

Opinion

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Inventive spirit

Creativity springs from artfest

FARMINGTON SCHOOLS aren't perfect. As in most other school districts, there's room to improve classroom curriculum, faculty training, teaching facilities and special programming.

But the district stands second to none in student inventiveness. That conclusion is drawn from the consistency of the inventive spirit showcased at the first six Creativity Springs Alive art festivals.

The artfest lets students of all ages and from all grades — including community ed, special ed, common campus and Boys Republic students — express talents, skills and ideas in varied art forms.

Some of the artistry rivals professional quality. Much of it weighs in a few rungs below. But no matter: the ideas are what's important.

As festival coordinator Paul Barber told the Observer at Creativity '89: "We need to promote individuality and creativity. That's one thing we have that machines don't."

"We've got to create the climate that values the creative mind. We've got to try and dream a little bit if, for example, we're going to come up with a better engineered car."

JUST ANOTHER nice presentation of student art it's not.

Thanks to the artfest, hundreds of students, prodded by what Barber calls "stimulation and nurturing," indeed are on their way to "becoming the innovators of the 21st century."

For a peek at the creative expressions of tomorrow's young leaders, take the time to stop by Creativity '90 — 7-9 p.m. Friday and 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday in the Harrison High gym.

The hour or so you spend will be a blue-chip investment, even if you're not a parent of a student.

You'll see scientific experiments, architectural designs, industrial technology, creative writing, computer technology, television programs, marketing, forensics, inventions, art, poetry, dance, drama and music.

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Last year, the fare included everything from sawdust sculpture, student newspapers, a space colony and a model police robot to haiku, yarn art, pottery, woodworking, mining and creative thinking demonstrations.

The computer-aided drafting work done by senior high students looked to be of exceptional quality.

ESPECIALLY CLEVER was the "Invent America" display. It challenged students to invent solutions to everyday problems by using analytical and imaginative thinking.

The intent isn't to make something for the festival. Teachers choose projects done as classroom assignments but which offer a special flair. Not every project makes the show and earns a certificate. And not every display is a show stopper. But disappointment provides incentive to try even harder the next time.

Most kids, like most adults, thrive on plaudits — oohs and aahs, accolades, appreciation, proof that somebody cares.

As Barber perceptively put it: "Accolades go to musicians on the stage and to athletes on the field. But for many kids, their source for accolades is Creativity Springs Alive."

Superintendent Mike Flanagan believes "the future of our country is at stake. And I believe over the next 10 years, we're going to make it or break it — and it's largely going to be due to what we do in K-12 education."

Creativity Springs Alive is a significant stride in the right direction

Hiding public records was bad enough, but piggishly opening them up to one caste is even worse.

records law has been that public information is available to the public, period. Senate Bill 240, however, sets up a caste system. The "Blues" are in the favored caste. The rest of us are left out.

Sponsor Fred Dillingham, R-Fowlerville, guided this bill through his Senate Human Resources Committee. The proper forum would have been the Judiciary Committee, whose members are better attuned to assaults on the sunshine law. It passed the Senate.

In the House, SB 240 went through the Labor Committee, not Judiciary. At this writing, SB 240 is on the House calendar. It should be junked, and so should PA 104 which it would amend.

Hiding public records was bad enough, but piggishly opening them up to one caste is even worse.

With Stephen's actions is a difficult question to answer, if it can be answered at all.

WE SUGGEST instead the community adopt a broader approach to the situation in its effort to prevent similar tragedies. Specifically, local schools and parents need to find ways to keep lines of communication as open as possible.

No, parents shouldn't have veto power over which materials are used in the classroom. Under the Michigan public education system, that's a job that residents delegate to school board members and professional educators.

But parents should (and in many local districts they do) have the right to review classroom materials and exclude their children to anything they find morally objectionable.

That means that school officials have an obligation to screen all classroom materials and inform parents of questionable material, something that Plymouth-Canton school officials admit wasn't done in this case.



Councilman Ralph Yoder (center) receives a Shirley Richardson (right) as city clerk Jo Bushey looks on.

Yoder's gift to city — respected leadership

HE'S MR. FARMINGTON — at least in my mind.

For 25 years, through good times and bad, Ralph Yoder, 64, has stood sentry over the city as a council member.

And he's done it with style, vision and a keen sense of what the 64-year-old city is all about. I think it's terrific his fellow council members saw fit to name the new road between Slocum and Orchard streets Yoder Drive.

The former two-term mayor has pushed to make the city livable and enjoyable for everyone who calls Farmington home, from kids to seniors.

His popularity speaks for itself at the polls.

Before the last few council elections, Yoder hinted he might not run again. But he has always turned in nominating petitions by the deadline. And except for 1985, he has always run strong enough to win a four-year term.

I've known Yoder since 1985. And what has struck me most about the 38-year resident is the way he sticks to his guns and isn't swayed by lobbying, no matter how intense the pressure.

More than once, I've seen him vote for something that irked some folks in the council chambers but which he felt, in his heart, was right for the city at large.

I HAVEN'T always agreed with



Bob Sklar

Yoder. But I've always respected his feisty demeanor, dry wit, historical perspective and gutsy approach to lawmaking.

Sometimes abrupt, he no doubt has rubbed some constituents the wrong way through the years. But over the long haul, he has been a dedicated public servant in the truest sense.

