

Youth center Needed: Programs, place

How about that . . . the Farmington Area YMCA is raising \$1.6 million for a needed expansion and renovation that would benefit the community. Interestingly (and thankfully), the money is being obtained without one single cent being ratted at you in malls or on street corners, or without one piece of begging mail finding its way into your letter boxes.

As reported in the Dec. 16 Farmington Observer, the funds are coming through "philanthropic giving" from area businesses and individuals who can most afford it. Apparently, corporate Farmington has taken a leadership role here.

Chief among the planned improvements are a swimming pool specially designed for use by the handicapped (\$337,800) and a teen center and activity room (\$240,270).

The teen center especially interests us. It is our belief that the people who govern the Farmington area should take a good, hard look at developing programs for young people — and also a place in which to conduct those activities.

A teen center, well-staffed and open to all every day and night, is needed in the Farmington area. We hope the YMCA facility can meet that need.

Now, we're not putting down other efforts toward this end. We know that the school district has sponsored a teen center on Fridays at East Middle School. The problem has been not lack of concerned people, but a proper place for such a center in a community where space is expensive.

If you want to see where too many kids hang

out, especially in the summertime, just check out the parking lots of the fast-food joints and, long and always, the malls.

It's sad that so many kids hang out in parking lots and shopping malls where they usually aren't wanted just because there isn't something better to do. But it doesn't have to be that way.

While open gym/swim — also available in the past — more than meets the needs of youngsters looking for a dip or a pickup basketball game, a full-fledged teen center could serve a greater number.

Space for dancing, watching television or just hanging out could be provided. Movies and live entertainment also could be offered. And friendly conversation just might prove to be the most popular activity of all.

While we're on the subject of teen centers, it's crucial to have input from the teens themselves. We hope the YMCA officials remember that. No matter who sponsors the center, teens should be active at all programming levels.

It should be their program and their place. While the Y's teen center will be supported and staffed by the local YMCA, it would be open to members and nonmembers alike, according to Kevin Bush, executive director of the Farmington Area YMCA.

Excellent attitude . . . the Y seems to be doing a lot of things right here. One unfortunate thing is that, even if the fund drive goes as planned, the new facilities probably wouldn't be ready until the spring of 1995.

There are a lot of hours to be spent in parking lots malls between now and then.

Legislature does a partial job

The state Legislature's frantic effort to reform public education left the job only half done.

Lawmakers grunted, sweated, strained and gave birth to a camel — you know, a horse designed by a committee.

That's the best way to describe how lawmakers under the gun produced a new school finance system on Dec. 24 which guarantees \$4,200 to educate every child. This camel is an odd conglomeration of conservative, liberal and egalitarian ideas that will fully please absolutely no one.

And yet, on balance, we acknowledge the Legislature performed its duty under the state constitution: "The Legislature shall maintain and support a system of free public elementary and secondary schools as defined by law." (Art. VIII Sec. 2)

The constitution says nothing about cutting taxes.

The constitution says nothing about breaking the power of the teachers union.

The constitution says nothing about "parents' rights," contrary to what an ideological hard core imagines.

The constitution says nothing about a myriad of reforms, hopes, dreams and schemes of those with personal agendas to peddle.

On March 15, voters will be left to decide whether to hike the sales tax two cents and the real estate transfer tax another 1 percent. That step, if taken, would enable the state to drop the homesteaded property tax rate from 12 mills to six, the income tax rate from 6 percent to 4.4 and the single business tax rate from 2.75 percent to 2.35.

At this point we are not ready to support or

oppose the March 15 ballot proposal except to note it contains two serious flaws we've criticized in the past. First, the ballot plan almost doubles the real estate transfer tax. Second, it caps assessment increases at 5 percent, assuring that next-door neighbors with identical houses will pay vastly different tax bills depending only on length of residence. Both features hamper the young family trying to buy its first home.

For all the berating of the property tax, the Legislature came around to the position of this newspaper and recognized the property tax is here to stay. Businesses and owners of second homes will pay 24 mills. The homesteaded rate will be either 12 mills or six, depending on the decision of the voters.

Hopefully, tax reform will serve as a catalyst for better schools — at least in the districts where more money will accompany each student. But the Legislature's job is not yet done.

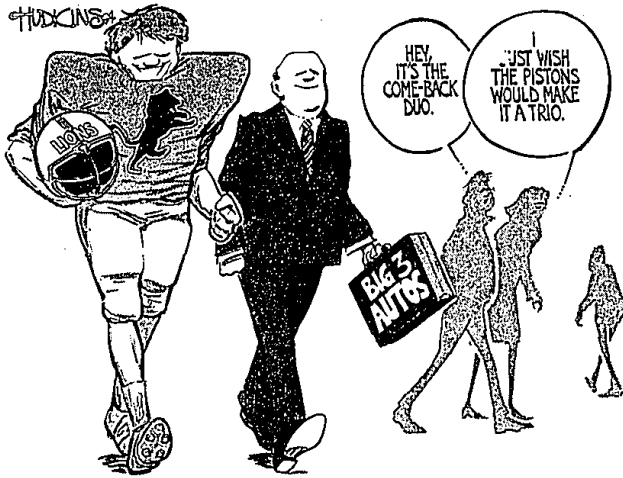
Charter schools and one hour added to the day no time soon is not sufficient to satisfy the kind of school reform we had in mind.

