

Opinion

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Mentorships

They're needed in the 1990s

ANYONE WHO runs a business in Farmington or the Farmington Hills should listen up. The Farmington school district is interested in becoming business partners with you in a very special kind of way — a way that'll benefit our most valued resource, our kids.

In an unabashed plea at the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce-hosted State of the Cities breakfast last week, Superintendent Mike Flanagan said "adopt-a-school" programs aren't the answer. Mentorships — which go a step farther than the popular work-study co-op programs — are.

And he agrees — enthusiastically! As Flanagan, a rising star in the ever-changing world of education, frankly told local leaders: "We have kids in our community who need mentors. We have kids who need to understand what career choices there are for them."

He issued this challenge: "If you're willing, on an informal or a formal basis, help us work on that. I think you can make a tremendous contribution."

And he's right. When kids see a city manager, banker, merchant or reporter at work — when they can relate to people in the workplace — they better understand what roles they can achieve.

You betcha, that result is far more beneficial than an "adopt a school" program, where the funding tends to slow when the novelty fades.

FARMINGTON SCHOOLS, unquestionably, are a business — a big business with 1,800 employees, 30 buildings and a \$89 million budget. But its real business is educating 11,000 students. And chamber of commerce members can be on the cutting edge of that through mentorships, in which businesses "adopt a student" and provide personalized, on-the-job training.

We at the Observer have dabbled in that through the years, informally taking high school students under our wing to show them around the newsroom and introducing them to news gathering and photo processing.

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When Flanagan talks about the brain race our nation faces, he's not kidding. Movers and shakers of the local business scene would be doing their bottom line a favor by heeding his message.

"How are we going to make sure our kids are not on drugs and instead becoming productive members of this democracy? We're in a situation where the rest of the world is just exploding with democracy and freedom. We've got to make sure we're not sitting back taking our own for granted."

LIKE FLANAGAN says, "When it really gets to it, it doesn't matter what ingredients we put into a school, what matters is what comes out." In that spirit, Farmington schools — recognizing our nation's future is at stake — have reinforced their pledge to assure diplomas not only have been earned but also mean something to employers.

A diploma doesn't mean much when the holder can't adapt quickly in our hotly competitive world. Developing our nation's talent pool to its fullest starts with a well-educated citizenry.

We urge Farmington business leaders who want to repay the community for its support to try something new — and "adopt a student" through a personal mentorship, not merely a careers talk.

Earth Day

Cleanup must begin at home

EARTH DAY is coming. That means we will be reading and hearing plenty about such environmental issues as preservation of the Brazilian rain forest, elimination of chloro-fluorocarbons (CFCs) and prevention of environment-ravaging oil spills. All of these are issues of global importance.

What must be remembered, however, is that cleaning the world also means cleaning our own back yard.

We, in southeast Michigan, are no different from other Americans — or from other citizens from other nations. For too long, we've paid too little attention to the world around us. That must change.

IN MANY ways, change is already evident. But nagging environmental problems persist:

- It's encouraging that individuals from many southeastern Michigan communities contribute their time each year to cleaning the heavily polluted Rouge River.
- But it's discouraging many of the communities themselves are involved in a lawsuit to protect their outmoded sewers — the primary source of Rouge pollution.
- It's encouraging that many communities have begun recycling programs.
- But it's discouraging that so few markets have been found, to this point, for recycled goods — especially recycled newspaper.
- It's encouraging that many area stores have begun "environmentally conscious" products, often on specially marked shelves.

But it's discouraging that, in many stores, shoppers can take their goods home in non-recyclable plastic bags.

Likewise, it's discouraging many stores continue to stamp the label "biodegradable" on products, even though environmentalists say that even biodegradable products will deteriorate too slowly to play any role in easing our landfill crisis.

The original Earth Day, 20 years ago, represented a grass-roots approach, bringing individual citizens together to make their opinion known to government and industry.

Earth Day 20, Sunday, April 22, should provide a similar forum. If there's a difference it's that we have the understanding that individual responsibility is also important.

It's difficult to equate our individual responsibility with that of the government of Brazil, or, for that matter, the Exxon Valdez. Nonetheless, we can do much, as consumers



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and citizens, to influence government and industry.

As consumers, we should pledge our allegiance to goods in environmentally safe packaging — as well as to products that have already been recycled.

Returning to cloth diapers and building a backyard compost pile, for yard waste, are other steps each of us could take to help the environment.

Producers won't move toward recycling until they believe a market exists among consumers.

AT THE same time, we should let our local government know that we are willing to pay the cost necessary to eliminate outmoded sewers, as well as to begin local or regional recycling programs — including ones for tires and car batteries, a pair of particular environmental problems. These suggestions are neither easy nor cheap, but all are necessary.

Landfill space is decreasing. We urge the state Department of Natural Resources to hold off on licensing any new landfills until the communities they would serve have recycling plans up and operating.

Landfills, with their potential for air and water pollution, are yesterday's waste disposal solution. While some additional landfills might well be necessary, every landfill licensed under the present setup is a setback to recycling and other more responsible approaches.

There was a time when we could throw waste materials away, without worrying about where they were headed. Today, that is a luxury we can no longer afford.

