

Reflecting on the Rotunda trip

David Litogot teaches elementary school history in the Farmington Public Schools. He is a member of the Farmington Historical Society.

By David Litogot
Special writer

footprints in history

This time of year has always been special to me: colored lights, music, festive songs. Nevertheless, as an adult, I reflect back to a time in my youth when this season meant a special trip to the Ford Rotunda in Dearborn.

Newcomers to the area are, unfortunately, not familiar with that popular tourist attraction that sat on the corner of Rotunda Drive and Schaeffer. The Rotunda drew thousands of spectators year-round from 1926 to 1982. At this time of year, it was, in my mind, a truly magical place. There were hundreds of changing lights, special displays, and, of course, Santa Claus.

The 12-story high, gear-shaped,

Christmas display.

THE ROTUNDA was especially dear to our family because my grandfather was the building's first stationary engineer. When he retired in 1958, he was proud indeed to work in such a beautiful building. It was a sad day for him and the millions of people who witnessed the beauty of the Rotunda when it burned down the afternoon of Nov. 9, 1982.

The fire started on the roof which was being repaired with hot tar. Somehow through the propane heaters and the hot tar being spread on the roof, a fire began that moved quickly through the structure. Sheets of flame shot over a hundred feet in the air. Thick, black smoke was seen for miles. Virtually every piece of firefighting apparatus in Dearborn

was used to fight one of the largest fires in that city's history.

The fire devoured a false ceiling in the main building and spread behind the walls. Fortunately, no one was seriously hurt and the wing with the Ford Archives was saved from damage. In that wing were millions of documents and pictures pertaining to the Ford family and the Ford Motor Co.

In 40 minutes, the interior of the main building was destroyed. Huge blocks of limestone that covered the Rotunda tumbled inward to form a huge heap of burning rubble. A Detroit News reporter wrote that the "Queen of the Ford Empire" died that day.

AS THE smoke cleared away, the memory of the large Christmas tree with the huge ornaments, the new cars, the model city, and the beautiful lights still persisted.

After the 1964-65 World's Fair in New York City, there was hope that the Ford Motor Co. would move its large circular display building to Dearborn and the world would have a new Rotunda. But the cost of such a move was more than the company was willing to spend.

Gene are vivid memories of the Christmas fantasy, the free comic books, model cars and key chains. Gene are sights of the colored lights, the giant ornaments on the Christmas tree and the huge ramp that Santa sat atop. Gene are the futuristic displays, the new cars, and the merris.

Gene is one of the greatest free tourist attractions in Michigan. Fortunately I still have the memories (and a keychain).

campus pipeline

If you have news from a college, university or other campus of higher education — and there's a Farmington-area connection — we'd like to hear from you so we can share your news item with other Farmington Observer readers. Send items to: Campus Pipeline, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River, Farmington 48024.

NEW PLEDGES
Maureen Amrhein of Farmington

Hills pledged the Alpha Gamma chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha. She is a sophomore majoring in psychology at the University of Michigan.

Melissa Davis of Farmington pledged the Alpha Gamma chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha. She is a freshman at the University of Michigan.

Kristen Oswald of Farmington Hills pledged the Alpha Gamma chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha. She is a

sophomore majoring in business administration at the University of Michigan.

Renee Thibodeau of Farmington Hills pledged the Alpha Gamma chapter of Zeta Tau Alpha. She is a sophomore majoring in nursing at the University of Michigan.

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CITY OF FARMINGTON COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS (Summary)

A regular meeting of the Farmington City Council was called to order by Mayor Tupper at 8:00 p.m. on January 9, 1989, in Council Chambers, 23600 Liberty Street, Farmington, Michigan.

PRESENT: Campbell, Hartsock, Tupper.
ABSENT: Richardson, Yoder.

OTHERS PRESENT: City Manager Deadman, Director Lauboff, Director Billings, Adm. Assistant Schultz, City Clerk Busby.

Minutes of the previous meeting of December 10, 1988, were approved as written.

Minutes of other Boards were received and/or filed.

Council agreed to select citizens for the Farmington Hills' "Year 2000 Plan" task forces in the near future.

Council opposed S. B. 687 relative to child care facilities.

Council issued the following proclamation:

FARMINGTON AREA JAYCEE WEEK - January 15-21, 1989;
JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT WEEK - January 23-27, 1989.

Council established a Public Hearing for 8:00 p.m. on February 6, 1989, to review the 1988 Sidewalk Program Special Assessment Roll.

Council was informed of the DNR's recently issued drafts for the new combined sewer overflow permits.

Public comments were heard.

Council appointed Jane Malar to fill the unexpired term of John Donohue on the Board of Review.

Council received the General Fund and 47th District Court financial reports for the five months ended November 30, 1988.

Monthly bills were approved for payment.

Meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

RICHARD L. TUPPER, Mayor
JOSEPHINE M. BUSHEY, City Clerk

Published January 12, 1989

CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS EMPLOYEE AWARDS CEREMONY AND REGULAR CITY COUNCIL MEETING JANUARY 9, 1989

Mayor Soronen opened the Employee Awards Ceremony/Regular Meeting of the Farmington Hills City Council on January 9, 1989 at 7:34 p.m. Members present: Mayor Sever, Mayor Pro-Tem Fox, Atkatech, Arnold, Marks, Soronen, and Vagnotz. Others present: City Manager Costick, City Clerk Dorman, Assistant City Manager Call, Director of Public Services Biassoli, and City Attorney Bibeau.

Council approved the Agenda and Consent Agenda, as published.

Formal passing of the gavel to Incoming Mayor Terry Sever.

Mayor Sever proclaimed the week of January 15-21, 1989 as Jaycee Week and the week of January 23-27, 1989 as Junior Achievement Week.

Presentation of Employee Awards.

Council postponed Enforcement of Tree Ordinance to meeting of January 16, 1989.

Council approved appointments of task force members for the Year 2000 Project and appointed Lawrence Lichtman to the Planning Commission, Karen Hoss and Dara Tolbert to the Commission on Aging, and Peggy DePont to the Zoning Board of Appeals.

Council established special assessment district for sanitary sewer improvement for Hollister Road (from 660 ft. north of 12 Mile to 1,188 ft. north of 12 Mile) and set January 23, 1989 for the public hearing date.

Council approved request for employment under Article X, Section 10.01A of the City Charter.

Council denied requests by Burton-Charest Company and P.M.F. Corp. for new entertainment permits.

Council approved purchase of Firearms Training System II in the amount of \$16,446.13.

Council approved the minutes of December 12 and December 10, 1988, as published.

Council authorized increase in per meeting pay to members of Zoning Board of Appeals.

Meeting adjourned at 10:20 p.m.

TERRY SEVER, Mayor
KATHRYN A. DORNAN, City Clerk

Published January 12, 1989

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