

## Idea takes off

### County chopper merits a look

**O**akland County should scrutinize cost concerns before creating an aviation unit within the sheriff's department and equipping it with a helicopter.

That said, we think Sheriff John Nichols' idea of adding a chopper to his fleet of 104 marked patrol cars, 28 boats, one motorcycle and a Dragon Patrol 2 public safety vehicle merits serious review. Potential uses for a helicopter, working in tandem with ground units, include rooftop rescues, woodland searches, high-speed chases, shopping district patrol, air medical evacuation, traffic surveillance, boating accident support, reconnaissance and crowd control in any of the jurisdictions patrolled by the county's more than 40 law enforcement agencies. The idea commands the support of the Oakland County Chiefs of Police Association.

Consider the advantage a chopper would have given officers amid the shootout at the Ford Wixom plant last November, during the hunt for the two men who robbed Tapper's Jewelers in West Bloomfield May 21 or in the aftermath of the tornado that ripped through Springfield Township July 2. A chopper also would be integral in watching over the Woodward Dream Cruise and pinpointing airplane crash sites. In a high-speed chase, it could keep fleeing vehicles in view so pursuing patrol cars could slow down, decreasing the risk of a smashup.

A helicopter's visual vantage point not only increases the efficiency of ground units, but also enhances officer safety because perimeters and dangers can be established quickly, according to sheriff's Sgt. Kerry Krupsky.

The purchase price for a new, commercial helicopter would be upwards of \$1.5 million. The Michigan State Police — together with Warren and Detroit, the only area police agencies to have a helicopter — pegs the operating cost at almost \$400 per flying hour.

The Oakland County Board of Commission-

ers' seven-member public service committee, chaired by Shelley Taub, R-West Bloomfield, wisely referred the cost of buying and maintaining a helicopter for study to an ad hoc county committee that includes the County Executive. We concur with Commissioner Lawrence Pernick, D-Southfield, who told us: "I generally support the idea of a helicopter. But as with other proposals, we need to see the figures."

Given its potential use in life-threatening emergencies, a helicopter should be new if purchased, not an unreliable military surplus model whose parts are hard to come by. We're intrigued by such "night vision" features as a searchlight and a thermo-imaging camera that projects onto a screen images of people or objects from the heat they emit.

With a cruise speed of 120 mph between 700 to 1,000 feet, a helicopter can search one square mile in about two minutes, significantly reducing the number of ground units required, according to Krupsky.

It's easy to say the county should just call Warren or Detroit when in need of a chopper but travel time and other commitments would make that an undependable option for our county — 910 square miles, 1.2-million residents and 40,000 businesses. It's the third wealthiest county in the country.

Based at Oakland International Airport in Waterford, a helicopter might prove beneficial to other county departments, like the drain commission, road commission, development and planning division, risk management department, or community and economic development department, rather than standing idle, awaiting a law enforcement emergency.

To protect the county's investment and the integrity of the expenditure, we envision helicopter flight plans based on stringent common sense to help thwart misuse by public officials.

## Bows, balloons flavor a fine fest

**L**ast week's Founders Festival was my first as editor here at the Observer, so I did a lot of listening. Here's a bit of what I heard:

■ Marilyn Smith of the Farmington Community Library told me how they started at 7 a.m. Saturday with a small army of volunteers inflating and later handing out 700 sky blue balloons to the hordes of parade-anxious children along Grand River.

She graciously complimented the larger, blue and white O&E balloons that our staffers gave away. We learned the hard way not to over-inflate the balloons, let them float up to the drop ceiling in our office or let them bump any trees or bricks — those mistakes brought the same loud result.

■ I heard Diane, a former high school classmate of mine, tell about her three little boys and their tradition of attending Kids Day together. They look forward to going to Shiawassee Park every year, treating the day as a real holiday, just like Mother's Day or Father's Day. The tradition is so ingrained, they even asked mom to serve them breakfast in bed. She didn't, but she packed them lunches and brought them to enjoy the games, rides, crafts and other fun.

■ Linda Enberg, Maria Esposito, Rose Butler and Larry O'Connor told me about "bows." The descriptions varied, but the recommendation was consistent: "You've got to try them." These meat and vegetable pies served up by The Great Wall of China Restaurant at a stand in the Downtown Center parking lot are just as much a tradition as crowning Miss Farmington.

I finally tried one Friday night and now I can see the attraction. Despite a 10- or 15-minute wait for the next shipment — it was worth it. A manager at the restaurant said they sell bows all year, but they've become an annual rite at the festival because they're freshly baked and served warm.

■ Supportive applause and cheers by early parade-goers who watched Fun Run racers heading east on Grand River an hour or so before the parade arrived in the other direction.

■ A bit of disappointment was evident from local veterinarian Dr. John Richardson, whose Pet Show and Contest during Kids Day now draws a lot fewer entries than it once did. "Today's kids have other interests, like the Internet, to fill their time, he told the crowd that Tuesday at the park. Still, his entrants and the audience seemed to enjoy most of the



DAVE VARGA



STAFF PHOTO BY DEAN MITCHELL

Great seat: Nicholas Wilson, 2 1/2, rides a trolley during Saturday's parade.

show.

