

Village Mall offers step down to its past with new staircase

BY BECKY BURNS
STAFF WRITER

David Cornwell wanted to do something to bring more traffic to the basement shops in his Village Mall in downtown Farmington. So, he decided to start digging — through the sidewalk.

Cornwell knew of an old staircase that used to lead from the west side of the 76-year-old building to a storefront below street level. But sometime around the early 1950s, the stairs were filled in with concrete and made level with the sidewalk.

The shop they had led to was then turned into a mechanical room of sorts, housing the building's pre-air conditioning ventilation equipment, he said. What had been an alcove outside the downstairs door was spared from the concrete to become "a dank closet."

Cornwell, who manages the building at the corner of Farmington Road and Grand River Avenue and is partner in the mall, saw the possibility of recreating the sub-street storefront.

About a year ago, he began rallying city officials for their approval, only to find out authorization had to come from Oakland County because Farmington Road is a county right of way.

He found a sympathetic in with county engineer Jim Fazzini. "When I asked him about the idea, he said, 'I remember those stairs from when I was a boy,'" Cornwell said. "I think we were really fortunate to find someone who had seen it and understood how it used to be."

Three weeks ago, Cornwell and his crew broke concrete, so to speak, and dug the staircase out. And in the last week, they erected a wrought-iron-like rail around it, complete with a tall arch above the street-level gate.

"They tried to bring it back as close as they could to the original," Farmington city manager Frank Lauhoff said, adding, however, that he has yet to see pictures of the original.

Aside from the top two steps, which needed to be rebuilt, the remaining stairs "were almost

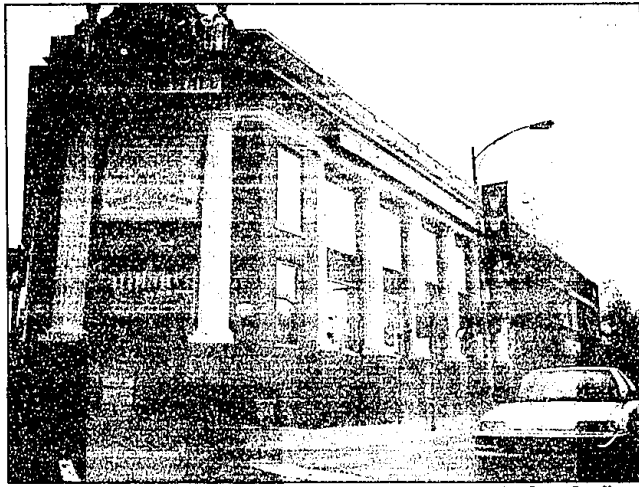
like new," Cornwell said. They remained in such good shape because the cement that was used to fill it in 40 or 50 years ago was present, he explained, meaning it came in the form of concrete slabs with steel rod reinforcements. All that needs to be done now, Cornwell said, is some scraping, painting and installation of lights.

"It's kind of a novelty. It's puts the building back to the way it was originally," Cornwell said, adding that he likes the natural light that now comes into that section of the basement.

The idea was to lease the new storefront to a retail shop, but while Cornwell was waiting for approval from the county, Flextech, a computer consulting firm, agreed to rent it for office space.

Regardless, Cornwell said he's happy to have the staircase dug out. And he foresees somewhere down the road, it will again serve to bring customers into a basement shop.

Lauhoff agreed. "It could be a very unique entrance for a very unique store."



STAFF PHOTO BY DEAN MCKENZIE

Step by step: A new staircase leads to what may become another shop in the Village Mall on Grand River and Farmington. The building opened as a bank in 1922 and was the site of an unsolved robbery in 1924 when six masked bandits stole \$11,000 in cash and \$75,000 in Methodist church bonds.

Hills man's death sparks traffic concerns

BY GREG KOWALEKI
STAFF WRITER

A 46-year-old Farmington Hills man was killed early Saturday when he plowed into a Consumers Power truck on Orchard Lake between 14 Mile and Maple.

Adolph Kizas was killed after his 1995 Ford Escort rammed directly into the Consumers truck at about 1 a.m. The truck had been parked in a south-bound lane while workers were doing an underground repair job. None of the workers at the scene was injured.

