

Opinion

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City drops ball in naming park

IT'S A decision worth reconsidering. Supporting a Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission recommendation, the city council Monday decided against naming the new youth athletic fields northwest of 13 Mile and Farmington roads after an individual.

The commission, appointed by the council, and the council, elected by the public, have every right to vote their conscience.

But their logic in deciding against naming the fields after Jim Ellis — a man who did more for youth athletics in Farmington Hills than anyone — is creaky at best.

When voters approved a special park tax last June, the parks and recreation commission led them to believe the newly acquired land at 13 Mile and Farmington roads would become a park geared to youth although not their exclusive domain.

AFTER GAINING community opinion, the good-hearted parks and rec folks recommended naming the 15-acre site Pioneer Youth Park. They also recommended naming playing sites in honor of or in memory of worthy people.

Monday, the city council pared the name to Pioneer Park. The name no doubt will be easy to remember. And it plays on the history theme established when the 212-acre Spicer property was named Heritage Park last year.

But it lacks the human spirit a name like Ellis Sports Park would bring. Park names reveal much about a community's values.

When Hills resident Bev Ellis last year suggested such a name in memory of her late husband, some park commissioners had never heard of Jim Ellis. Many never people in the community hadn't either, including yours truly.

But as the Observer reminded last fall, there's plenty of background material that punctuates just how deeply the

Interest in schools: It's clearly overdue

IT WILL be a pleasure to have company at Tuesday's school board meeting.

Of course, a few loyal staff members and residents usually come to watch the board of education make million-dollar decisions.

It's the new faces that will be particularly welcome.

Deputy superintendent Michael Flanagan has called the district, with its \$32 million budget, one of this area's largest businesses. He's right.

Until an issue raises the dander of residents, most are content to make better use of their Tuesday nights, letting their elected officials make all the decisions. Attending school board meetings is not at the top of most residents' "favorite activity" list.

Next Tuesday will be different as parents, staff and residents interested in preschool education listen to proposals for the future of kindergartens. The meeting has been moved to Fairview Early Childhood Center to accommodate the several hundred people expected to attend.

THE INVOLVED parents say they want this momentum to continue on other issues. They want to have a say in how the future leaders of our country are educated — from preschool all the way through high school and beyond.

I hope there are hundreds of other parents — and residents without children — who want a say in future school policy making. People like Elizabeth Lurie and Roxanne Fitzpatrick have made such feelings known.

Working independently, both women have called residents of the Farmington school district to action.

Both advocate some type of political, active community council, representing each school building, that could add another dimension to running the school system.



Bob Sklar

35-year resident gave a darn about this community and its greatest resource — its kids.

GRANTED, COUNTLESS residents have donated time and energy on Farmington Hills' behalf. Citywide memorials can't be handed out like community service plaques.

But there can — and should be — such memorials when contributions are unusually lasting and significant.

If asked to name someone with a more diverse record of youth-oriented service than Jim Ellis, you'd no doubt be dumbfounded — and with good reason.

This giant of a humanitarian helped organize the area's first youth baseball and football leagues. He organized Farmington High's athletic booster club. For many years, he headed up the Farmington Rotary Club's vocational scholarship program. In 1981, he was district chairman of Rotary International's Youth Exchange Program.

Farmington DeMolay, Farmington Youth for Understanding, Boys Republic, Farmington Public Schools — all have Jim Ellis' imprint.

EVEN AFTER discovering he had cancer, Ellis battled courageously, humbling many along the way. He embodied the kind of person a city should be proud to name a youth-oriented park after.

Ellis Football Field has a nice ring. But Ellis Sports Park has an even nicer ring.

How about it, Mayor Marks? How about it, council members?



Casey Hans

Lurie represents Parents for Open Communication, which submitted a detailed plan to board members last April.

Although a community relations subcommittee of the board is studying her proposal, she is getting impatient.

TRUSTEE JANICE Rochnik, who actively supports the concept, has raised the issue several times at public meetings, but the idea grinds along slowly.

Fitzpatrick, a local Parent/Teacher Association activist and current president of the Farmington Area PTA Council, wants her group to do more than serve cookies and coffee.

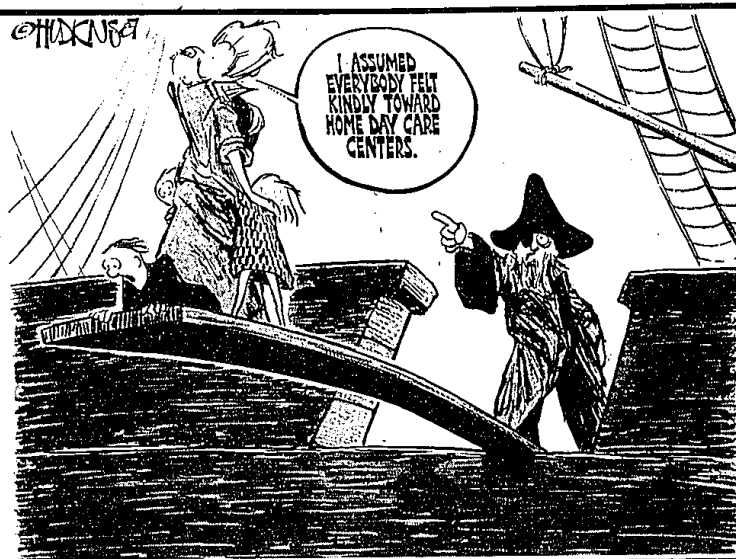
It's time their demands are met. Parents and other interested parties must organize and take an active role in school policy making — not just in Farmington, but throughout the country.

