

Opinion

33203 Grand River/Farmington, MI 48024 Bob Sklar editor / 477-5450

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Older folks Their will to learn still strong

IT'S AN acceptable compromise. The older folks who call the Farmington area's 12 retirement complexes home will have the chance to take high school completion courses at the Farmington Community School and academic and enrichment classes on site.

Farmington Public Schools' decision to move free high school completion courses out of the retirement complexes didn't come easy.

The intent wasn't "to rip the diploma out of some seniors' hands," as one upset adult education teacher put it.

The net effect will be greater variety of on-site academic and enrichment offerings, from humanities to fitness, including one free class per semester at each site. The per-person fee for additional classes will be \$8 — a third of what other community ed students pay.

Acting Superintendent Michael Flanagan, throbbed by their impassioned plea to keep high school completion courses in their retirement complexes, told a group of anxious seniors last week: "We do appreciate very much what you've done for us and the kind of country you've built for us."

To underscore that appreciation, the school district will hire a part-time person to coordinate the still-vibrant educational needs of our golden generation.

SENIORS WITH walkers or wheelchairs say they're too frail to go to Farmington Community School in pursuit of a high school diploma.

Others lack transportation. Vans at most retirement complexes carry 11 passengers but academic enrollment at some sites has been 25.

To ease these worries, a top priority for the new community ed senior citizens coordinator will be to enlist volunteer drivers, says Pam O'Malley, school/community relations director.

"We like the idea, even though only time will tell how well it works. We remind that vans that accommodate wheelchairs are a must."

"We can appreciate that some seniors are wary

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of going to a "strange building" and "mixing with the younger generation."

But O'Malley vows to make the transition "as easy as possible." And we trust she will. She not only has scheduled tours of that "strange building" but also individual counseling sessions.

FARMINGTON CENTRALIZED its high school completion courses because of a state crackdown to assure state funding standards are met. The state has told districts or consortiums expecting reimbursement to centralize such courses or risk losing state funding.

In the past, Farmington was part of a consortium in which Clarenceville Schools acted as the fiscal agent for the adult education program.

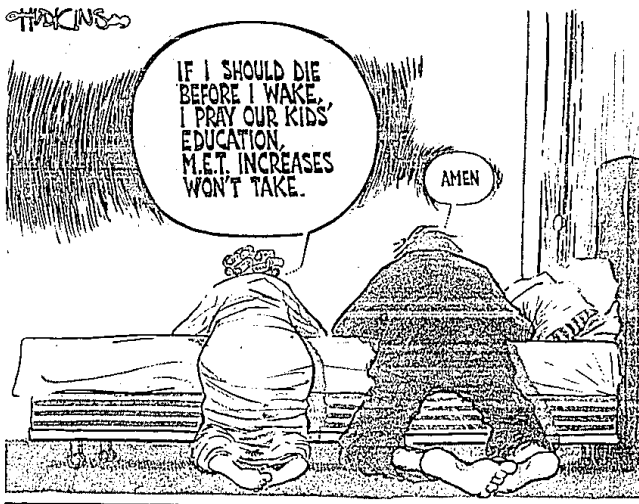
Clarenceville then was an in-formula school district, which, under state law, could collect state reimbursement for the program.

As of July 1, Clarenceville went out-of-formula and could no longer be that fiscal agent.

So Farmington, long out of formula, signed a contract with Huron Valley Schools. But its adult ed program requires high school completion courses to be centralized, in deference to the state crackdown.

What's the lure of high school completion courses in Farmington, which averages two graduates a year? For some, it's the goal of a high school diploma. For others, it's the mental stimulation. For many, it's just a way to keep up to date.

As changes evolve in educational offerings for our community's ever-growing senior population, the school district must never forget the touching message of Marion Conklin, who lives at Mariner Oakland-West: "We really enjoy learning. We don't ever want to stop learning."



Assessment program: indeed a new land use

IS THE new assessment program at Boys Republic a new, expanded use of the land — and thus prohibited without board of zoning appeals approval?

