

Begin the debate Raise questions, issues on bond

The bond is on — and so are we. Now that Farmington Public Schools board members have committed to go for a \$110 million bond issue, it's time to get more specific on this plan including what's in it and why.

Here's a brief summary: The district wants to spend more than \$115 million, which covers more than \$92 million to improve aging and overcrowded school buildings and another \$23 million-plus to boost the number and capability of computers across the district. Bonds will be sold to pay \$110 million of that bill, with interest raised to pay the rest.

Those are the basics. But we've got plenty of questions, including: Are there any frills nestled among the needs, items in the plan that aren't necessary? Does it make sense to buy millions of dollars in computers when the state of technology is changing so quickly? How equitable is the plan across the district?

We pledge to look at all the nooks and crannies of this proposal and deliver that examination to our readers before the proposed March 25th election. We'll inspect current facilities, plans for the future and enrollment projections; we'll dissect current computer use and future computer needs. And we'll get viewpoints from school officials and outside experts in various fields trying to breakdown the needs of this plan.

The idea is to give voters enough information to decide on their own whether or not this huge investment is something worthwhile or whether it's too much.

And, frankly, we're a bit concerned at the lack of comments or questions so far on the proposal. Maybe it was the holiday season that distracted folks; or maybe they were just riding the fence waiting to hear whether or not the board would take the plunge.

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It's fair to any some folks have already made up their minds about this plan. School district faithful will support just about anything proposed, even as loyal opposition voters will reject any new tax that comes down the pike. Many of those people will show up at the polls no matter what. It's everyone else in the middle that we'll be aiming to help inform and prompt to the polls.

We hope to generate more debate and discussion with our stories. We also expect the school district to offer further hearings or town meetings to outline the plan and answer questions, plus providing neutral, objective printed material for the public to chew on. Our letters to the editor space, of course, is available for questions, ideas and opinions. So, let the debate begin.

Judge Grant holds promise

What's in a name? Victory, if the name is Nanci Grant, the newest Oakland County Circuit judge, whose father Barry is a longtime Oakland County Probate judge.

The West Bloomfield resident took advantage of her father's popularity, campaign signs that dwarfed her opponent's and endorsements from key community leaders to outpoll John N. O'Brien of Royal Oak, whose uncle Francis X. is a circuit judge, in the Nov. 5th general election.

But Grant also was long on substance during the grueling and expensive fall campaign. She took a strong case to the voters, touting her civil law background against O'Brien, an assistant Oakland County prosecutor. Grant also has been an Oakland County mediator and a circuit court arbitrator, clerk and researcher. That broad background should serve her well as Oakland institutes a Family Court to oversee divorce, custody and juvenile cases.

I saw Grant in action several times during her election run and was struck by her resolve to win a seat on the 17-judge bench. She wanted the \$109,257 post — badly. On the stump, she was friendly and articulate, but not necessarily outgoing. On first meeting, she almost seemed aloof. But in the end, I found her committed, caring and compassionate — not easy to get to know, but with the panache to win over detractors once she donned a black judicial robe.

At her swearing-in, she said: "The most important person is the person before the bench, not the one behind it."

I'm especially impressed with Grant's choice of role models: her father Barry, and Judge Hilda Gage, newly appointed to the Southfield office of the Michigan Court of Appeals. Both are Bloomfield Township residents and fine jurists.

The ideas Grant espoused in seeking the job will serve as the benchmark of her success as a jurist.

Foremost is her self-characterization as a strict constructionist, following the law, not making it. That's the philosophy, she says,



BOB SKLAR

she'd apply even to controversial cases involving assisted suicide or cocaine possession. But will she wait under public scrutiny?

If elected, Grant pledged to help ease the court docket, do more public education and continue as a community activist. In keeping with her love for research, she pledged to consider alternative sentencing where appropriate. All are admirable goals. But in what form will they play out?

Both Grant and O'Brien, now new county prosecutor David Gorczyca's top aide, ran independent campaigns, in contrast to the team approach used by five incumbents against one challenger in the other circuit court race. The prosecutor's, sheriff's and county executive's races also proved to be heated. "My race in particular was a very clean, very positive race," Grant said — and she was right.

As she embarks on the first year of a six-year term in one of Michigan's busiest circuit courts, Grant would do well to heed her dad's advice: "Be fair, be respectful and be decisive. Those are the three most important ingredients."

After drawing 53 percent of the vote, the newest Judge Grant said, "My job is to fulfill that vote of confidence by doing a great job and being a true public servant." By the end of the year, we'll know how closely she measures up.

Bob Sklar is managing editor of our Oakland County editions.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Can you recommend a good book?



We asked this question at the Farmington Public Library.

