time I see them and has the most amazing variety of music, from country to classical, pop to jazz to satisfy every taste. They have dancing, comedy, special acts, solos and the best choral sound around.

I highly recommend that you give yourself a gift you won't forget and see their holiday show. I've checked it out. They perform on Dec. 20 and 21 at Mercy High School Auditorium at 8 p.m. All tickets are \$10. You can call ahead at (810) 632-4057 or get them at the door.

Madeline Carlson

## Expand accountability

The Legislature is on the move to consolidate school elections with state/national elections. Farmington school officials are opposed, asking where is the problem with the status quo?

Start with the oft-cited \$20,000 township cost of the elections. Compare the 2,500 votes of a school election to the 35,000 votes of a state/national election.

How has Farmington been served by the insular focus of 2,500 votes?

Board elections are focused on energizing the parent cheerleader vote, those who see the Emperor's new clothes. Opposition is attacked as misguided or

malevolently motivated.

The bond issue originated on the premise of the redefinition of equity as equal, in part, with low voter turnout in mind. Rather than concentrating the money on the areas of greatest need, it was spread throughout the district. Compare our high schools to those attracting parents to other communities and the consequences of that tactic becomes clearer.

Annually, Farmington receives data that over 50 percent of its students at all levels fail to meet the state's minimum standards. School officials feel secure with their 2,500 cheerleaders to blame the test and revel in our 50 percent being better than others' 65 percent. Despite the data, curriculum, and talent to do better, we consistently leave children behind.

There are more problems. Expanding community accountability from 2,500 to 35,000 is one step in the right direction.

David L. York  
Farmington Hills

## True far right

It's good that your paper wrote an article discussing County Commissioner David Moffitt's principled stand during the most recent Oakland County Republican Convention.

I would like to point out that there were a good number of GOP activists from our two cities who were present that night. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of those people stood behind Commissioner Moffitt and the current GOP leadership in their efforts to prevent the county party from falling into the hands of some severe right-wing extremists from Troy and Rochester Hills.

Many of these same people are also members of the Farmington Area Republican Club. Where this is relevant is that I occasionally hear complaints in the community that the FARC is a band of far-right nobodies.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We represent the mainstream in our party, and the mainstream in our county. And a handful of your fellow citizens proved it that night by standing up to the extreme elements of the GOP.

Christopher Cummins  
Farmington Hills

## 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 nothing else, it was gratifying to have gone through that process."

— Former Farmington City Councilman Bill Hartsock, after being disqualified as a city manager candidate

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