

Mayor assesses her term

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

JoAnne McShane likes the progress that's taken place in the City of Farmington during her soon-to-end two years as mayor.



JoAnne McShane

McShane, near the beginning of the 8 p.m. Monday city council meeting, will comment about her mayoral term and then relinquish the top council post. The city charter mandates that Farmington mayors serve no longer than two years consecutively.

But first, Mary Bush and Arnold Campbell will be sworn in to new four-year terms and James Mitchell will receive the oath for another two-year term. All three were re-elected during the Nov. 4 council election.

"So many things have happened that I'm very proud of," McShane, whose council term continues until November 1999. "We have a Web site in Farmington, a new phone system."

"We're such a historic town but we've become a progressive city and I'm proud of that."

"She also lauded the leadership of the rest of the council and City Manager Frank Lauhoff for those accomplishments and others, such as how a fall 1996 outbreak of Legionnaire's Disease was put under control and how the city began a museum development committee for the Warner Mansion."

"Another McShane goal, getting a long-term 'visioning' process established for downtown, is becoming a reality. The city and Wayne State University are involved in the long-term planning effort."

"That's something I always wanted to do and we're doing it," she said.

It is expected that Mayor pro-tem Mary Bush Monday night will be selected to succeed McShane.

But Lauhoff said nominations for the council's next mayor and mayor pro-tem will take place anyway. Between the conclusion of McShane's term and the election of a successor, Lauhoff will temporarily preside over council during nominations.

The new mayor will then lead the rest of the agenda, which includes a presentation from Sue Bass, the new president of the Michigan Municipal League.

Lauhoff said Bass is making an effort to meet with city councils throughout the state as she begins her tenure.

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p.m., and New Year's Eve until midnight. Free miniature train rides will be given the first weekend, and free horse-drawn wagon rides will be given 6-8 p.m. Saturdays and New Year's Eve.

A special opening ceremony featuring Santa Claus is slated for 6:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 5.

The Howell Area Chamber of Commerce hosts the 14th annual Fantasy of Lights at 7 p.m. Friday, Nov. 28, in downtown Howell. Dozens of floats, marching units and Christmas trees will sparkle with thousands of holiday lights.

The parade, sponsored by Detroit Edison and Cobb-Hall Insurance Agencies, attracts some 30,000 spectators. The parade begins at Byron Road and travels east on Grand River through Howell's historic downtown to Elm Street.

Merchants, building owners and residents get in the act as well, adorning buildings with lights, fresh garland and red bows. After the parade, Santa will visit with children at the Fantasy of Trees. For more information, call the Howell Area Chamber of Commerce at (517) 546-3020 or visit the chamber's Web site at www.howell.org.

From Russia ... with love of music

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Public Schools students this month are learning a thing or two about Russia without even referring to their textbooks.

That's because a trio of teachers from Russia is visiting them in their schools through "Project Harmony." The government exchange program gives American and Russian teachers the opportunity to travel to the other's country, to share their educational expertise.

Last Monday, Valentina Fissenko of Smolensk and sisters Yevgenia and Oksana Bychkova of Siberia presented songs of their homeland during a visit to the vocal music classroom at Lanigan Elementary School.

The Russians are the second group of teachers from that country to visit the district; the other was in October 1996.

"The children are very excited to see this," said Naum Schulman, Lanigan vocal music director and a Russian immigrant. "You could see it (the excitement) in their eyes, their reactions."

With Fissenko at the piano, the guests and Schulman's third-graders sang Russian songs "Sunny Circle" and "Jolly Happy Ganders."

The Lanigan visit was just the beginning of a busy week. Tuesday, the contingent spent all day at Harrison High School, watching the band and orchestra practice. Wednesday morning, they spent time with Harrison's POHI/SXI (special education) programs and were at Power Middle School Thursday and Friday.

Their itinerary since arriving Nov. 2 also included a tour of Farmington, a stop at the Detroit Zoo, shopping and evening plans with host families Nancy Heilman and Julie Grodin, both members of the Kenbrook Elementary School faculty.

Before leaving for Siberia on Tuesday, they will today go to church service at Brightmoor Tabernacle in Southfield and spend tomorrow with Heilman and Grodin at Kenbrook.

After more than a week, it appeared that the Russians were becoming easily acclimated to American life. Heilman, who is hosting Oksana and Yevgenia, joked that the latter "allowed us to call her Jane." Grodin is hosting Fissenko.

Native music:
Farmington schools music instructor Naum Schulman performs as part of "Project Harmony," which is a cultural exchange involving Russian teachers.



Project promotes cultural harmony with songs from the motherland



STAFF PHOTOS BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Chorus in action: Students in the class (from left to right) Raquel Elisha, Francheska Gjelashaj, and Justin Glass sing Russian songs with Russian English teachers Valentina Fissenko and Yevgenia Bychkova (far right).

But, taking a more serious turn, Heilman talked about how "Project Harmony" can improve global understanding — or, at least, improve the way Americans and Russians view each other.

"They (the Russian visitors) are living, walking people that can give geography lessons like nobody else," Heilman said. "...

We have this image of 'ugly Russians,' and here come these sweet ladies. And we're all teachers at heart. We care about children."

Fissenko currently teaches English in grades five through 11 in a Smolensk school. She also is a longtime music and piano teacher.

Yevgenia Bychkova teaches

British history in English to seventh- and eighth-graders while Oksana Bychkova is studying to be a teacher of Russian language and literature.

Heilman said the visitors have made some interesting observations about how American teachers and students interact.

"They said to us, 'You treat

children with so much respect, you put up all of their artwork," she said. "They talked about how in Russia there's an imaginary wall between students, teachers and even parents."

In February, Heilman and Grodin will travel to Vladimir, Russia, for the return part of the exchange.