■ When asked, Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff provided a good perspective on the festival: "It is a hometown event. . . People come down to meet each other, to sit around the fountain. When you bring that many people, you create an image for the community, and that's the most important thing."

■ My family has a summertime tradition of debating the quality of every watermelon or corn on the cob. It usually starts with, "This is the best we've had since. . ." Founders Festival veterans make those kinds of innuendoes when talking about the weather for the festival. The week's warm, but not too hot temperatures have hardly ever been better, many agreed — despite a few rain drops near the end of Kids Day.

■ I heard some fest-goers who couldn't say no to the salesmanship of the crafters selling their own wares, such as a decorative beach towel that converts into a tote bag or a beaded hair tie up. Well, actually it was just one festival-goer and, as we headed home, she admitted she's always a sucker for such sales pitches.

Dave Varga is editor of the Farmington Observer.

## COMMUNITY VOICE

### QUESTION:

What did you like best about this year's Founders Festival?

We asked this question at Farmington Plaza.



John Mieczek works in Farmington



Sara Olive Farmington Hills



Mike Williams works in Farmington



Linda Smith Farmington

## LETTERS

### Why close road at OCC?

I fully support the need, and the decision of fully closing Farmington Road over I-696. We certainly do need the road to be open once schools start, and even more traffic is on the roads.

What I do not understand, is the need to close Oakland Drive through OCC.

This has not been explained to the taxpayer public that supports the road. For those of us living north of 11 Mile on Farmington Road, it means that any time we need to get home from north of I-696, we have to go through the extra traffic at Orchard Lake Road and 12 Mile — unavoidable if we are going to have a new bridge. We also have to go on Orchard Lake to 11 Mile, which at many times backs-up all the way to the entrance to OCC, before we can get to Farmington Road and then to our destination. I have not seen any construction on Oakland Drive through OCC, and the construction in the parking lots does not mean that the road cannot be used. It would certainly alleviate the acute traffic problem created by the bridge repair. I have not heard any valid reason for the road closure, and I hope that OCC would like to help its neighbors during this particular time. It is not too late for OCC to make a goodwill gesture and help the city that helps the institution so much.

Oscar E. Roberto  
Farmington Hills

### Thanks for wonderful year

As I reflect on my year as Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills many wonderful memories come to mind. I made so many appearances this year with the most memorable ones relating to my platform, A Stand For Children.

From Washington, D.C. to East Lansing to my own community of Farmington/Farmington Hills, I have spent much time encouraging youth to aspire to attain their dreams. As I spoke to students at schools, we discussed how drive, determination, and most importantly education would help them to reach their goals.

As the end of my year was fast approaching, I found it was time to leave my community for a week to compete in the Miss Michigan Scholarship Program. I am so proud to have been a member of the 24 intelligent and talented women selected to compete in the program. As I close this chapter in my life, I will open another. I look forward to the future with ambition and excitement. I plan to continue my work with youth and to make a constant effort to stand for children.

My upcoming year is already filled with pursuing my bachelor degree in journalism at Michigan State University, working for the North American International Auto Show, and continuing my Stand For Children.

Thank you Farmington/Farmington Hills

for all your support. Thank you also to my Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills Scholarship Program Board. It is because of this program that upon my completion at M.S.U. I will go on to pursue my masters degree with the aid of the \$11,500 scholarship that I received the night I began my year of service as Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills. I will forever keep you in my thoughts and prayers. God bless you all.

Annette M. Hohl  
Miss Farmington/Farmington Hills

### Help kids develop

One result of the recent media reports concerning early brain development in children is that parents with children of any age are wondering, "what exactly does this new information mean to me and my child?"

It's clear that human development is a complex issue that science is only beginning to understand. Part of my job as a pediatrician (and member of the American Academy of Pediatrics) is to help parents interpret the implications of new research.

The current discussions about early brain development center around children from birth to three years of age. It is during this period that the growth and organization of the brain is most influenced by environmental factors, including the active communication between child and parent.

Parents of a child from birth to age three should focus on positive interaction with their children such as talking, reading, listening to music or just playing.

The real key is for parents to focus on providing a healthy, safe, emotionally balanced and loving home. If we can manage that, our children have a better chance to thrive both physically and mentally.

Parents of children who are older than age three should be aware that opportunities abound throughout childhood to impact positively on the development and well-being of our children. There is no time limit on learning. It is a lifelong endeavor.

And let's not forget older children in foster care or awaiting adoption, or children with disabilities and other special health care needs. These children also respond to and benefit from positive family and environmental support.

Parenting a child of any age can be a difficult task. That's why it's so important to have support from friends, family and the community.

Dr. George L. Blum,  
Southfield

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas. To ensure authenticity, please sign your letter and provide a telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

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— Philip Power