

Sound ice

Let's have an arena study

Some Farmington Hills residents — city officials, hockey enthusiasts, figure skaters and recreation professionals — are operating on sound ice when they ask the city to pay for a serious study on the feasibility of building an ice arena here.

Such a study, which would probably cost a few thousand, is up for discussion at the March 22 Hills City Council meeting. We hope the study is authorized, and we hope it shows the idea of an ice facility in a favorable light.

An ice arena for Farmington Hills... it isn't as far fetched as it may sound.

Yes, quite a few suburban ice arenas were built in the early 1970s, when ice sports were all the rage. Many were poorly designed, maintained and marketed. Some are out of business now.

But there still is a demand for recreation on ice, we think. If other arena areas are experiencing hard times financially, it isn't for lack of demand. Ice users have to be shoe horned in at midnight and 4 and 6 a.m.

Now, three thoughts hit us right away when we consider a local ice rink.

■ The city of Farmington Hills should not get into the business of building or operating an ice arena. The facility should be privately constructed and operated through some arrangement that would allow the city some measure of control and guidance.

■ The city seems to have done all the right things so far in preparing for the possibility of an arena. Spending a few dollars on the feasibility study is a good example.

■ The ice rink should not be located in Heritage or Woodland Hills parks.

The committee appointed to study the ice arena recently brought in Leo Bourgault, who

■ If the local rink is going to be a metal hulk, freezing cold inside with uncomfortable seats, filthy rest rooms and no place to buy a cup of coffee or a bag of peanuts, forget it.

owns several profitable rinks in Montreal, Canada, as a consultant.

Bourgault told the group that it takes more than just ice to have a successful arena. It takes the amenities (restaurants, lounges, pro shops, other stores) and a comfortable setting to keep them coming back.

His message: If you build it right and manage it properly, they will come. Anyone considering building an ice arena here would do well to remember that advice.

A rink should be user- and spectator-friendly, and multiple ice surfaces are a must.

If the local rink is going to be a metal hulk, freezing cold inside with uncomfortable seats, filthy rest rooms and no place to buy a cup of coffee or a bag of peanuts, forget it. It'll be out of business in no time.

A rink like Bourgault's, however, could become a mecca for winter sports enthusiasts from all over the Midwest. It might even become a tourist attraction in its own right. Dollars would be brought into the community's economy.

So, reader, what do you think? There's an article on the ice arena on page 1A of today's Observer. On page 2A, with the jump of the story, there's a coupon you can fill out, clip and send to the city. Make your opinions known, please.

Keep suburbs in limelight

How's this for a weekend package: Neil Simon's "Plaza Suite"; "Nunsense II," a world premiere sequel to the long-running musical comedy about life in a Franciscan order; capped off by a Sunday matinee performance of the national touring, Tony-winning "Six Degrees of Separation."

All big city, professional shows. All playing at a theater near you — literally.

That trio of well-received productions was playing in mid-February on stages in western Wayne and Oakland counties. Collectively, they represent the good news for local theater fans.

Packed suitcases and New York airfare are no longer requirements for a fulfilling weekend. Neither is a trip downtown, although Detroit's revived theater district is replete with top-notch shows — often at less-than-Broadway prices.

The George Burns Theatre for the Performing Arts in Livonia has joined the Birmingham and Meadowbrook theaters as major professional venues. Coupled with the smaller Jewish Ensemble Theatre in West Bloomfield and the Attie's second home at Pontiac's Strand, the suburbs have blossomed as a theater-goers paradise.

Now, the downside.

Live theater — done well — is scintillating art. But it's also a business. And business could be better, say the proprietors of suburban stages.

The Burns is still feeling its way, fighting to find the right niche in a highly competitive market, according to Karen Kahn, vice-pres-

ident of marketing and public relations. While traditional musicals like "Fiddler on the Roof" are selling out, "Six Degrees" and other more contemporary fare is a tough sell, Kahn said.

"We'll continue to experiment with sophisticated, bold shows because they deserve to be showcased," Kahn said. "But filling seats is still the bottom line."

The Birmingham has been "up and down" but has mostly done all right despite the sluggish economy of the past few years, said spokeswoman Cheryl Harris. Harris said advance sales for "Nunsense" and "Oklahoma" have been in the "blockbuster" range. The theater has cut back on advertising to deal with leaner times, she said.

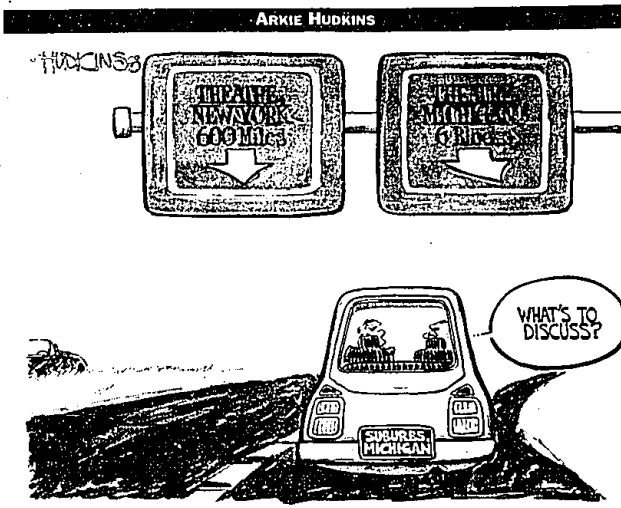
Both the Burns and Birmingham are strictly commercial houses.

