

Walls 'n' judges

What hopefuls must remember

Hey, there's talk about a third judgeship being added to the 47th District Court in Farmington. OK, round up the usual suspects.

Actually, if our local court does grow by one seat — and right now that possibility is a remote one — you can put away your spurs and lasso. With a brand-new position opening up with no incumbent or clear favorite, the flower of Farmington legaldom will pretty much round itself up for what could be an interesting judicial race.

Maybe stampede would be a better word than roundup . . . a stampede to the old filling water hole.

Consider . . . in 1992, the last time anything opened up to the 47th, seven moths were drawn to the flame. There were seven candidates for the position vacated by the retiring Margaret Schaeffer.

That's amazing when you remember that, although there was no incumbent, there was an *heir apparent* — the respected Jack McDonald. More than one attorney told us he wanted to run, but not against Jack.

But now, with whispers of a third judgeship just escaping some legal lips, one Farmington Hills attorney was moved to visit the newspaper office recently to see if his political boat would float.

Yes, my friend, we know you're interested. You have stars in your eyes and the moonbeams won't wash them away.

His visit and the talk of an expanded court got us to thinking about all the right stuff a district judge needs to be a success in a community like Farmington. Our thoughts:

For one thing, judges are politicians, and some politicians are great wall-builders. And it

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seems the more exalted their office, the higher and thicker the wall they erect between themselves and the public.

Sure, it's glad hands and back slaps and luncheon talks *ad nauseum* during the campaign. But then they're elected (or returned) to office and up goes that wall . . . complete with barbed wire and broken glass on top.

After the election, the order of the day is: Send away the campaign workers and bring on the stonemasons.

Different judges build different walls. A Supreme Court justice constructs an impenetrable fortress worthy of Saddam Hussein or Michael Jackson. A federal judge just might have a castle with a shark-filled moat around it. Some circuit court judges are about as approachable as Cindy Crawford.

But a district judge is truly a jurist of the people. If he/she has a wall at all, it should be a freshly painted picket fence with working gates. And he/she should be willing to chat with folks who drop by. A district judge needs to communicate with his/her public.

That's something we'd like our local thundering herd to remember if they do get to poll up toward a seat on the bench of the 47th District Court in Farmington.

Give schools forfeiture funds

Coming up with new and continuing revenue sources for public education has consumed the Michigan public for years — climaxing (we hope) in the current efforts in Lansing. But one revenue stream that could be a year-round Santa Claus for education seems to have been overlooked.

A source of supplemental income that ought to be considered is drug forfeiture funds. Forfeitures made under federal laws require that the money be spent specifically on drug-related programs. Forfeitures made under state law give the police more leeway. Each local police department gets to keep money and property that is confiscated during a drug-related arrest.

In either event, earmarking forfeiture money for education could go to provide a better education, probably the most effective tool against drug use. An education offers opportunity. Those who take advantage of opportunities are less likely to be involved with drugs. And they won't be as vulnerable to the desperation of the semi-literate.

Another advantage is that the money would stay in the community where drugs are a problem. That makes it equitable since those communities with less of a problem will see fewer dollars going to their public schools, while those communities where drugs threaten the coming generation will see an increased amount deposited in their general funds.

For example, if an arrest is made in Livonia, the forfeiture money would be earmarked for that district. In all of 1992-93, Birmingham took in only \$63,953 from drug sources. Under this plan, the money would go to the Birmingham Public Schools rather than be used to purchase new squad cars or traffic cones. Similarly, large cities with larger incidents of drug use — Detroit, Flint, Pontiac — would get a larger piece of the pie.

The investment would be with the kids, rather than with the police departments. For years, the lip service has been to "save" the new generation. This plan would do more than tell the students that they are the future; they'll be the prime beneficiaries of the money.

The police shouldn't object to this solution. It's their job to arrest law-violators so the change in funneling funds shouldn't have an impact on the professional performance of our police officers. And they should be pleased with any plan that will steer people clear of drugs, preventing the problem rather than trying to stop it once the wildfire starts.

