

## The search

### Let's look for 'right stuff'

**T**he Farmington Board of Education is undertaking the arduous and delicate task of replacing Michael Flanagan as superintendent. We wish them well.

First, we like the idea the board is seeking advice from the school employees and members of the community as to what qualities they'd like to see in a new superintendent.

We also commend board members for taking a more hands-on approach in this search while using the more cost-effective Michigan Association of School Boards to guide them.

We have a few thoughts on the subject, too. For instance, trustees agreed at the Sept. 21 meeting that having a doctorate should not be mandatory. They cite the current superintendent, who has a master's degree.

While we don't think not having a doctorate should disqualify a sterling candidate, it would be a plus and something to strive for.

It's also been mentioned the new superintendent should be visible in the community. We agree, but to what extent?

In his five years, Flanagan wore out a trail from Shiawassee Hill to Glen Oaks Country Club, the Farmington Community Center and the Botsford Inn, representing the district at a myriad of functions from retirement parties for city officials to leading the charge at cultural diversity seminars. His efforts repaired what were previously tenuous relationships at best with city and community groups.

In the end, though, Flanagan admitted it wore him out.

We think it would be unreasonable and unfair to expect the same of his successor. A good school superintendent doesn't need season tickets for every banquet dais to have a high profile

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in the community. We also suspect a new superintendent will be busy with other pressing matters.

As for Flanagan, we give him our best in his new position as superintendent of Wayne County Regional Educational Service Agency.

His commendable service to Farmington schools can be measured in a number of ways. During his tenure, he's brought in several highly qualified administrators — including new principals at all three high schools.

He also fostered an atmosphere of creativity that is seen in such innovative programs as the zero hour at North Farmington.

If there was one blemish during Flanagan's tenure, though, it was dealing effectively with the segment of people who were less than satisfied with the schools.

Too often, he tried to "establish a dialogue" instead of talking to them. He attempted to "bring closure" to matters instead of settling them.

That said, no one could ever question his commitment to the most important people in education: the kids. The sincere look in his eyes when he handed a child a pen for leading the pledge during board meetings expressed it better than any educationalist.

And that is going to be hard to replace.

## Paper tailored to community

**N**ational Newspaper Week begins Sunday and this is the time we're making a major change in our paper designed to bring us even closer to you, our readers.

Although the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers continues to be the name of the network of 12 suburban newspapers you read, we are decentralizing our internal structure to better serve you.

Our award-winning newspapers are being crafted into three divisions: the Eccentrics, the Observers and a Regional operation. The regional group includes the sections such as Taste, Business and Entertainment, which go into each of our community newspapers.

This will make it simpler for you as a newsreader, reader or advertiser to get in touch with us.

And it will make it easier for us to tailor our stories, ads and circulation to the needs of your individual community.

The restructuring is a continuation of our desire to make the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers the best network of suburban newspapers in the country. And in our estimation, best connotes journalistic excellence as well as leadership and responsiveness to our communities.

In the past year and a half, we have redesigned our newspapers to make them more reader friendly, including more color photographs, a weekly community calendar and a front-page index giving you a rundown on what you can find inside.

We started monthly reader advisory groups in each community to help us find out what you want covered.

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We began a dialogue with you, opening up our phone lines so that you could vote, comment or get information on local issues.

And our major local stories and editorials, as well as an assortment of other useful information, is now accessible to those with personal computers through our On-Line computerized information service.

Recently we offered our opinion pages for readers to write a column on local issues or national events that hit home. You will find one of your neighbor's columns in each Thursday edition.

Next month we will begin opening up our twice-monthly editorial board meetings to anyone who would like to see how we arrive at our editorial stands. Stay tuned for information on time, place and date.

We don't take our job lightly; your community is our community. National Newspaper Week is an optimum time for us to update you on the changes we're making — and for you to take a look at how we're serving our community.

We want you to be as proud of us as we are of you.



## LETTERS

### Thank you

**O**n Saturday, Sept. 18, approximately 215 people met at Cloverdale School, a school for severely mentally and multiply impaired children and adults, for the first annual Road Rally Fund Raiser.

All the instructions were given and the race was on. After working on mind bending clues and running all over Farmington and Farmington Hills, everyone met at the Piemontese Club in Farmington for food and entertainment.