Meanwhile, the Jewish Ensemble theater is dealing with the double whammy of the economy and dramatic cuts in state money for the arts.

Two years ago — when Gov. John Engler began slashing arts grants — the theater's appropriation was cut by more than a third, said artistic director Evelyn Orbach. The company has attempted to make up for the state cuts by going after more corporate support and looking at different kinds of government subsidies.

It will be a major disappointment if this new, golden era for professional theater in Metro Detroit is short-lived. Now that theaters have seen the suburban light, the challenge to the community is clear.

Use them or lose them.



LETTERS

Ernie says thanks

Several people have sent copies of the article Larry O'Connor wrote about Lulu and me.

It was well written and you were most kind in your treatment. Please thank Sharon LeMieux for the neat photos.

We appreciate your talent and your thoughtfulness.

Ernie Harwell, Farmington Hills

More on T-shirts

I wish to express my complete agreement with Marie Hoeflin's letter to the editor in your Feb. 25 edition.

I, too, was appalled at the message that the cute T-shirts conveyed. Like the majority of the media today, the Farmington Observer is promoting the myth that condoms equal safe sex.

The true message is that condoms provide somewhat safe sex and total freedom to lull yourself into believing that you can indulge in any behavior without fear of the consequences.

Unfortunately, this message doesn't fit well onto a "fashionable" T-shirt.

Jane Bradley, Farmington

No fan of clock

The DDA just doesn't get it. What will the taxpayers of Farmington have to do to get their attention? The DDA wants to spend \$80,000 of our hard earned tax dollars on a clock.

And in spite of protests, they're going to bulldoze over taxpayers to build this monument to themselves.

Where do they get their money? And to whom do they report? It seems to me that the taxpayers, who place the city council in office, are the bosses.

It also seems to me that members of the city council, when running for re-election, need to take a hard look at the way their DDA appointees spend our dollars.

If the DDA is so hard-up to spend \$80,000, I suggest they donate it to the public school system. I can see it being put to better use in education rather than wasted on a clock.

P. Migliore, Farmington

No DeVries fan

My husband and I have lived in Farmington Hills for two years now. Like most newlywed couples, we look forward to having children and sending them to school.

The school system was a major factor in determining the city that we would call home; the place where we would build our future.

Since moving into the area, I have been reading about Farmington schools, students and their projects and the recent millage renewal. In all, I've been impressed with what I've read about the current administration and board.

I am not familiar with any of the potential school board candidates mentioned in your Feb. 25 article. I prefer and expect to become familiar without the biased, arrogant opinions expressed by former candidate Richard DeVries.

He is getting the attention of the community and your paper by making derogatory statements about other community members.

Based on his comments, one has to wonder if he doesn't run, will he endorse a candidate for the board who will serve as his political parrot?

I don't want the Farmington school system affected by an unsuccessful candidate with a serious case of sour grapes.

As demonstrated three times in the past, the voters of our community have judged his qualifications and commitment to the school board by not electing him.

Based on his remarks and arrogance, I understand why he has been so unsuccessful.

Margaret Horron, Farmington Hills

Thanks for story

I would like to take this opportunity to say thank you for writing the article regarding the Mid-American Pompano All Star Team in the Farmington Observer in January.

The article was well done, and the publicity was greatly appreciated.

Karen L. Blazatis, Farmington

Understanding 'No'

Sixty-eight percent of you voted "No" last November on Proposal D. The automobile insurance lobby is now trying to get around your vote by pressuring the state Legislature to pass a horrible piece of legislation, HB-4166.

This latest "idea" of the automobile insurance companies:

■ Gives control to insurance companies over the care and treatment of accident victims.

■ Allows insurance companies to raise rates twice a year.

■ Reduces the mandatory coverage of "No-Fault" by eliminating much of the medical coverage.

■ Makes it almost impossible to sue a careless or drunk driver who caused death or serious injury.

■ Denies access to the court systems for all but the rich.

House Bill 4166 is a rape of Michigan residents by automobile insurance companies. If any representative votes for it, he or she should be recalled.

Francis P. Hughes, attorney, Rochester

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Are you prepared if fire breaks out in your house?



'We have a fire extinguisher and a ladder, too. We live in a condo.'
 Jean Tusberg
 West Bloomfield



'Yes... we have smoke detectors.'
 Randy Alderman
 Farmington Hills



'We have a security system. I feel safe.'
 Allison Tusberg
 West Bloomfield



'I was in a fire once and lost everything. Sure I'm prepared. We have smoke detectors and easy-release windows.'
 Mike Klein
 Southfield

We asked this question at the Orchard Place shopping mall in Farmington Hills.

The Farmington Observer

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