

Farmington Observer

Volume 90 Number 36

Monday, February 19, 1979

Farmington, Michigan

36 Pages

Twenty-five cents

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Parents fight for dignity for mentally retarded

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Like other parents, Carol Jenkins and Pat LaBue are concerned over the future of their children.

But as parents of mentally retarded children, the concerns of the Farmington women center around the prospects of helping their offspring enjoy as normal and independent life as possible.

And they manage to temper their determination to achieve that goal with dignity and humor. Far from being martyrs to their children's cause, they fight for understanding and information through the Greater Farmington Association for Retarded Citizens.

The group draws its members from Farmington, Farmington Hills, South-

field, West Bloomfield, Birmingham, Novi and South Lyon.

Through the group, parents like the Jenkins and the LaBues promote the rights and dignity of mentally retarded persons.

Both Mrs. LaBue and Mrs. Jenkins don't have children who attend regular classes. Instead, when their teenage children were young, they found themselves fighting for classroom space.

BEFORE SPECIAL education became mandatory, parents of mentally retarded children usually kept them at home until the youngsters were about seven years old, according to the women.

Present programs are designed to

find the mentally handicapped child and begin educating him as soon as possible. But when Mrs. Jenkins son was young, the public school system made provisions for the retarded who were at least eight years old.

"We had to fight to get our kids into school," she recalled. "We had our son in a private school until he was eight."

Mrs. LaBue considers herself a little more fortunate. She was able to place her teenage daughter in school at age three after a California doctor diagnosed the daughter as epileptic.

"Otherwise, there was nothing until seven or eight," she said. Now they are concerned about what will happen to their son and daughter when they reach 25, the age at which

special education ceases to be mandatory.

"Our daughter is our only child and I worry about what will happen to her if something should happen to us," said Mrs. LaBue.

BOTH WOMEN ARE looking toward the day when their children can achieve an independent lifestyle through the community living centers, where adults live in an apartment setting with house parents to supervise activities.

The residents of community living centers hold down jobs while residing in the house or apartment.

Because mandatory special education requirements don't continue after

the person is 25, there are a small number of living centers and job opportunities for the mentally retarded, according to the women.

For this reason, they are trying to work through the Greater Farmington Association for Retarded Citizens to make persons aware of need.

They want to make sure that when their children need adult facilities, opportunities will be there. Mrs. Jenkins is president of the Farmington group.

In the meantime, they are using the group to help them cope with problems they face in raising their children.

Their main problem is "living harmoniously with our mentally impaired child," according to Mrs. LaBue.

But the problem of living with their

children is one they share with all parents.

ANOTHER GOAL they achieve with the group is one they don't share with other parents. Through the group, they trade information and are able to listen to experts tell them about services which are available for them and their children.

But their educable mentally retarded children want to achieve independence and are just beginning to realize they are different from others their age. That presents another problem for the parents.

"They want to be like the other kids in the neighborhood," said Mrs. Jenkins.

Bob Lanier: Superstar in residence

By MARY GNIEWEK

Bob Lanier, Farmington Hills' superstar in residence, is something of a gentle giant.

Next to his 6-foot-11, 255-pound frame, other Detroit Pistons are dwarfed by comparison. Despite his awesome physical and professional stature, Lanier is an unpretentious, easy-going man.

He was at a routine practice session last Thursday afternoon at St. Mary's Orchard Lake campus. Everyone was up for the occasion. It was the day after the Pistons broke a five-game losing streak by beating the Denver Nuggets, 111-107, at the Pontiac Silverdome.

Everyone but Lanier was on the court. Dressed in rust color corduroy trousers and a beige pullover sweater, he sat in the bleachers while his teammates exercised.

Lanier's latest injury, a badly bruised toe hurt in a game against New Jersey, had kept him out of action for a few days. He has also suffered chronic knee injuries and undergone surgery three times during his nine seasons with the Pistons.

The 30-year-old center, who averages 22 points a game and has played in seven NBA All-Star games, is still optimistic about his career. Under the right conditions, he believes he can play five more years and hopes it will be with the Pistons.

"I have no control over my future here," he said. "It's up to the man upstairs. He can make anything happen for the best. As soon as I can walk without pain, I'll be back."

SITTING ON THE sidelines, Lanier autographed a fistful of envelopes and glossy pictures of himself at the request of a Pistons employee. And while there have been rumors of discord between himself and Pistons coach Dick Vitale, Lanier spoke highly of the man who stood on the other side of the gym shouting his team into shape.

"This is an extremely good organization. The key is talent and the right chemistry between players. In time, we will be a formidable force. With Dick's talent, we are getting there."

"I met Dick when I was in high school. He was a camp counselor Lanier.

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Pistons star Bob Lanier at a recent practice. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)

Kids pitch their lunches, load up on junk food

BY SHERRY KAHAN

"I've watched students get off the bus, take their nice brown bag lunch and drop it in the nearest container. Then they go to the nearest candy machine for their breakfast. They don't buy one bar, they buy two or three."

