

Parents picket at Middlebelt for lunches

By DIANE HUBEL

FARMINGTON — In an attempt to get the Farmington school district to change its lunch time policy, nearly 40 parents Monday were in front of Middlebelt school picketing.

The parents, who were picketing during the schools lunch hour were protesting a recent school board decision which requires all children who live within the square mile boundaries of main roads and who walk regularly to school, to return home for lunch.

The change in policy went into effect on Monday.

The Middlebelt parents, demonstrating sent their children to school with their lunches, and notes informing their teachers that the children were to stay in the building during the lunch hour.

The group had made arrangements to take the children to a nearby church lot for lunch if the school forced them to leave.

HOWEVER, Middlebelt principal Philip Townsend told the parents that the children who were sent to school with their lunches on Monday would be allowed to eat in the school.

"We are not going to put the children in the middle of this thing," Townsend said. "We do not want them going against their parents instructions. If their parents told them to stay, we will let them stay today. I guess from now on, we will just play it by ear. The main thing is that we just do not want the children to get involved."

The parents at Middlebelt said they are concerned about three factors involving the lunch hour policy: time, safety, and the fact that many of the mothers work and can not be home with their children at noon.

Many of them said it takes too long for the children, especially those who live in the outlying homes, to walk the distance in an hour, and still have time for lunch.

Mrs. Joe Alcantara, who has four children in school said, "It takes them 25 minutes just to get home and back, they won't have time to take off their coats and eat."

"Right now it is not too bad because the weather is nice, but what happens when it is raining or snowing. Last year the children used to come home at night freezing, now they have to do it at lunch time too. I am very disturbed about the decision, I think they are being very rough on the children."

Other parents are concerned about a pathway some of the children must use to get to school.

The pathway, they say is unsafe, because it leads into a ravine in a heavily wooded area, with no visibility from the homes in the subdivision.

In an open letter to the board of education the parents said, "The vehement opposition by many of the mothers to sending their children home for lunch stems from the fact that on more than one occasion small children have been sexually molested in the wooded area to the east of the school."

"As recent as April of this year, two small boys were sexually molested in these woods after school."

Immediately after this crime was committed, a warning letter was sent home to the parents, and classroom teachers warned the children not to go into these woods.

"Now, to our dismay, we find the school administration telling the parents that our children must walk through these woods four times a day."

THE PARENTS also said that the new policy discriminates against working mothers who, they say, are forced to find a place for their children to go during the lunch hour.

According to Townsend the school is making an exception to

the lunch policy for children whose mothers are the sole supporters of the family.

According to Mrs. Sally Howland, one of the mothers who organized the demonstration, the parents have suggested that the school utilize volunteers to help out in the lunch room, thereby eliminating the need for the noon aides.

However, at the last board meeting the board said the schools could not use volunteer help in the lunch rooms.

The board said it has been their experience in the past that volunteers were not always reliable and could not be counted on to show up every day.

The schools, the board said,

could not be put in the position of being responsible for unsupervised children during the lunch hour if the parents did not show up.

THE PICKETS demonstrated in front of Middlebelt for about two hours.

In addition to the mothers, and several pre-school children, there were also several fathers present.

Two of the fathers, Jerry Saad and Robert Ferguson said they took a few hours off from work to support the mothers in their demonstration.

Saad said he only lived a few blocks away, so the decision did not adversely affect his children, but was in front of the school Monday because he was sympathetic to

the position of the parents who were demonstrating.

Ferguson said he came to support his wife, who was walking in the picket line.

"This decision does not only upset and affect only the mothers," he said. "I think there would be a lot more fathers here, too if it were at a different time, but many of them can't get away from work."

The new policy was originally met with opposition from parents throughout the district.

However, according to Lawrence Freedman, assistant superintendent of schools, the demonstration at Middlebelt was the only major incident at the schools on the first day the new policy went into effect.

Board considers volunteers to aid during lunch hours

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take out that will not take away from the education of the children. With the rising costs of tuition for college and inflation, a 12th grade education may be the most many of our children can afford to get. We better make sure it is a good education."

OTHER PARENTS, however, were at the meeting to protest the decision.

Almost every group that spoke

mentioned the possibility of forming volunteer noon aide groups to watch the children.

"They were all concerned about the children walking long distances in bad weather, and the plight of working mothers, too."

Many of the groups presented petitions to the board, or mentioned that they were currently circulating petitions protesting the board's actions.

Mrs. Leah Brancheau, whose children attend Gill Elementary said, "Do children need extra

teachers for art, music, and elementary band, when they receive most of that instruction in their individual classrooms already? School property should be open to all children at lunch time."

JOHN BAILEY, who said he was representing 750 parents of children at Larkshire, said the parents were concerned about all the cuts the board had made, but were "unanimous in their outrage over the lunch program decision."

Bailey suggested that the board

alter the plan and require the junior high students to walk home rather than the younger ones.

Slonange Meselian, a parent of Eagle students said, "We are all most concerned about education."

However, our primary concern is for the health and welfare of our children. We are concerned about them walking four times a day, during the cold, wet weather."

If some of the children have to go home for lunch, all of the children should have to go home for lunch.

Hills volunteer firemen find job satisfying

By CRAIG NEWMAN

To every little child, a fire fighter is a super hero.

The small child dreams of sirens blaring as fire engines speed through the night.

But, as the boy grows up, his childhood hero may be just a man doing his job.

There are many stereotypes for firemen, but none of them seem to be completely true.

"Some people think we just race to fires, put them out and that's it," said William Gearhart, Farmington's Fire Chief for volunteer unit number three.

"Fire fighters are more than just meets the eye," he explained. "We don't only put out fires, we have to be part mechanic, engineer, drivers, public relations man, doctors and much more."

With only four volunteer fire stations serving Farmington and Farmington Hills, one would think it's response times would be lagging.

But, Chief Gearhart insisted. "Our response time is excellent. We have had fire fighters come out of Detroit's units and become truly amazed at our response."

The volunteers are dispatched through the police station when a call comes through. Gearhart said, "Basically, we have two ways of alerting our men in case of a fire."

Each man has a fire band monitor which is tuned to our particular fire channel and he can find out that way. Or, we can set off our air raid type alarm that almost anyone can hear."

Fire station three, located on Grand River and Wheeler Road, is the only fire station that is manned during the day in both cities.

The volunteer fire fighters not only are trained in fire prevention but also in resuscitation.

"Right now, we have a van which we use for our rescue work, but maybe, sometime in the future we will be able to get an emergency unit that is fully equipped."

The van holds stretchers, a resuscitator unit and first aid equipment, according to Gearhart.

"Not just anyone can be a fireman," he stressed, "you have got to make decisions that are fast and logical."

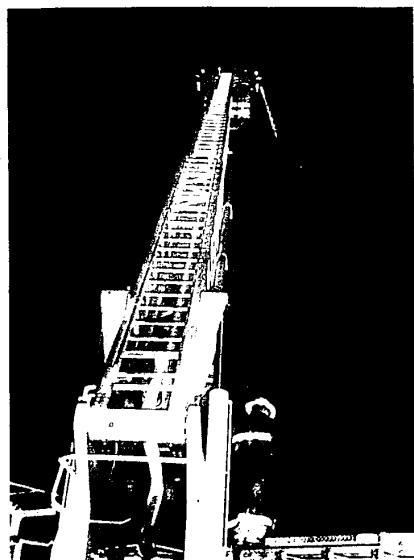
"But most of all, we are in business to help people who need it."



Chief William Gearhart at his desk



Volunteers work with a victim at a fire. (Evert photo)



A high-rise ladder truck is used.



Volunteers get some action.