There's no mistaking the environmental importance of the rain forests, or the ozone layer. But Earth Day must begin at home.



THINKING

Teen activities lacking; control signs cautiously

SCANNING THE cityscape:

• Time to act — What's there for teens to do on weekends in the Farmingtons? A movie? Bowling? A party? A dance? Cruising?

If the recent outbreak of rowdiness at local fast-food restaurants is any indicator, there's not much in the way of upbeat entertainment.

Farmington Hills councilman Terry Sever's push for a teen activity center isn't so far-fetched when viewed in that bleak context. Consider the nightmare of this past weekend:

— Two teenagers were robbed and at least six were beaten in a fight centered in the parking lot of the Taco Bell on Orchard Lake Road, north of 13 Mile.

— A 17-year-old Northville girl who tried to break up a fight between Farmington High and Harrison High students was assaulted by two teenage girls in the parking lot of the Taco Bell on 10 Mile, near Grand River.

— Damage was estimated at \$500 when disorderly teens cracked door glass at the McDonald's Restaurant on Orchard Lake Road, near 10 Mile. As the weather warms, parents owe it to the themselves to work with city leaders to provide our teens with safe, stimulating weekend activities.

A spring and summer of discontent is nobody's idea of a good time.

• Fighting blight — It came as no surprise when Farmington Hills Mayor Jean Fox spoke out against



Bob Sklar

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visual pollution at the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce-hosted State of the Cities breakfast last week.

She has long rapped merchants who plaster advertising on seemingly every inch of wall and window space.

"Some windows are so plastered with numbers and lettering," she says, "the police car on surveillance can't even see if anyone is robbing the safe or the cash register!"

She calls visual pollution an "environmental storm cloud" that's on a collision course with the "cancer of blight."

"The long-term cost of blight to a community," she says, "is found in its contagious effect, in decrepit neighborhoods, in drugs which seep

into the corners or invade nearby homes once well-kept but now deteriorating, and eventually enter the schools where children, mandated in attendance, on occasion get shut — a situation unthinkable to our fathers."

She says "a community that doesn't care, which allows slovenliness, is fair game for the merchant who cannot make it using higher standards."

I applaud Fox's pursuit "to keep this city clean and attractive."

But I'm not about to support her relentless crusade against virtually all banner and window signs. Too many more important issues exist.

I have no problem with "strict, but enforceable sign ordinances," as Fox put it, to address excessive advertising on buildings.

But let's not rob small businesses of their major advertising tools in one of the midwest's most competitive markets.

• Cable quality — Given the equipment is far from state of the art, the quality of the cablecasting of Farmington Hills City Council meetings has been unexpectedly good. The video more times than not is sharp. But the audio often leaves a lot to be desired.

The microphone system in the council chambers needs to be replaced — make no mistake about that. Heck, it's not always easy to hear even when you're in the chamber audience!

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

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, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

Newest trees come up short

To the editor:

The Observer editorial, "Downtown: It's a treasure for community" (March 15), was a fitting tribute to the many fine changes supported by the DDA in recent years.

The new sidewalks, curbs, trees, lights, banners, etc. are a welcomed addition to the downtown area and add significantly to its appeal.

It is puzzling, however, that, after all the work done on the sidewalks bordering Farmington Road last summer, stretches still exist where few or no trees were planted.

The east side of Farmington Road between State and the first entrance to the shopping center received only two new trees, where it appears several more could have been planted to shade what is bathed in hot, late afternoon sun.

Another area left starkly barren of trees is on the south side of the new building that faces Orchard Street. A canopy of trees here would form a natural passageway to the development starting on the south side of Orchard.

Perhaps there are plans to put additional trees in these areas. It seems out of balance to raise \$40,000

for the new gazebo and yet not put in more trees along the roadway, where they really are needed to improve the visual appeal of the entire area.

George Wright,
Farmington

Hats go off to school leaders

To the editor:

At the March 5 Farmington Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Mike Flanagan surprised those in attendance with a wonderful presentation by the cast members of North Farmington High's recent play, "The Wizard of Oz." It was a fantastic experience for all.

At the board meeting of March 20, we were treated with a video presentation of William Grace Elementary School students, who participated in their recent book parade. It was great to see the students' sense of pride.

Hats off to Mr. Flanagan, and the board, for encouraging participation by all of Farmington's schools at future board meetings.

It's exciting and rewarding to observe our kids in action and bring

into perspective one of the reasons for board meetings — the kids.

Catbreen M. Webb,
Northville

Social drinking vs. alcoholism

To the editor:

Your article in the Observer & Eccentric, "When does social drinking become alcoholism?" (March 1) was excellent, and hopefully made many of your readers aware that they no doubt have many of the signs of chemical abuse and will seek help.

I am writing to you because of the alcoholic in my life who made my life miserable and unmanageable. There is a cliché "you don't have to be an alcoholic to suffer from alcoholism."

I went through the co-dependent program at Maple Grove and then was advised to join AA-a non. I never knew until I did these two things that there was help for me, too.

There are many people out there like me, spouses, parents and children who are unaware of these programs and of the help and support they will receive toward serenity and renewed self-esteem.

An AA-a non member,
Farmington Hills

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