As a janitor at Stevenson's High School in Livonia, Eva Mesh found these eating habits hard to take. She wanted to tell someone about the substitution of junk foods for good food brought from home.

That was why she was seated in the first row at the hearings on non-nourishing foods sponsored by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She was hoping to tell her story directly to Carol Foreman, assistant secretary of agriculture, who sat in front of her on the platform together with several aides.

Testimony had been invited by the department on whether it should restrict the sale of candy, pop, frozen desserts and gum in schools taking part in the national school lunch program.

They are labeled by the department competitive foods. They can compete with the nutritious Type A meals subsidized by \$3.2 billion in federal funds. Under the department's proposed regulation last April, these items could be sold after the last lunch period.

BUT MRS. MESH had been late in signing up to speak. More than 80 parents, educators, administrators and representatives of the soft drink and vending machines industries were there ahead of her. But while waiting for the event to start, Mrs. Mesh had a story to tell to underline her point about junk foods.

A Stevenson girl once approached her to ask for help. She had thrown away her lunch without remembering that her wallet was in the bottom of the bag. With Mrs. Mesh she went to the trash container and together they opened every lunch that had been tossed away so cavalierly. The girl's lunch was at the bottom.

The experience was a real mind-boggler to Mrs. Mesh. "You can't believe the waste," she said. "All those oranges, apples, carrots, celery, ham and roast beef sandwiches thrown away. They even

threw away money that was in the bottoms of the bag. We found about \$5. "Every now and then some of the students will tell me they have a headache. I ask them what they had for lunch and they tell me it was a candy

bar. And they wonder why they are sick."

THE HEARING PROVED to be an emotional battle between the sweet and anti-sweet partisans, who applauded for the speakers who agreed with their thinking.

On the other hand, spokesmen for the soft drink industry questioned the right of the federal government to butt in on the issue. Calling pop "a pure and wholesome beverage," Douglas Graham of the Michigan Soft Drink Association, said a ban on soft drinks would be discrimination. "There is no valid research showing soft drinks are harmful if consumed moderately," he added.

A Livonia dentist, Dr. Michael Weisenfeld, had a differing opinion. "We know sugars are harmful to health," he maintained. "They cause tooth decay and gum disease. We also know that the more frequently a person eats sweets, the more rapid the decay." In an interview after the hearing, he said soft drink representatives approached him after his testimony and questioned him about the medical evi-

dence on sugar. He told them there is scientific proof that any sugar taken in from a soft drink stays in the mouth a long time.

"The sugar is converted into acid by bacteria," he said, "and we can measure for a long period of time the decay caused by the bacteria."

In his testimony, Weisenfeld, president of the Detroit District Dental Society, noted that the American Dental Society is so concerned about harm to the teeth caused by sugar that it is actively striving to have pictures and references to confections deleted from textbooks.

ANOTHER POINT made by soft drink representatives was that depriving students of pop meant they were being deprived of their right to learn to make their own choices.

Esther Shapiro, director of Detroit's Consumer Affairs Department, found fault with this kind of thinking. If given the right to make all their own choices, students would ask for marijuana and contraceptives in vending machines.

To which Maryanne Mahaffey, president of the Detroit City Council, added another point. Students are not given free choice of curriculum.

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Janice Rolnick, a member of Farmington Board of Education, was a featured speaker in a hearing sponsored by the U. S. Department of Agriculture. She is a long-time enemy of junk food who has taken a stand to ban such items from school cafeterias.

Agendas posted

FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 19

Five public hearings are slated.

• Cost hearing for sanitary sewer improvement on Sans Souci from Middlebelt to the westerly terminus of Sans Souci.

• Introductory ordinance requesting the rezoning of Freedom and Power from RA-3 (single family) to RC-3 (multiple family use).

• Introductory ordinance requesting the rezoning of the west side of Halsted south of Nine Mile from RA-1 to B-1 (business service use).

• Introductory ordinance requesting the rezoning of 38640 Nine Mile from C RA-3 to RC-2.

• Introductory ordinance requesting the rezoning of lot 61, West Hill Woods, on Lamar from RA-3 to RC-2 Unfinished business.

• Consider introduction of amending an ordinance regarding subdivision of land - chapter 61 of the city code (division of unplatted land) NEW BUSINESS.

• Setting a date for a cost hearing for sewer improvement in the Old Homestead subdivision.

• Setting a date for a necessary hearing for water sewer improvement along Haggerty north of Eight Mile to Nine and one half Mile.

• Consideration of transferring quarterly receipts from major road to local road funds - \$45,359.

inside

Suburban Life Sports Classified The Inside Angle Community Calendar Monday's Commentary NEWSROOM CLASSIFIED LINE	Section B Section C Sections C,D 3A 8B 11B 477-5450 591-0900
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IT'S OUR MOVE

Drop by and see us sometime - we're right in the center of things. That's how the staff of the Farmington Observer feels about their new office at 23352 Farmington Road, just south of Grand River, in downtown Farmington. Our new phone number is 477-5450.