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IN THE PAPER
TODAY

Back from Guyana: A Farmington Hills nurse is back from South America to practice her speciality — anesthesiology./B1

The vacation from . . . Murphy's Law turned a family vacation into a memorable event, says Kathie O'Donohue, Farmington Hills resident and Observer guest columnist./B1

YMCA gears up for big day

Oct. 12, a Saturday, has been designated as "YMCA Day" in the Farmington area. That's the day the local Y's renovation and expansion will be unveiled.

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

The UFOs are hovering, says Mandi Skeegan. While it may sound like the community relations director for the Farmington Area YMCA has been watching too many episodes of "The X-Files," she's really referring to "Unique Family Opportunities," the

central idea behind the Y's recent expansion.

The as-yet-unfinished center is on schedule to be unveiled at a special open house/celebration from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 12, officially named "YMCA Day" by both Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils.

The expansion has received much

attention, from national leaders like Vice-President Al Gore to locals like Joe Knollenberg and Carl Levin, who plan to appear that day.

According to Skeegan, the 12th will bring not only a name change — the Farmington Family YMCA — but also a new era of family entertainment.

"It's a concept that has to do with parallel programming," she said. "A family can walk in the front door and Mom can go exercise, Dad can go play racquetball, infants can go into our baby-sitting area, for children there's a Kids Zone, which is

comparable to Discovery Zone, and the teens can go to the teen center.

"That family is coming in to spend time together, but in their different ways."

The baby-sitting area is licensed and supervised, while the elaborate, \$200,000 teen center features pool and ping-pong tables, as well as areas for kids to do their homework after school.

The new Y's biggest attraction is a second, handicapped-accessible pool. Many area health groups have expressed interest in holding reha-

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OPINION

Spike the list: There's a whoopee-dee-do coming at the Farmington Public Schools. We'd like it if the guest list included some ordinary folk as well as the cream of officialdom./A16

SPORTS

Swim meet: Farmington Harrison and North Farmington matched swimming and diving talents in girls dual-meet competition Tuesday./C1

SPECIAL SECTIONS

Home improvement: Look for our annual fall improvement supplement, chock-full of helpful hints and ideas, among today's inserts.

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They strive to drive



ABCs of driving: Amy Russo (above), a Farmington High sophomore, takes constructive criticism from ABC Driving School instructor Frank Yeager (below). He points out the car's radio, but says they won't be playing it.

Young drivers learn new rules of road

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

A long-in-the-works bill making Michigan driver's education more rigorous is only one step away from becoming law: John Engler's signature.

But the Farmington area's young drivers have been well-drilled in the new standards.

Last week, both the state House and Senate approved the new system, which calls for the implementation of a three-step process.

Anyone 14 years and nine months or older can qualify for level-one status by fulfilling certain requirements. Ages 16-and-up advance to level two after holding a level-one permit for six months, completing a driver's training course, incurring no moving violations, and passing a road test.

The most controversial parts of the system are a ban on driving between midnight and 5 a.m. for level-two drivers, except with a parent or guardian, and a required 50 logged driving hours with that guardian in order to advance to level three.

"This was going to come sooner or later," said Frank Yeager, a driving instructor at ABC Driving School in Farmington. "It's been in the works for years, but (legislators) have just been arguing about how they're going to write it and pass it."

Sgt. Dennis Green, traffic section supervisor for Farmington Hills Police, cited state statistics as evi-

'If you're 16, and out after midnight, you shouldn't be out that late anyway.'

Frank Yeager
—driving instructor

dence of the need for new requirements. "Drivers ages 16 to 20 represent about 9 percent of drivers but cause about 15 percent of accidents, and I'm sure that's representative of Farmington Hills, too.

"We support this change, and it's been in the making for quite some time. Anything to make young drivers more skilled will be helpful."

The bill also no longer requires public schools to offer driver's education, but Deborah Brauer, publications specialist for Farmington schools, believes Farmington would.

"At this point, I can see us continuing our program," she said. "We're going ahead as if we will offer it this coming summer, but it's really too early to tell. It's really the board of education's decision."

Rep. Dan Gustafson of Williamston, who sponsored the bill, agrees. "I believe that schools will continue to provide it, just as most continue to provide team sports

See DRIVE, A3



More 'Madness' is in store for downtown shops

BY TODD WICKS
STAFF WRITER

Hot chocolate, acoustic music . . . and, hopefully, plenty of deals.

All of the above and more will be available when the Downtown Farmington Business Association holds another of its Moonlight Madness Sales Friday, Oct. 4. Several local stores will remain open into the night, offering specials and discounts as late as 11:59 p.m.

Brian Ferrobce, the owner of Comic Plus in the Village Mall, said the special sales are a great way to introduce new customers to a store they might not shop.

"There's a greater variety of retail down here now than there was three years ago when I first started participating in the sales," he said. "A lot of people don't know what we've got here in their own town."

They fly down Grand River on their way to work, and they're not even aware that some of these stores exist. "This gives them an opportunity to see what we have to offer."

Ferrobce will also be performing a set of unplugged blues and modern rock for shoppers with his band Angry Rod Planet. Meanwhile, in front of the Farmington Insurance Building, free coffee and hot chocolate will be offered to shoppers chilled by the night air.

Touch of Romance on Grand River has experienced repeated success with the sales.

"Last year, we had people in here until we closed at 10, and we expect that this time, too," said owner Beverly Brown. "We catch people coming back from dinner, all ages and all kinds."

"One of the things we're after is to get people to realize that we're not just fat businessmen sitting around, reaping the benefits of owning businesses," said John Cromwell of the Downtown Farmington Business Association (DFBA) and the owner of Cromwell Family Chiropractic in town.

"We want to be as productive as possible. We're committed to Farmington. People think that you open your doors and then you're at the golf course every Wednesday, and it's just not true."

Retired school people take note

Attention, anyone who worked for the public schools in any district in any capacity:

You're invited to a luncheon hosted by The Farmington Area Association of Retired School Personnel at noon Tuesday, Oct. 8, at the Farmington Hills Beef House, 28975 Grand River, Farmington Hills.

Linda Serrrena, Blue Cross/Blue Shield representative, will speak on understanding the forms received from her company.

Anyone with a Blue Cross/Blue Shield billing to discuss should bring it to the luncheon.

For more information on the retired school personnel group, call 471-7477.

FARMINGTON FOCUS

For young gardeners

The Farmington Garden Club's group of Junior Gardeners will meet at 4:30 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 15, in the lower level of the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library, Liberty and State streets.

The club is open to students between grades 3-7, but registration is required by phone (474-7770) or in person with the children's librarian.

Genealogically speaking . . .

Carlyn Griffin will discuss organization of materials at a meeting of the Farmington Genealogical Society at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Oct. 15, in the lower level of the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library, Liberty and State streets.

At the next meeting on Nov. 19, same time and place, speaker Dave Finney will explain how the Civil War is related to our ancestors and those living today.

Items for Farmington Focus may be mailed to the Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington 48335; faxed to 477-9722; or dropped off at the newspaper office. For the computer literate, the Internet E-mail address is packy@online.com.