The Farmington school board is doing all it can to represent effectively the children through the school system. Trustees are trying to efficiently run the district with what feedback and information they have.

They need more. Each person who has ever disagreed with a board decision, or has a better idea, must speak up and be heard.

Perhaps kindergarten parents are the ones to spark the fire. They will follow their children through the school system with a sincere caring about our future leaders — their children.

We should all care — and be ready to invest time in our future.



In praise of bilingualism

A COLLEAGUE of mine here at the newspaper, a Mexican-American, tells some disheartening stories of what it is like to be a Latino in a gringo world.

I wish Birmingham's U.S. Rep. William Broomfield could talk to my friend. Maybe he would understand better why he is making a mistake in introducing an amendment that would prohibit Spanish from being adopted as this country's second language.

Being stopped for a minor traffic violation often threatens to end in major ethnic confrontation. Store clerks often watch closely as he looks over the merchandise. The air of discrimination always is lurking in the background.

He laughs when telling the stories. But the tone in his voice says the wound never quite heals.

"You own this car?" says the cop.

"Yes, sir."

"What year is it?"

"1980."

"When did you buy it?"

"1980."

"You mean to tell me you bought this car new?"

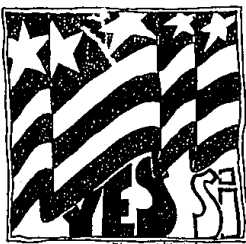
"Yes, sir. Would you like to see the registration?"

"I'm the one asking the questions here."

"Yes, sir."

"Let me see your registration . . ."

My friend, the Mexican-American, resents that because of the color of his



skin and Spanish accent he is treated rudely.

My friend is known for his politeness and never is rude to anyone, even to those who are discourteous to him because they fear his ethnicity.

PERHAPS HE KNOWS some things that folks like Broomfield should realize.

We live in a hemisphere where the majority of people share the same religious belief, similar culture and speak Spanish.

That's potent stuff. Perhaps he knows that by the year



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

2000, U.S. Hispanics will number 30 million — the largest and one of the most economically affluent groups in this country. Today most of the 18.9 million U.S. Hispanics live in states with large numbers of electoral votes — California, Florida, Illinois, New York and Texas.

That's power.

Perhaps he knows that in the last 20 years U.S. Hispanic-owned businesses have increased from 100,000 to 400,000 and that in the next decade Hispanic elected officials will double to 3,200.

We should take a lesson from our neighbors to the north who recently adopted bilingualism as a way of life. After decades of battling each other, French- and English-speaking Canadians are uniting to build a stronger country.

We can avoid the struggle and turmoil now by adopting Spanish as America's second language. And we'll be a stronger country for it.

General 'catches my fancy'

WHEN I BROKE out with a case of "Haig fever" last week, I sent me scurrying to Ann Arbor — not to a hospital for an allergy injection but rather to the Gerald R. Ford Library to see what Al Haig looks and sounds like close up.

If that seems too informal a way to refer to Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., who lists supreme allied commander in Europe, chief of staff and secretary of state among former titles, it's because you don't realize how close my mission carried me. Neither did he until I told him two days later.

Just because I searched out this one potential candidate for the presidency of the United States for eyeballing doesn't mean I intend to do the same with the whole lot as they pass the hat among us. But the general catches my fancy and has ever since the day Ronald Reagan was shot in 1981 and Haig seemed so ready to step into the breach.

WHAT'S MORE, I needed fodder for a column.

Here was one of our most prominent citizens on his way to address the Oakland County Republican Lincoln Day Dinner and who, two days earlier, would pause 30 minutes from my home for the television taping of a discussion with such figures as former President Ford Meese, Sen. Alan Cranston, former CIA director Stansfield Turner, commenta-

tors Sam Donaldson and Dan Rather, and the president of Yale University, among others.

The same character who coined the line about newspapermen meeting such interesting people probably is to blame for the theory that folks walk in where angels fear to tread. Anyway, I thought to myself, what the hell, why not?

The Ford Library is a new structure on the north campus of the University of Michigan and I had to ask instructions. Also, I was late, overlooked the proper entrance and walked in through a back door.

IT LED DIRECTLY onto a set where six TV cameras were focused upon a horseshoe-shaped table at which were comfortably seated some of the most important thought-shapers of the free world.

For the rest of the morning, fortunately out of camera range, I quietly shared space with a potted palm and a couple of couldn't-care-less TV guys, within first down distance of the back of Jerry Ford's head and with profile views of the others.

Although I'm happy I apparently don't look like an assassin, I was amazed at the ease of access and at not being stopped, queried and perhaps checked for weapons. At the Kingsley Inn when I told the experience to Haig, he verified what I already had found to



through bifocals
Fred DeLano

be a fine sense of humor when he joked, "Maybe the laxness you describe suggests it was a roomful of has-beens."

Pat Wierzbicki of the Oakland County Republican staff tells me that the attendance of about 850 at Saturday evening's Lincoln banquet was the second largest in the 98 years these rah-rah GOP feasts have been held.

Slim and trim in a well-tailored pin-stripe suit, Haig was not the bombastic, long-winded orator some may have expected. He spoke in a positive, upbeat manner for about 20 minutes, much of it about what he calls the "renaissance of American spirit" during the Reagan years.

When we came face to face, he didn't prove quite as tall a man as I had envisioned, nor was he a haughty know-it-all. If he's power hungry, he shields it.

I feel he would be a fantastically stimulating all-night conversationalist in a group before a glowing fire. But I'd hate to be his rival in a poker game.