Kizas was taken to Providence Hospital where he died at about 4 a.m.

Kizas' car was severely damaged. West Bloomfield police traffic Sgt. John Baligian said an investigation is continuing. As of Tuesday, police were awaiting results of an autopsy indicating the type of injuries Kizas suffered.

Although the accident occurred at a time when traffic is usually light, Orchard Lake is one of the most dangerous roads in the township.

According to police statistics, Orchard Lake and Maple is the worst intersection in the township. Last year, 76 accidents were recorded there.

The second worst intersection was Northwestern and Orchard Lake with 46 accidents. That was followed by Orchard Lake and Walnut Lake (40 accidents), Farmington and Maple (34), Haggerty and Maple (34), Lone Pine and Orchard Lake (32), 14 Mile and Orchard Lake (30), Commerce and Hiller (28), Drake and Maple (26) and Maple and Middlebelt (23).

The core problem, Baligian said, is traffic volume. "It's not really the roads," Baligian said. "They are in relatively good condition now, especially following the repaving of a stretch of Maple west of Orchard Lake."

However, Orchard Lake continues to have a high volume of cars.

"The main type of accidents are rear-end collisions," Baligian said. "The traffic is a constant stop and go. Drivers just have to pay attention."

Statistics show 6 to 9 a.m. and noon to 6 p.m. to be the most dangerous times to drive, when accidents are most frequent.

Baligian said there have been no definite trends in the number of accidents, which varies from year to year.

Last March, the Road Commission for Oakland County installed a series of traffic monitors and devices to re-time traffic lights along Orchard Lake as part of its Fast-Trac program.

The goal is to improve the flow of traffic to reduce congestion and the risk of accidents. The surveillance monitors were placed at intersections from 14 Mile to Long Lake.

Baligian said it's too early to tell if the system is effective. "It hasn't been working long enough," he said.

According to the road commission, the system has proven to be effective in other communities, such as Troy.

The most effective safety device, Baligian said, is a careful driver. "If you drive out there, you have to be patient," he said.

"Those are very busy roads. Try to be as courteous as you can," Baligian said.

Strong turnout shows interest in downtown improvements

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff was heartened by the turnout at a recent meeting about long-range improvements to the business district.

Approximately 30 residents attended the session, hosted by the Farmington Downtown Development Authority. Six potential improvements were introduced by landscape architect Grisim/Metz Associates, Inc. of Farmington Hills. But Lauhoff said other ideas were registered by audience members.

"I'm very enthused about the participation and level of concern," Lauhoff said. "There were many residents who had ideas they had seen in other cities."

How does a boulevard for Grand River sound?

Residents also carefully listened to the architect's six potential improvements, described by Lauhoff as being unique. The

suggestions would attempt to "create focal points" and "promote pedestrian activity," according to the architectural firm.

"If they do move forward on some of (those) things," Lauhoff said, "it will make downtown Farmington very unique in the metro area."

The six suggestions from Grisim/Metz, and input from residents, will be weighed by the DDA board during its October meeting. Potential projects will be prioritized, to determine whether any make sense for the 1998-99 fiscal year.

Some highlights of the architect's presentation included: turning the city hall site into a "people place"; changing the parking and roadway system for the downtown center; and revising the design for the corner of Grand River-Farmington to allow more of a focal point for pedestrians.

State House Republicans set up web site

The Republican caucus of the Michigan House of Representatives has entered the information super highway with its new internet web site. The site contains a host of legislative and policy information so that constituents can remain on the cutting edge of state government.

"Access to computers and the Internet is growing exponentially," said state Rep. Andrew Reckowski, R-Farmington Hills. The Michigan House Republican Communications Section web site address is <http://www.voyager.net/migophouse>.

satin
fire

Electrify the night in this lacquer red gown with delicate black beading. Body-hugging fit with cap sleeves. En Francals by Husy Waltzer. Made in the USA. 100% polyester satin. Sizes 4-12. \$330.

Jacobson's

Birmingham (248) 644-6900 Livonia (313) 591-7898 Rochester (248) 651-0000

10 hours • Mon-Sat 10-9 • Open Sunday at Noon.