

# Farmington Observer

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## IN THE PAPER TODAY

**Crashes:** Two people were injured in separate accidents in Farmington Hills this week. /A3

**Business booster:** From banjo to business, deputy county executive Kenneth Rogers has met success that earned him a spot with Executive L. Brooks Patterson. /A6

**Turning 1:** A Farmington Hills youth program for middle schoolers celebrates its birthday. /B8

## TASTE

**Focus on Wine:** Paired with Guinness, St. Patrick's Day fare is complete. /B1

**Master Chef:** Certified Master Chef Milos Cihelka shares recipes for simple, fresh foods for people who don't have a lot of time to cook. /B1

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## Bond's hard drive — computer push

Editor's note: This is the third in our series of stories on the Farmington schools' \$110 million bond issue.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITER

Those who deal in data daily have a dream when it comes to school technology. Kathy Jones, director of information management, would like to see every Farmington school child have a classroom computer at their side.

"When the students have their own laptops to plug in and use it as needed and never have to wait... that would be great," Jones said.

The \$110 million bond issue before voters March 25 settles for something less than that grandiose vision.

Some \$20 million would pay for new computers, Internet connectivity and video programming. Another \$3 million is earmarked for applied technology.

In Farmington schools, there is an average of one computer for 10 students. Some are 7 to 8 years old.

District officials want a 4-to-1 computer ratio for its 11,600 students.

The debate is not whether school children need computers, but how the district should buy them.

Bond opponents — namely Farmington Parents for Educational Priorities — believe computers should be paid for out of the district's \$114 million operating budget and \$20 million surplus.

PEP's chairman and Farmington Hills resident Paul Wolday questions the need for a private fiber optic network and putting VCRs and TV monitors into every classroom.

"What's the deal with all these new computers?" asked Wolday at an informational meeting at East Middle School March 10. "The fiber optic network proposed by the school board is top of the line. This is a network that is very expensive and very sophisticated."

"In fact, I'd say more than 90 percent of the businesses in this community."

He also questions wisdom of buying of computers and paying them off over a 24-year period.

State law requires technology bought through bond issue money be paid off in seven years, which the

See BOND, A3

## Icy devastation



STAFF PHOTO BY DIAN DEAN

The aftermath: Kenneth Hoskins, foreground, of Hoskins Tree Service in Farmington Hills cleans up branches while his brother, Tony, clears the roof of a house on Hawberry Street in Farmington Hills after Friday's storm.

## Power punch Storm takes toll on trees, lines

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
AND LARRY O'CONNOR  
STAFF WRITERS

Farmington and Farmington Hills were reeling Friday from an ice storm that downed power lines, knocked down trees and forced schools to close.

"We were informed by Detroit Edison that some 300,000 customers in the area are without power," said Hills City Manager Dan Hobbs, who was surveying the damage with Public Services Director Tom Bisell Friday morning. "My own house was without power."

Edison had received more than 16,000 calls by 8 a.m. Friday. It was the third largest ice storm in Edison's history.

Farmington Hills firefighters had been on 62 runs between 8-10 a.m. and dispatchers at the city's communications center had received 101 9-1-1 calls between 3-7 a.m. There were 106 emergency runs in 12 hours Friday. The

Hills firefighters average 15.

Hills Deputy Fire Chief Pete Baldwin said firefighters had "battered" down wires and asked advised people in the neighborhood of the problem.

"We were just too busy answering calls to stay at the scene," he said. "People should consider the downed wires as being live. We've banded and blocked off some streets so that no one drives over any wires."

Edison was airing public service messages Friday, warning residents to consider the downed wires a hazard and giving out its number to report problems and get information. That number is 1-800-477-4747.

Baldwin cautioned residents to be a little patient and not call 9-1-1 unless it's a clear emergency. For other problems, residents can call the non-emergency number in Farmington Hills, 477-0911 or police at 473-9694.

Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said Edison has

See STORM, A4

## Teacher faces sex for pot charges



BY BILL CASPER  
STAFF WRITER

A 41-year-old Redford man who teaches special education in Farmington is out on bond after being arrested for allegedly exchanging marijuana for sex with two teenaged brothers.

Jeffrey A. Downing stood mute Thursday in Redford's 17th District Court to six counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct and two other drug-related felony charges. Visiting Judge Vesta Svenson entered not-guilty pleas for Downing, who was released from custody after a \$200,000 cash bond was posted.

Downing teaches special education students ages 11-15 at Warner Middle School in the Farmington school district. The students are in grades six through eight.

"We were informed Thursday by (Redford) police, and we're all stunned by the news," Farmington school Supt. Bob Maxfield said Friday. "It's a tragic situation for everyone involved."

Downing, a teacher in the district for 15 years, has been suspended with pay pending an internal investigation by school officials, Maxfield said.

Redford police heard allegations last Sunday morning when officers were called to Downing's

See TEACHER, A4

## Tower rules go to council

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

After more than five years of study sessions, debate and changes, a proposed ordinance regulating cellular equipment was passed by the Farmington Hills Planning Commission Thursday night.

The ordinance, which has been revised several times, regulates the location, size and appearance of cellular towers and antennas in the city.

The Federal Communications Commission had sent a letter to the city calling for passage of an ordinance. Farmington Hills is one of only 32 cities in the United States that hadn't developed an ordinance after putting a moratorium on the towers and antennas.

"I hate cellular towers," said Commissioner Paul Blizman. "I don't want them in residential areas. But a hidden antenna is something I don't think the city could fight in a residential area. There would be no impact on property values."

The proposed ordinance would allow cellular towers, the single poles that have antennas for cellular communication attached, only in non-residential areas, 500 feet from any residential areas.

But the new ordinance, which, by federal law can't take into account health concerns, also allows

See TOWER, A2

## Pothole plague only getting worse

### More road talk, Page A5

BY WILLIAM COUTANT  
STAFF WRITER

The people who fix them and the people drive on them all seem to agree that the area's roads are worse than ever.

"Yes, it's probably getting worse," said John Kent, owner for 22 years of Farmington Hills Collision Center on Folsom. "We see it in flat tires, broken tie rods and bent rims."

The more frequent than usual cycle of freezing and thawing has wreaked havoc with roads in Farmington and Farmington Hills, keeping both city's road crews busy.

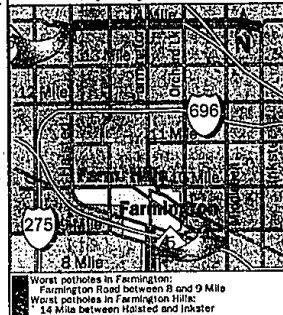
"A big factor is the freeze-thaw cycle," said Dan Rooney, Farmington Hills public works superintendent. "Our pavements are getting older."

Rooney said that many of the roads causing problems are maintained by Oakland County, including Middlebelt, Orchard Lake, Hagerston, Eight Mile, most of 12 Mile, most of Grand River, 12 Mile, M-6, I-275, I-696 and Northwestern.

"I would say the worst road that we have to take care of is 14 Mile," he said. "When you consider the volume of traffic and that it is two lanes, that makes it a tougher road to maintain."

In Farmington, the roads are probably in better shape than in most of the surrounding communities because of a city road mileage issue passed three years ago, said Kevin Gushman, director of the city's public services department.

### Potholes aplenty



Worst potholes in Farmington:  
Farmington Road between 8 and 9 Mile  
Worst potholes in Farmington Hills:  
14 Mile between Halsted and Iakator



STAFF PHOTO BY BRADLEY LEBLANC

Just fillin' time: Matt Berzins and Wayne Smith work on Independence Hills subdivision roads, off Drake.

"That was a real shot in the arm," he said. "Our local roads are probably in better shape than those of most cities."

But Farmington Road, which is a county road maintained by Farmington under contract, is a challenge, Gushman said.

See POTHOLES, A3