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FYA referrals decline

By TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Youth Assistance enjoyed another successful year, accomplishing its quest of steering at-risk children away from potential delinquency.

Proof was offered during last week's 38th annual meeting of the community based, volunteer-driven organization.

The breakfast meeting included reports on 1996-97 programs, "thank you's" and a future look.

The number of troubled youths being referred to FYA caseworkers by parents, teachers, police and counselors decreased from the previous year, but interest in the programs and activities is rising.

Among those offering congratulations was school board President Linda Enberg.

"Farmington Youth Assistance has been in business for decades," said Enberg, to the gathering of volunteers and community leaders. "You have influenced the lives of hundreds of at-risk children and their families."

"Your referral services, counseling services, parent classes, student activities are making a difference. And for that, we thank the people that have been involved in this program."

Small rewards

Youth Assistance Chairperson Joseph Svoko, also a member of the school board, cited examples of how programs are working, having a positive influence on which direction children turn.

"One of the youngsters had an invitation to a (FYA) camp," Svoko said, "and that camp made such an impact that the kid called and asked, 'Can arrangements be made so I can go to the reunion in December?'"

Another indicator of success, Svoko continued, is the letters of thanks to camp personnel and counselors. "These are some of the small rewards that come back."

Such praise, however probably wouldn't be possible "without the efforts of the volunteers," said caseworker Deborah McAleer. Volunteers logged approximately 750 hours, with 240 of those by the family education committee.

The committee helped offer "Children the Challenge" communication-building courses to the parents of pre-school and school-age children.

"These are people who really work hard, not only working with the kids, but working with the par-

ents of the kids who have issues and problems," McAleer said.

Besides volunteers, FYA banks heavily on funding from the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills, and the school district. The latter also chips in with office space, classrooms and buses.

"When you think about coalition building," she noted, "Farmington Youth Assistance has one of the strongest in the county."

Concurring on the community cohesiveness was Pamela Howitt, deputy court administrator for Oakland County Probate Court, which administers FYA.

"I see all you here and realize Farmington and Farmington Hills has a leg up on that as well," Howitt said. "You are here and you are working together."

Making pieces fit

Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield was succinct in his summation of Farmington Youth Assistance. He described it as a very challenging jigsaw puzzle.

"We have to make sure we don't have too many of one puzzle piece and we have more of the ones we need... We can't afford to duplicate our efforts."

With the 1996-97 story documented and conveyed, FYA is looking to a new year and a new program—retail fraud prevention.

"What we find, is shoplifting, retail fraud, is probably one of the more common reasons for referrals by police," McAleer explained. "If we can get the children educated about the consequences of shoplifting, we think that that will be beneficial."

Such a program might further cut referrals, McAleer said.

"I don't think I'll ever be put out of business," she said. "I don't think we'll ever not have a case load. But, maybe we can help kids make better choices when they are hanging out with their friends at the mall."

Thanking Earleen

Meanwhile, another highlight of the breakfast was mention of a newly formed memorial fund in the name of Farmington Youth Assistance vice-chairperson Earleen Kisner, who died in April. Kisner also was executive assistant to Maxfield.

The Kisner fund will be used to help keep FYA programs and camp scholarships going strong.

"Her memory will live through this," Maxfield said. "This is something she really cherished."

Health

from page A1

other suspected Legionnaires' cases at the hospital.

At the health division, Bird said the investigation is continuing to see if there is a link between the two cases.

"We have checked all the area hospitals and there are no more cases of Legionnaires' lying around," Bird said. "We continue to keep in contact with the hospitals."

There have been six cases of Legionnaires' disease reported in Oakland County since last January, but that's not unusual, said Rosemarie Rowney, manager of Health Services for the county.

"We experience about six or seven cases a year," Rowney said. "We investigate every single case." She said there does not appear to be a link among the cases. And she stressed the current identified cases do not constitute an "outbreak."

"It's important to remember that Legionnaires' (bacteria) is around us all the time in the soil and water," Rowney said. Persons who come down with the disease experience a lowering of their resistance system.

Legionnaires' disease is a severe type of pneumonia spread by a bacteria that thrives in warm mist found in cooling towers, air conditioners, hot tubs and showers. It is generally not fatal but smokers and people with weak immune systems are especially vulnerable.

Finding a common thread between the two men may be difficult, Bird said.

"With separate cases there's not a lot you can do to track it down," Bird said.

The last outbreak of occurred last year in Farmington Hills. Four people died and 26 became ill. The source was traced to a roof-top air handler at a cattleman's market.

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