A medium-secure temporary home for juvenile offenders ages 12-17, Boys Republic has been north-west of Nine Mile and Inkster since the '20s.

Because it pre-dates Farmington Hills' zoning ordinance, the private, non-profit, social service agency can continue to operate as long as its use of the wooded, 80-acre site doesn't change.

After touring the grounds, I'm convinced the assessment program indeed represents a new, expanded use of the land.

The assessment program, in combination with increased staff and renovated housing units, has yielded tighter security. In turn, curtailing truancy and making the neighborhood safer, campus officials say.

In exchange for improving security, the state, strapped for beds for delinquents, will continue to send more boys to Boys Republic. As part of a one-year contract, the facility will receive a much-higher daily payback to help pay off a \$1 million mortgage taken for security improvements.



Bob Sklar

THE STATE Department of Social Services insists that renovation of the state placed at Boys Republic for short-term assessment are no more dangerous than those already there for long-term treatment.

But consider:

• Yes, assessment program boys undergo pre-assessment screening to establish potential risk. Still, common sense dictates that risk can't be fully known until after the assessment, otherwise the program wouldn't require "mini prison" security measures.

• The two assessment buildings are fully secure, including locked bedrooms at night. In contrast, the third building, for boys in the treatment program, will have improved perimeter security but bedrooms won't be locked at night.

• Assessment program boys can't leave the "lockup" during their 30-

day stay. Treatment program boys will continue to have supervised community access.

• Basketball courts attached to the assessment buildings are ringed by 18-foot-high fences. Treatment program boys use unfenced campus courts.

THE DSS and Boys Republic were downright wrong in not publicizing the assessment program when describing renovation hopes last December.

Meanwhile, Mayor Terry Sever and City Manager William Costick stumbled badly in not pressing for specifics when Boys Republic later unveiled its first major renovation in 33 years.

It may be too late to have the BZA consider if the assessment program, in operation since July, is a new, expanded use of the land. Frankly, Farmington Hills may have no recourse but to negotiate a consent judgment so it at least can limit the kinds of offenders housed at Boys Republic, smack in the heart of quiet neighborhood.

In my mind, a guarantee shaped in court carries much more impact than one simply written into a contract.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Smart move DSO aid is money well spent

APPLAUSE to the Michigan Legislature and Gov. James Blanchard for approving a \$1 million supplemental appropriation to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in its time of turnaround.

With many worthy causes grasping for very little loose cash, state government has added to the \$2.5 million it already had voted the debt-plagued DSO.

It was an enlightened decision under the circumstances. The DSO is more than a rich folks' form of entertainment in downtown Detroit. It is all of Michigan's symphony orchestra, an asset to the entire state.

CONSIDER:

• In May the DSO played in Lansing, and in October it will perform in Ann Arbor and Muskegon.

• During the summer, it played free concerts in Kensington, Willow and Metro Beach metro-parks.

• It also played a regular summer series at Meadow Brook on the Oakland University campus near Rochester.

• DSO this summer brought a rare form of music to the Upper Peninsula towns of Calumet, Escanaba, Ironwood, Iron Mountain, Marquette and Sault Ste. Marie.

• In November, it will visit a number of suburban high schools — Churchill in Livonia, Harrison in Farmington Hills, Pontiac Central, Utica Stevenson and Lakeshore in St. Clair Shores.

• In the spring of 1990, audiences in Alpena, Adrian, Flint and Kalamazoo will hear Michigan's symphony orchestra.

At the risk of overemphasizing money, we add that DSO's tours of international capitals and fine recordings bring favorable attention to this battered old town in the world economy.

Those are DSO's contributions as a unit.

THE 98 MUSICIANS make other contributions to the quality of life in the suburbs, where most of them live.

Many provide first chair leadership in community orchestras, working side by side with amateur and student musicians. Often they are called upon as soloists with local orchestras.

They teach, privately and in universities. In other words, if Michigan's symphony orchestra were allowed to disintegrate and the musicians to move elsewhere, the cultural loss would be far-reaching.