Taking drug forfeiture money from the police budget and putting it into school budgets seems the wisest way to convert something harmful into a benefit for the children. It also takes away any suspicion that a police department more strongly enforces drug laws because there is a direct pay-off.

School districts should latch on to this as a new revenue source. And legislators, scrambling to put a package together, should see this as a valuable addition — much like the Lottery money designation.

And if the legislators are too shy to make the suggestion, perhaps some anti-drug units will DARE to make a difference, and ask that the spoils of drugs be used for a more long-term solution to the drug problem.

Sweet wishes



STEPHEN CANTRELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Holiday spirit: As busy a season as it is for the post office, Birmingham postal worker Mike Nixon plays a ready and willing Santa for Brittany Totten. There's still time to make sure no child goes without a holiday wish coming true.

LETTERS

Best wishes to you

To Superintendent C. Robert Maxfield: As President of the North Farmington High School Raider Parents' Club, I want to congratulate and welcome you as the new superintendent of the Farmington School District.

It is a wonderful, well-managed, progressive school district and you have a tough act to follow.

However, based on my observations during the cable-cast interview process and my review of the reports in the Farmington Observer, we have nothing to fear.

Please be assured that we will work with you to continue the excellent programs which were the hallmark of Michael Flanagan's tenure and which led to North Farmington High School being named a National Exemplary School.

Best wishes for a healthy and happy holiday season. We look forward to meeting you in January.

David L. Haron, Farmington Hills

Why she performs

Over the last few weeks, I have read the numerous articles written by citizens and the Farmington Observer staff about the Harrison band.

Being a student and band member at Farmington Harrison, I have heard many opinions regarding this issue. My hope is to offer a side that perhaps few have written on.

Being that I am a member of the marching band, I have not only experienced the glory but the downfalls that come with being involved in this program.

At times, the last thing we the members want to do is go rehearse for two hours everyday after school.

Saturday morning practices start as early as 7:30 a.m. followed by a competition that evening. And there are the additional sectionals called by individual section leaders.

I, however, am convinced that all athletes at one time or another feel this way.

Maybe the marching band didn't receive the coverage it deserved this year. Maybe in the years to come this will be changed.

Personally I feel dragging this issue out will not solve anything, and it certainly cannot change the events of the past.

Some band members were disappointed when we didn't receive the coverage we thought we deserved. But as a friend said, "If you're in this band for the publicity then you're in for the wrong reason."

I agree with him completely. I am not in this band to wear the state championship ring on my finger. I am involved in the band program because I enjoy music and love to perform.

There is no feeling like the one experienced when an individual marches off the field after giving his or her all in a show.

There are no words to express how I felt as I looked into our drum major's face at our last performance. The look was so full of intensity and pride it brought tears to my eyes.

Rory Carpenter, Farmington Hills

It's a problem

Drug abuse is a major problem in our society. This dilemma ranges from people ages 10 to 60. Many teenagers have substance abuse problems.

Farmington High School has a skyrocketing number of kids who currently or have at one point abused drugs. Many teens feel that it is necessary to use drugs to have a good time. Their lives revolve around their "high."

Recently, I witnessed a young adult describing his weekend. He was saying how it was so awful because they didn't have any "bud" (marijuana), but then they came in contact with their dealer, and the night became suddenly wonderful.

We don't realize how serious this issue really is. Kids are experimenting with more than just marijuana. They are trying acid and other drugs that are much harsher. If parents suspect any kind of drug abuse, they should start giving their kids random drug tests.

It's sad to see how addicted many people I attend school with are to the feeling of "flying high." Does it take a person to die for us to understand this is no laughing matter? Our children need help. The parents and communities need to open up their eyes and do something.

Nicole Lipa, Farmington

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What was your most memorable Christmas?

We asked this question at the Farmington Hills Senior Center.



"I don't remember any specific Christmas, really. But we did seem to have a lot more snow." Annette Richey Farmington Hills



"My first Christmas with my kids . . . about 40 years ago." Ed Smalley Farmington Hills



"Last year . . . I had my nephew with me and another relative was just out of the hospital." Peter Phillips Farmington



"Every year for the last 18 years has been memorable. I always go to my boss's house for Christmas." Russell Farmer Farmington

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