Yet, we want those improvements to be made carefully, thoughtfully, one at a time, and not bargained into place in a single 26-hour session.

We strongly suggest the Legislature look at consolidation of school districts with a target of 200 districts with a minimum of 8,000 students each. And that they mandate multiple use of buildings to deliver after-hours social and public health services.

And we suggest that the massive changes in school quality the state has made over the past four years be allowed to take effect, then evaluated for additions and fine-tuning.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Best of luck

To Mike Flanagan, former superintendent of the Farmington Public Schools:

As president of the North Farmington High School Raider Parents' Club, I want to wish you the best of luck in the next step on what will certainly be a nationally recognized career.

Your tenure at North Farmington coincides, to a great degree, with mine as president of the Parents Club. Yours was certainly marked by many highlights.

It has been a pleasure working with you in connection with the introduction of the scheduling innovations at North.

I have always found you willing to listen and open to suggestions. I will miss hearing your mellifluous voice during the cablecast board meetings, but trust that you will drop in from time to time to give the district an update on your career.

Best wishes to you and your family for a happy and healthy new year.

David L. Haron, Farmington Hills

yet, stay down in your basement and play your video games and watch your new TV idol, which is "Beavis and Butthead."

Even better, do me a favor and stay down in your basement so those of us who care can enjoy a better quality of life with our parks which are our urban jewels.

The thought "Our children are our greatest natural resource" is used a lot lately. Well, without clean air, water and food there won't be any children to be natural resources in the future. After all our environment on this planet is our greatest natural resource.

Without it, we won't be here at all. Think about it the next time you drive by that undeveloped wetland and woodland.

Bravo, Roy Lindhardt, keep telling it like it is.

Joe Derek, Farmington Hills

On 'Jumplin' Jack'

There's something: Why did the metropolitan media find Jumplin' Jack Faxon's dancing the night away at the Fox Theater instead of being in Lansing, taking care of business, newsworthy?

He only failed to make even one of the 26 votes required to craft what is probably the most critical legislation to come out of Lansing in years.

It couldn't be that because Jack Bo Nimble is a stalwart of that most noble organization, that fountainhead of all wisdom, goodness, compassion, the Democratic Party, you felt it wasn't a big deal, could it?

Even though your political soul mate, the Freep, a rag which has never met a liberal, or Democrat it didn't like, pinned the tail on this donkey?

What would have been your reaction if this shameful dereliction had occurred by a Republican? Let me guess — not only would your headline have screamed out in righteous indignation but, also, the pundits of your editorial page would have torn their robes, poured ashes over their pointy heads and demanded the miscreant's resignation.

You even probably would have summoned Phil Power from high on Mount Olympus, to fulminate against such a wretch, right?

F.M. Seibert, Farmington

Great column!

I would like to compliment the wonderful article written by Mr. Roy Lindhardt titled "Treat Parks Like Jewels" in Dec. 30 Observer.

First off, I know Roy and know that he feels like I do when it comes to protecting our parks and natural areas that are left in Farmington Hills.

It's too bad when you see these narrow-minded, self-centered, greedy individuals running around that feel everything should be covered in concrete and blasted to death with chemicals, pesticides, etc.

How sad the world would be if the only things left were boring people and concrete. Yes, I said boring people. A lot of you today are boring and dull. You spend all your time trying to make a lot of money to impress people you don't like.

I, too, am proud to say I have been criticized by those who would like to destroy our parks and remaining green spaces. I will admit it takes guts these days to speak out on our parks like Roy, I, and a few others have.

Children who are allowed to experience a wide array of activities and educational opportunities grow up a lot more aware of the world we live in than those who have only sports like baseball, soccer, etc. shoved down their throats all the time.

I am glad my parents allowed me to pick and choose my own activities when I was growing up.

Everywhere you go these days in the metro area are wall-to-wall people. Many things that used to be fun just aren't anymore. That's why passive parks and natural areas are becoming more important to our "quality of life" as time goes by.

I know that some of you will probably not agree with me and say who cares about natural areas. Well, I say who cares about you. Better

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Can Mayor Dennis Archer make a difference in Detroit?



"Yes. He's going to have to start with small things. How about a tax incentive to start a business in Detroit?"
See *Hasapsanani Farmington*



"Yes. He seems to be vibrant, kind of a take-charge guy."
Barbara Wolff
Farmington



"I think he's going to be fabulous . . . but there's so much to be done."
Ralph Farley
Farmington



"Yes. Basically, I don't think it could get much worse. But I think Archer'll have a positive influence on business."
Jeff Robinson
Farmington

We asked this question at the Farmington Branch Library.

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