Parents relish cyber workout at first-ever family conference

BY TIM SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Parents didn't exactly flock to Saturday's first annual Family Focus Conference at Dunckel Middle School.

But enough showed up — about 100 or so — to give event organizers encouragement to do it again next year.

"The evaluations indicated that people thought it was a real positive experience," said Terry Klenzner, director of Farmington Public Schools adult education program. They encouraged us to do it again. They thought the sessions were very valuable."

Of 14 workshops, the top three choices were: You're Not Talking — You're Not Listening, Dr. Mel Chudnof, Oakland Community College; Six Tools for Easier Parenting, Nancy Wellinger, Farmington Youth Assistance; and Siblings Without Rivalry, Marilyn Suttie, Farmington Youth Assistance.

Klenzner said she thought those were the top picks because "all were dealing with very clear parenting skills."

She concurred that today's parents are seeking out such conferences more than ever before.

"Parents are looking for all the help they can get in this very challenging world we have," Klenzner said. "And here was a perfect opportunity."

About one of the other workshops, Cyberspace for Kids, Klenzner said it was useful for parents to see how their children are using computers both at home and in the classroom.

"Parents need to understand what their kids are doing on the computer," Klenzner said. "They need to stand over their shoulder and ask, 'What are you reading?' They have to monitor their kids while they're on those computers."

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STAFF PHOTO BY BRYAN MITCHELL

Tech talk: Sharon Vincent, the youth services coordinator at the Farmington Community Library, teaches a workshop on monitoring your kids in cyberspace at the first-ever Family Focus conference at O.E. Dunckel Middle school last Saturday.

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will be unplugged on Thanksgiving, Christmas Eve, Christmas, New Year's Eve and New Year's Day.

Admission is \$3 for adults and \$2 for children 2-12. Children under the age of 2 are admitted free.

"Proceeds from Wild Lights go to the Detroit Zoological Society to help fund educational programs and for exhibit renovations," said Brancato-Mauk.

In 1994, Wild Lights attracted 25,000 people. This year, zoo officials are expecting nearly 60,000 people through the turnstiles.

"We originally billed Wild Lights as a family event, however, we see a lot of couples attending," said Brancato-Mauk. "It's a nice night out before going out to dinner or a movie."

For more information on Wild Lights, call (248) 541-5635.

Hines LightFest

Billed as the country's largest drive-through light show, Wayne County's LightFest runs Thursday, Nov. 20, through Thursday, Jan. 1, along Hines Drive, between Merriman and Warren roads.

"We have overhead bridge displays, deer leaping across your car, and a four-story poinsettia wreath with candles," said Kathy Lewand, Wayne County parks

department executive.

For \$5 per car, Lewand promises you'll enjoy a mix of new and old displays, featuring more than 600,000 lights.

"We have more than 35 displays," added Lewand. "This year we have two new wetlands-themed exhibits, in conjunction with the newly opened Crosswinds Marsh in Sumpter Township. Look for the giant heron and animated frogs leaping from lily pad to lily pad."

The new displays cost \$5,000, and are handmade by companies in South Carolina and California, just like the others.

Lewand says much of the money for new displays is donated by Friends of Wayne County Parks, with others sponsored by companies like Blue Cross Network, NBD Bank and AAA Michigan.

This is the fifth year of the event, which started with roughly 25 light displays. The number has grown by approximately two a year, and includes displays depicting the Nativity, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa.

"The first year we spent \$250,000 on displays, and another \$100,000 on costs related to setting them up," Lewand said.

"We have nearly 300,000 people come through each year," Lewand said. The Wayne County LightFest begins Thursday, Nov. 20, and runs every night (except Christmas) 7-10 p.m. through New Year's Day.

Opening ceremonies will start at 6:30 p.m. Thursday as County Executive Ed McNamara and the CEOs of the sponsoring companies flip the "on switch." A brief fireworks display will follow.

Another way to view the lights is the first annual 8K Fun Run/Walk at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Nov. 18.

"Participants will be running through the lights," said Lewand. "All proceeds from the event will benefit the Friends of Wayne County Parks and the American Heart Association."

Entry fee \$16, and \$10 for teens or younger. For additional information, call (313) 261-1990.

Domino's Farms

The Christmas Light Display at Domino's Farms in Ann Arbor has attracted more than a million people and raised nearly \$500,000 for charity over the past five years.

"Last year 70 charities shared more than \$70,000," said Ashley Moran, director of the non-profit group Spirit of Christmas, which sponsors the event.

"We'll have over one million lights this year as we add six new displays, some with animation," said Moran. "We'll have upwards of 30 light displays."

The holiday event costs \$5 per car Mon-

day through Thursday, and \$7 on the weekend. Buses are asked to pay \$50. All the proceeds will benefit children and charities around metro Detroit.

"Last year we had 42,000 cars drive through, with 80,000 people visiting the indoor display. This year we think we'll get 60,000 cars and 100,000 people."

"We also will be expanding the route to include a drive around the petting farm," added Moran. "Visitors will drive through most of the light display before being able to enter the backside of the building for indoor attractions."

Moran says inside visitors will see 20, 14-foot designer-decorated trees, a "Christmas Around the World" exhibit, a miniature electric train, ornament-making for children, and a gingerbread house gift shop.

"The focus of our exhibit is children, because Christmas is for kids," said Moran. "We are also looking to broaden our appeal to make this an area event, not just an Ann Arbor experience."

The Christmas Light Display at Domino's Farms runs from Friday, Nov. 21, through Wednesday, Dec. 31, with the displays aglow from 6-10 p.m.

Take U.S. 23 to Exit 41, then a half-mile east. Follow the signs to Domino's Farms on Earhart Road, north of Plymouth Road.