'The Four-Year-Old' (by Louise Bates-Ames and Frances Hg.) There's one for every age.
Cindy Lazoen
—Farmington



'The Horse Whisperer' (by Nicholas Evans). It's excellent!
Jeanette Proy
—Farmington



'Follow the River' (by James Thom). It's a true story about a woman who was captured by Indians.
Danielle Zalac
—West Bloomfield



'The Mummy by Anne Rice.'
Rechael Rogers
—Farmington

LETTERS

Cable answer will say it all

When I learned that Time Warner Cable had dropped CICO (Channel 21, TV Ontario), I was deeply disappointed. Along with Channel 11 (WTWS), Channel 21 offered some of the most consistently reliable high-quality commercial-free viewing options available for my 2-year-old daughter. No home shopping, golf or courtroom programming can possibly provide the benefits derived from CICO's children's educational television programming.

In early December, I wrote the above views in a letter to Tom Bjorklund, vice president and regional manager of Time Warner. His letter of response was courteous and concerned, but gave no hope of CICO's reinstatement. Since Time Warner entered the picture, rates have been raised, a valuable channel has been dropped, and yes, some new channels have been added, merely bringing our lineup on par with neighboring communities. Not an inspiring track record.

Judging from the letters in the Observer and my own contacts with Time Warner staff, Time Warner is getting lots of customer feedback on the CICO issue. Their response to this outcry will tell us whether or not they care about keeping their customers happy.

Sue Curtis
Farmington Hills

Missing CICO

To Time Warner Cable Co: Can you please bring back CICO, the Toronto Educational Channel 32, Channel 21 on Time Warner Cable, to Farmington/Farmington Hills television? We really miss it. It is an excellent station and had excellent programs which we very much enjoyed. You removed it from your cable channels a short time ago. Is there some way it can be reinstated for our television viewing here in Farmington and Farmington Hills? We very much hope so.

Margaret G. Schaeffer
Farmington Hills

Ameritech: Sounds too good

Competition? Monday's Observer included a story on Ameritech's attempt to enter the long distance market. The head of Ameritech chided the large long distance carriers for their recent price increases. From reading the article one would assume that Ameritech is the champion of competition. If you believe that, I have a bridge in Brooklyn that you might be interested in.

The truth is that Ameritech wrote and paid for the recent legislation in Michigan. The truth is that Ameritech has vigorously fought against intra-lata dialing parity. That allows you to make a "toll" call using another carrier without first dialing a five-digit access code. We were all supposed to have intra-lata dialing

parity on Jan. 1, 1996, but Ameritech wrote the new legislation to change that and is now fighting in the courts to delay the full implementation envisioned in that legislation.

The truth is there is no competition for our overpriced local phone service. The truth is Ameritech recently raised the price for some of its already overpriced services such as call waiting by \$1 a month, or a 25 percent increase. You may not even be aware of that because Ameritech does not provide you with a monthly detail of the components of your local service charge.

When you make a call, do you know if it is a local, zone or "toll" call? Probably not, because Ameritech removed the chart from the white pages directory that used to list that information. The truth is that to make unlimited local calls the charge is \$40 per month. In many other states, the same service costs around \$10 or less. The truth is that the local calling area is extremely limited and thus many calls that would be local in other states fall into the zone or "toll" call category. Most other states do not even have the category of a zone call.

Yes, we are all for true competition. It sounds good. But when a monopoly writes and pays for legislation through PAC contributions and a massive lobbying effort, it's too good to be true.

Tom DeWard
Farmington Hills

Helping is 'in'

May I add another "In and Out" to Judith Doner Berne's list? (New Year ins and outs in our town — Jan. 21, 1997.)

Out: doing something nice or helping out once a year at holiday time, usually in November or December. . .

In: the whole office, group, house of worship, or family "adopting" a cause or non profit agency, and then working throughout the entire year to make things better for others.

At Open Door Outreach Center, our busiest months providing food, clothing and financial assistance to families in need are July and August. This past year in September, our food cupboard actually ran out of soup!

There are 12 months of the year to show concern and commitment to others. Make it an "in" thing to do in 1997!

Susana Williams, director
Open Door Outreach Center, Pontiac

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 810-477-9722.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

40 Years ago — Jan. 17, 1957 (Enterprise)
Superintendent O. E. Dunckel announced he would retire as head of the Farmington Public School system after nearly 18 years in the top post. He was planning to retire from administration and teaching. He touted the "sympathetic understanding and support" of the board during the problems of a growing district.

25 Years ago — Jan. 19, 1973
Farmington school board Trustee Aldo

Vagnozzi was found innocent on an assault charge filed by a woman who claimed he had grabbed her arm and bruised it while she was collecting recall signatures against him. "If the decision had gone the other way, person of good reputation would think twice before running for public office," Vagnozzi said.

Two years ago — Jan. 19, 1995
Farmington area residents were among those awaiting word about loved ones from Japan, after an earthquake measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale hit the town of Kobe on the island nation. Estimates were that 2,000 people were killed and thousands were injured.

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— Philip Power