



Learning place: David Hughes (left, far left) and Chuck Sharon learn about graphs from Doris Joyner. Jeffrey Stewart (above, right) talks current events with his classmates, including Jacklyn Mendleson (left).

They learn more than just ABCs in ABE



BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

In Adult Basic Education, people like Jackie Mendleson count. But it's a skill learned out of necessity.

"So I won't get swindled by anybody," said Mendleson, 44, who is developmentally disabled.

She lives on her own in Farmington. She works at the Raddison Plaza in Southfield.

Day-to-day tasks most people take for granted, such as balancing a bank book or counting change can be a vexing proposition for someone like Mendleson.

ABE coordinator Martine Leech relates how two roommates in a group home were learning how to handle their own checking accounts. One of them ran out of checks.

"So he just borrowed his roommate's checks," said Leech, who lives in Farmington.

Classes such as Basic Math and Math for the Everyday World offered in the ABE program at the Farmington Training Center teach those survival skills.

Developmentally disabled adults, some coming from as far as Rochester, learn how to tip, figure taxes or how to read a graph. They also work on computers.

One group last semester put out their own newspaper, prognosticating the Presidential election to Jimmy the Greek specifications.

Some 90 students are in the program, which is funded through the Farmington Community Education program. Most of them function below an eighth-grade level.

Many students are 40 and older. Laws changed in the mid-'70s, requiring basic education be taught to all people. Some older students were caught in the void.

"What we think of as reading and

math, they were never taught that," said Amy Vieaux, who teaches in the program. "Some of them are starting from ground zero."

Academic standards are not stressed as much as survival skills. Many gain confidence.

With self-worth comes success stories. Judith Latimer, 45, of Southfield has learned how to operate a computer. ABE classes have helped her better herself, she said.

Latimer has her own car. She drives to class and work everyday. She's employed as dietary aide at Presbyterian Village in Redford.

She still lives with her parents. "So I can take care of them now," she said.

Calvin Meachum, 38, of Southfield sits in back of the classroom. He's quick with a quip, according to teacher Amy Vieaux. He's also adept with figuring out math

in his head, Vieaux said. Meachum is blind.

"I think they are aware of my needs here," said Meachum, who is learning how to use a braille spellier in the program. Meachum has been attending ABE classes for five years. For him, and other students, the Farmington Training Center is more than an educational setting.

Longtime student Margaret Quigley died of Muscular Dystrophy last year. Several students raised more than \$500 money for the MD Shamrock drive.

Sue Meyers, an ABE student who works at Erb Lumber in Birmingham, collected \$168.

Students have also become involved in CROP walks, writing letters to disabled veterans and sending packages to troops during Desert Storm.

"It's important for our students to feel apart of the community," Leech said.

Farmington schools wouldn't gain, lose much from tax plan

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public Schools wouldn't gain anything under Gov. John Engler's new tax plan. Then again, it wouldn't lose much either.

"Compared to the radical and devastating alternatives that seemed so real only a few weeks ago, this is a much more desirable funding alternative," said assistant superintendent for finance Bruce Barrett. "It doesn't swoop in and immediately cut millions from district budgets."

'I think they're going to be skeptical of this plan because of the lottery. It's unfortunate. It's a legacy we'll have to overcome.'

Bruce Barrett
financial manager

would be held harmless the first year.

The plan hinges on whether a sales tax increase passes, which would generate an estimated \$1.7 billion in new taxes.

Voters haven't warmed to proposed sales tax increases in the past, sending four similar plans to defeat since 1980. Of states that levy a sales tax, Michigan's is the lowest at 4 percent.

Barrett is cautious.

"I think they're going to be skeptical of this plan because of the lottery," Barrett said. "It's unfortunate. It's a legacy we'll have to overcome."

School board treasurer Helen Ditzhazy is wary of the plan.

"A sales tax is so much less reliable than a property tax," Ditzhazy said. "When we have a recession, people do not spend."

Ditzhazy said she would favor a graduated income tax to supplement a sales tax.

A cap on assessments is a selling point to property owners. Un-

like the Headlee Amendment, this plan would cap assessments on a per parcel basis.

That would mean that increases in property assessments would be limited to 5 percent a year. The Headlee Amendment subtracts the difference between the rate of inflation and the average assessment increase.

This year, assessments increased an average of 9 percent in Farmington and 7 percent in Farmington Hills.

Also, there would be an assessment freeze the following year.

Farmington School's operating millage would be 27 mills, a cut of 4.62 mills.

A mill equals \$1 for each \$1,000 of state equalized valuation (SEV) property.

If the sales tax proposal passes, the schools would not be affected as much by the property tax caps and freezes in the first year. Sales tax money would make up the differences.

"Under either of the scenarios, our district would experience no slower growth in our revenues, no question," Barrett said.

Barrett said the district is continuing to put together the budget for the 1993-94 year "unabated."

The budget has to be ready June 30, according to state law.

"We have to have a budget in place," Barrett said. "We can't see if this plan flies or doesn't fly."

Farmington School District operates on an \$83 million budget and has 10,447 students.

RECYCLED

Tower from page 1A

Greg Holber, owner of the Civic Theater, said he was saddened by the outcome. He attributed the clock's downfall to a small group of people, which was divided by sentiment and "bad reporting in the Observer."

"If you look around town you see a lot of empty businesses," Holber said. "Part of that is the sign of the economy. Part of that is, why aren't people coming to Farmington? why aren't they supporting businesses?"

'Clearly, it was heard and understood. There's no point in having a project that is as divisive as this is turning out to be.'

Mayor William Hartsock

Councilwoman JoAnne McShane didn't see the issue as divisive as much as a compro-

mise. She commended the DDA for listening and the public for being part of the process.

A few residents echoed those feelings.

"All my life I was taught you can make a difference, you can make a change," said Joan McClincy, a resident on Glenview. "I hear a lot of negative terms being attached to what has happened here."

"I see this as democracy in action."

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