The most exciting part of the evening was the announcement by Nancy and Ray Merlo, parents of a student at Cloverdale and organizers of the road rally, that more than \$5,000 was raised for Cloverdale. This money will allow our students to participate in a variety of school activities, including a number of community experience trips.

Cloverdale's staff and students would like to thank everyone who attended the road rally and those who worked behind the scenes donating their time, money, and talents to make it a wonderful evening.

Claudette Bosseawen,  
Cloverdale School Developmental Training Center

### 'Inaccurate Picture'

**T**he editorial "The Attitude" in the Sept. 23 Farmington Observer, I think, painted a very inaccurate picture of the residents along Farmington Road and their recent appearance at a city council meeting to discuss the proposed bike path. I, being one of those residents, am far from "cantankerous" and found the council meeting one of the better examples of government working with the people that I have seen.

People deserve to be informed by, and have input into, the government that they support. The large group of citizens that showed up for this meeting, a number of whom are not even living on Farmington Road, demonstrated that people are interested in their city and want to be heard.

We were kept in the dark on the city's plans for the bike path until we were surprised by surveyors on our front lawn one day putting in stakes and tagging all the big, old trees out front.

The disinformation received by residents from different city departments regarding the path since then is astounding. The council meeting served to clarify discrepancies as well as provide an opportunity for council members to receive input from residents. We were grateful to have the mayor, council members, and city planners listen to us and our ideas.

Issues such as the following were discussed: location of the path (i.e.: where in the landscape it would go and whether it should be on the east or the west side of Farmington Road), vehicle, bike, and pedestrian safety concerns, whether

the path should cross a busy road like Farmington Road, type and design of path construction (asphalt, concrete, paving bricks) to best fit into our area's rural-like atmosphere, maintenance of the path (snow removal, clean-up), the fact that the path goes to a park (Heritage) where bikes aren't allowed on park paths, and the proposed width of the path (or should I say "road").

This is the first 8-foot wide bike path that I am aware of in our area that crosses through a residential area, not a park (like Kensington Metropark), and thus there are many new special issues to be addressed. This is not a 4-foot sidewalk. The mayor and council seemed impressed with the level of dialog at the meeting and I believe learned something from the people.

Overall, the opinion seemed to be that the path should not be put in the "path of least resistance" just because it is easier to build there or because we have available grant money to burn, but the ideas and concerns of the people should first be listened to.

I am a jogger, cyclist, and walker and I know with all the beautiful, quiet subdivisions in Farmington Hills that I do these things in I surely wouldn't find it enjoyable to do them next to a busy road. I can live with the final decision on the path as long as I know that we have been given a chance to speak and a fair shake.

Mark Weber, Farmington Hills

### Future in jeopardy?

**W**e have inherited a planet of almost infinite surprise and beauty. One aspect is the tropical rain forest, and man is destroying this forest at the rate of an acre a second.

I know this revelation seems incredible, but it's true. We are losing more than just acreage.

The greatest profusion of life that has ever existed is slipping away forever. This is a tragedy of unprecedented proportions, but the damage is far more reaching.

We are losing thousands of undiscovered foods, medicines and other valuable substances. We are destroying a genetic diversity, that could be a hedge against crop failure and other calamities. We are ruining watersheds, changing rainfall and climate patterns, and we are gaining very little or nothing in return.

Rain forests of the tropics give life to an astonishing variety of plant and animal life. Millions of years of tropical sun and rain have stimulated an extravagance of adaptation, specialization and interdependence of plant, tree, animal, bird and insect life.

If you wish to know more about life in the tropical rain forest, you can contact, Conservation International, 1015 18th St. N.W., Suite 1000, Washington D.C. 20036.

George R. Mell, Farmington Hills

## COMMUNITY VOICE

### QUESTION:

What do you like to read in your Farmington Observer?

In recognition of National Newspaper Week, Oct. 10-16, we asked this question of local residents who work at the Observer Newspapers.



"First thing I read is Sports, because my son and daughter both go to North."  
Sandy Gardner,  
Keyliner  
Farmington Hills



"News about the city council, recipes in the Taste section and features."  
MaryAnn Smith,  
executive  
secretary  
Farmington Hills



"Crime Watch is the first thing I turn to. I also like Entertainment and Tom Baer's crisp, authoritative editorials."  
Todd Schneider,  
reporter  
Farmington Hills



"Local news, stories about the high schools — because my kids went to Farmington — and the crossword puzzle."  
Norine Murphy,  
miller  
Farmington

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