In saluting him at the start of the council meeting Monday night, mayor Shirley Richardson said to Yoder: "Your endurance and longevity on the city council has amazed me and I'm sure others as well."

She's right.

Even today, eight elections and nearly 7,000 votes later, the former planning commissioner still drives around the city before council meetings — studying up, doing his homework, preparing to cast an informed vote.

His endurance, his longevity, his knack for vote-getting, spring as much from an understanding of what makes Farmington tick as they do

from naive recognition.

So in keeping with a "time-honored" tradition, it was fitting for the council Monday to give Yoder a wooden-framed pendulum clock as a token of the city's appreciation. He also received a red carnation.

"Oh God, I'm overwhelmed," he responded, obviously touched. Then in typical Yoder understatement, he added, "I have, for the most part, enjoyed these 25 years."

IT WASN'T surprising to see Farmington Department of Public Safety director Frank Laubhoff give Yoder his old fire hat as a "thank you" for "all the time you've stood outside and supported us at all the fires."

Yoder — a long-time community booster — is that kind of person: caring, concerned, committed. As Farmington Hills Mayor Jean Fox put it in a special proclamation: "He's approachable for many humanitarian and civic causes important to the well-being of the community."

Mayor Richardson paid Yoder the ultimate tribute Monday in concluding: "Farmington is a better city today because of your service and commitment to the love and loyalty to our community."

Enjoy your moment in the sun, Ralph. You've earned it.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

FOIA assault

Bill would create caste system

MICHIGAN LEGISLATORS are about to compound an error they made last year in tinkering with one of the sunshine laws, the Freedom of Information Act.

A single company bullied lawmakers into passing an exemption to the FOIA that would make secret the records any company submitted to the Workers Compensation Bureau in support of its application for self-insured status. Its unsupported alibi was that the information was "sensitive." Certain injury forms also were exempted in PA 104 of 1989.

BUT WAIT! Now the state Senate has decided it went too far and is rewiring the exemption. But instead of repealing the bad law, Senate Bill 240 would allow only Blue Cross/Blue Shield of Michigan to have access to the injury forms.

It's like a page out of George Orwell's satirical novel "Animal Farm" in which the pigs declare: "All animals are created equal, but some are more equal than others."

Until now, a guiding principle of our open

School materials

Screen them but don't censor

THE TRAGIC hanging death of an 8-year-old Canton Township boy March 24 has touched off a nerve among parents all over southeastern Michigan and caused reverberations in public schools as well.

The question on everybody's mind? Did the film "Nobody's Useless" — which has two fairly graphic scenes depicting unsuccessful suicide attempts and which Stephen Nalepa and his second grade classmates at Gallimore Elementary School viewed the day before his death — play a role in the incident?

The boys' parents feel it did. School officials and the film's distributor, Encyclopedia Britannica Educational Corp., say it didn't. They point out that the movie, which focuses on positive ways to deal with physical disabilities, has been shown to hundreds of thousands of children without incident since it was made in 1980. Nonetheless, the distributor took the movie off the market last week.

What, if anything, the film's showing had to do

Farmington readers' forum

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Northville ZIP irks Hills man

To the editor:

I would like to respond to your March 19 article about new ZIP codes.

I have never heard of Mr. Majors before this article appeared and he certainly does not speak for most of us Farmington Hills residents getting our mail from the Northville post office.

Joanne Maliszewski would have served our readers better by presenting a balanced viewpoint in her article, rather than just one side of the story. The truth is far from Mr. Majors' claim that "the feeling is leave well enough alone."

There are two very negative aspects of the situation that make it a constant annoyance for my family and neighbors.

The first, of course, is the recurring confusion for anybody we give our address to because we are being forced to list our street address as being in a different town (and even a different county) than where it is actually located.

This drives delivery people crazy and requires repeated explanations and instructions. Even UPS frequently puts packages on the wrong route, causing unnecessary delays in delivery.

And then there is the constant explaining to friends, relatives and acquaintances that "no, we really don't live in Northville..."

Could this be a point of confusion to emergency services also? We've been lucky enough not to have had the opportunity to try that one out yet, but I wonder what pops up on the 9-1-1 computer screen? Our physical location or the phone number we have come to expect in a city such as Farmington Hills is needlessly diminished by this situation.

Many of us are not at all happy about it. Oh, by the way Mr. Majors, the way to tell your magazine you have a new mailing address is simply to send in the change of address form. That's why they are there.

Mark Yull, Farmington Hills

Agency gave needed help

To the editor:

In a time when much of what we see and hear on the news is about people who are homeless and unemployed, I am happy to know there is an organization that is willing to help those in need.

I am a senior citizen from the Pontiac area. A few years ago, I was unemployed and receiving assistance from the Department of Social Service when a social worker told me about the Oakland Livingston Human Service Agency.

She said they had a work program for senior citizens such as myself, I applied and a couple of weeks later received notice that I was hired.

I have been working part-time at OLHSA since 1986 as a senior aide. It has been the most rewarding and beneficial work experience I have ever had.

Thanks to OLHSA, their program helped me make money to pay my rent, pass the time, be with others and, most important, learn a number of new skills.

I worked in the agency's WATTS room, taking phone calls from people needing help.

Mary Pollard, Pontiac

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