



Children visiting the farm at Maybury State Park were encouraged to interact with one another and the animals, too.



photos by SHARON LAMIEUX/staff

Maybury State Park naturalist Betty Hancock asks children visiting the park why ducks have webbed feet and why chickens don't fly (left). The kids — from Focus:HOPE and Gill Elementary — concluded it was because chickens don't swim. Gill Elementary second grader Sarah Ehlers (below) helps her Focus:HOPE buddy Nia Brown get on a swing at Maybury State Park.



Exchange breaks down walls

Continued from Page 1

grant program on hold this year, due to a school playground project underway. But the Gill community has high hopes for continuation of the project, especially after Cathy Ehlers and her husband Gary successfully sought commercial and business donors for the project.

Gary, a sales manager for Carrier Air Conditioning in Livonia, approached two major utilities — Michigan Consolidated Gas and Detroit Edison — who both agreed to give money to the partnership this year. Michigan is giving the money directly to Focus:HOPE because of its Detroit location and its current

'It was just friendly kids meeting friendly kids. There is no stigma, there is no difference.'

— Cathy Ehlers
parent of Gill student

involvement with that school. Edison's Oakland County Division will also contribute.

GARY EHLERS said the entire project "has just turned into a real

blessing" for everyone involved, and he would like to see the exchange program eventually expand to include more students, or more trips.

He and his wife got involved because they say how positive the exchange program could be. "I'm tired of seeing all this negative stuff in print," he said.

"Maybe if there were some better things published, things could change."

Kaplan said she hopes for an ongoing relationship with Edison — the utility selling power service in the Farmington Hills area — for a future business-school partnership.

Man wins sewer suit's 1st round

By Greg Kowalski
staff writer

Bloomfield Township resident Thomas Bithell won the first round of his fight with the township and the Oakland Hills Country Club over a leaking sewer that he claims has made his house uninhabitable.

Oakland County Circuit Court Eugene Schnetz Wednesday ruled in favor of three motions by Bithell. Judge Schnetz agreed to hear arguments next week to include Bithell's request to tie the Oakland County Drain Commission into his suit against the township.

The judge also ordered the country club to prepare an engineering plan to replace the sewer and install a temporary pumping station to stop use of the sewer within a week.

And the judge dismissed two sign ordinance tickets the township issued against Bithell for signs he placed on his property attacking the country club.

BITHELL HAD also named township Supervisor Fred Korzon in his suit and that suit still stands.

Bithell agreed to remove the signs, although his attorney, Lucy Benham, said Bithell was not in violation of the township's sign ordinance.

Bithell had placed a large banner across the front of his house saying, "Oakland Hills is a bad neighbor."

Benham said the banner was protected by the First Amendment as an expression of free speech.

The overall issue with the sewer

The source of the problem goes back to the 1920s when the country club, which then owned the lots along Oakhills, allegedly gave the county an easement to install the sewer.

has been festering for several months when the sewer, which runs under Bithell's house on Oakhills, began leaking. Gasses from the leak have permeated the house causing mold and bacteria growth becoming a health hazard, Bithell said.

He, his wife and five children, moved out of the house and are living in two apartments in Farmington Hills.

THE SOURCE of the problem goes back to the 1920s when the country club, which then owned the lots along Oakhills, allegedly gave the county an easement to install the sewer.

"Apparently, the drain commissioner never recorded the easement," said Benham. That's why no one seemingly knew the sewer existed, she said.

County drain commission attorney Earl Clark argued that the sewer was a sewer, not a drain and not the commission's responsibility. He said

the township is responsible for the leaking line because the township has maintained it through the years.

"We have no jurisdiction over this," Clark said.

Bithell said he was pleased with Judge Schnetz's decisions.

"How can we feel anything but great," Bithell said. However, it's questionable if his home can be salvaged, said Benham.

Alan Harnisch, attorney for the country club, said, "We don't have any basic problem with the judge's decision." Within a week the club will prepare a plan to install an alternate sewer line, he said. The line itself should be in place within 30 days after that if it is approved by the court, Harnisch said.

OAKLAND HILLS has been proposing an alternate line since the lawsuit arose, Harnisch said. But he said, Bithell rejected the proposal. Benham replied that the country club proposed to install the alternative line if Bithell dropped his lawsuit claims.

However, Harnisch said, "We're going to do exactly what Judge Schnetz ordered."

Cost for the new line has not been determined, although Judge Schnetz said to follow the "most economical" plan.

Benham said she thought the cost would be between \$50,000 and \$60,000.

Harnisch said, "We don't have any idea of what the cost will be."

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