DSO has a civic orchestra that trains young professionals from the metropolitan area. This orchestra is in the process of expanding its sea-

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sonal offerings from three to nine.

Four weekend young people's concerts are also on tap.

Detroit, where musical education may die for elementary and junior high kids, still is able to send busloads of classes to hear educational concerts. Some of the close-in suburbs take advantage of these concerts, too.

SOMEHOW, BETWEEN the recession of 1979-83, management mistakes and Detroit politics, DSO accumulated a deficit of \$18 million. New management, headed by chairman Robert S. (Steve) Miller and executive director Deborah Borda, has been joined by the musicians' union in turning Michigan's symphony around.

Already we are seeing better budgeting and better promotion.

The union took economic cuts of \$5,000 per person per year. In a little-publicized change, the union agreed to a 50-mile extension of the distance it will travel before a trip is considered an overnighner. That means the musicians realize they're part of a Michigan symphony orchestra.

So we applaud the state for its added \$1 million of faith in Michigan's orchestra. As Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said: "Taxes are what we pay for civilized society." (275 U.S. 87, 100)

At the same time, we agree with the state's view that corporations and individual donors ought to cough up two-thirds of what is needed to set DSO's affairs in order and to build up an endowment fund. This isn't Europe, where they have state-funded orchestras. The U.S. and Michigan are too culturally diverse to justify the state's picking up the lion's share of the DSO burden.

It's up to the rest of us to follow state government's, the management's, and the musicians' lead in polishing Michigan's symphonic jewel.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Keep reins on density

To the editor:
At the Farmington Hills Planning Commission meeting on March 3, 1988, concerning numerous proposed zoning changes, residents from all areas of the city spoke up about their concerns on density.

As an aftermath of the June 21, 1989, flood, many affected residents also re-echoed concerns about not increasing density until inadequacies of our drainage and sewage systems were corrected.

Therefore, due to the inadequacies of our drainage system, it would truly benefit the residents if a conservative increase concerning additional density was applied until the capacity and quality of sewers, drainage, etc., was corrected.

Leslia Hempel, Farmington Hills

Help stop runaways

To the editor:
The plight of the runaways and homeless youth is a very serious social problem, one that is so sad that it hurts.

The time has come for our society to work on it. Find out why so many teens and parents cannot communicate and

live in the same city. Find out what it would take to save our families. Our own city, Farmington Hills, has a project called 2000. Our city, if it is to have a fruitful future, must rely on its youth.

Living on the streets, like many adults, is not the place to be. Some who do so will end up in jail, dead, selling drugs, in a shelter for youths, as prostitutes.

Let us not give up on our youth for we may give up on our future as well.

Vernon C. Kielpinski, Farmington Hills

Library story appreciated

To the editor:
I'd like to express my thanks to the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and especially to Phillip Sherman for writing an excellent article about this library (Aug. 10).

It is often difficult for non-profit agencies to receive good publicity, regardless of the quality of services that may be provided. Your newspaper has always been supportive of this library and the important services we provide to our patrons. A large portion of my time is spent on attempting to spread the word about these wonderful library services that are available throughout the United States.

Phillip Sherman was professional and personable in his search for in-

formation. I am amazed at the amount of information he absorbed during our short interview.

Randy Bora's excellent photographs are the icing on the cake!

Thank you for providing Oakland County with accurate and important information. I have watched the growth and development of your newspapers over the years. You cover a wide variety of materials with exceptional spirit and enthusiasm.

Carole Head, head librarian, Oakland County Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped Farmington Hills

Library gets high praise

To the editor:
We would like to express our appreciation for the fine children's programs at the Farmington Community Library.

Most recently, the "Reach for the Stars" summer reading program was a great way to encourage out-of-school reading.

Thanks are also due to the generous people at Burger King (29206 Orchard Lake, Farmington Hills) and Little Professor Books (37115 Grand River, Farmington) for their involvement and for providing rewards that the kids (and the moms) enjoyed.

Jan, Trevor, Stephanie Clarke, Farmington Hills

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