

Future shop

Mall still faces parking challenge

The Downtown Farmington Center mall is changing, and it looks like for the better. The recent renovations, now nearly complete, provide a needed spiffy new look for the stores in the downtown's biggest shopping mall. Cost for the work is reported to have been nearly \$1 million.

Meanwhile the new, well-known retailers like the already opened Borders Outlet and the planned Starbucks coffeehouse should attract plenty of new visitors to the mall and the town. These are positive changes for the business community — more shopping traffic usually translates into more success for the retailers in town.

Yet, not everyone is excited about the changes brewing for the downtown mall.

A few longtime merchants talk wistfully about the days when mom and pop-type businesses filled storefronts and everyone knew everyone else's name. They worry that these national chain stores bring in nameless managers who have no vested interest in the town and no commitment to get involved in promoting its well-being. There is some validity to that concern, as folks in towns that made major transformations to nearly all chain-type stores, like Birmingham, would probably concur.

Unfortunately, it's the way of the business world. National chains get that way by being successful in offering products and services people want, at prices they can afford. And not all stores that are owner-operated are better than franchise stores. It depends on the store, the manager and the company culture involved. It sure seems that there's room enough in town for both local and chain stores, even if that means some of the local stores

(like Farmington Florist and The Discovery Shop) need to shift around to make way for parking lot fillers like Starbucks.

Another issue is the move from the discount-type stores toward more upscale shops. Again, that can be an improvement, especially if the retailers in the mall strike some kind of balance and offer something for everyone.

Parking is really the biggest problem at the mall and it will only get worse. A main culprit is the U.S. Postal Service center that pulls a lot of quick traffic in and out of the mall. Stores like Big Apple Bagels also draw plenty of drivers especially during morning and lunch hours, and adding Starbucks to the mix will bring even more cars. It's a good problem to be facing. One doesn't need to look into the too distant past to remember when vacant store fronts plagued the mall.

Parking issues, though, still need to be addressed — both for drivers and pedestrians. Farmington's traffic safety committee and DDA officials are looking at ways to improve pedestrian safety and make them feel more welcome. That's a huge issue for those of us who work within walking distance of that mall — it just isn't inviting to walk from Harmony House to Damman's or to Pier One Imports. It's also a key for people who drive to town and want to walk to shops that aren't right on Grand River. Some solutions proposed are easy — painting crosswalks, posting signs; others are more long-term and expensive — such as the proposals in the DDA 10-year plan. Those ideas total more than \$800,000.

Those parking/pedestrian problems need to be resolved. Until then, the improvements and plans for the Downtown Farmington Center mall merely look promising.

Credit Engler's predecessors, too

A visitor from Mars, listening to Gov. John Engler's 1998 State of the State speech, could have thought the world was created on Jan. 1, 1991, and before that, all was chaos. Engler could say nothing good about the Milliken years (1969-82) or the Blanchard years (1983-90). His constant theme was "the failed policies of the '80s" or "the failed policies of the past." He measured all progress from the date he took office.

To Engler's credit, however, we note he finally has awakened to the urban sprawl issue. "Reusing old industrial sites ... enables us to slow down the paving of green fields and thus conserve Michigan's beautiful countryside," he said. We welcome him to the club.

The historical truth is that Engler tried to obliterate his debts to Govs. Milliken and Blanchard, much like Winston Smith rewrote newspaper articles for the Ministry of Truth in Orwell's "1984." Consider:

■ Progress against crime didn't begin with the 300 bills Engler signed. The 650 lifer law, which cruelly dooms drug "mules" to life without hope of parole, was passed in 1978, when William G. Milliken was governor. Voters in 1978 eliminated "good time" for inmates at the insistence of Oakland's then-Prosecutor Brooks Patterson; approved tighter bail rules the same year; and elevated the Crime Victims Rights Act to constitutional status in 1988.

■ Engler advocated construction of 5,400 new prison beds, conveniently forgetting that his predecessor, James J. Blanchard, presided over the biggest orgy of prison building (from 13,000 to 35,000) in Michigan history.

■ Engler didn't mention shutting down state mental hospitals, but he actually followed the lead of Milliken and Blanchard in "deinstitutionalizing" mental patients into community programs.

■ Blanchard opened the door to welfare reform by capping individual benefits for seven of his eight years in office — and taking heat from the furious welfare lobby. Engler's welfare reform touchdown was built on Blanchard's blocking.

■ John Engler will earn an honored place in the history books for his advocacy of 1994's

Proposal A, which cut school property taxes and saved many non-industrial school districts from imminent disaster; his performance was heroic. But he shouldn't forget that he failed on his first try, in 1993. And he gave no credit to Milliken, Blanchard, the late Robert Fitch, Dick Headlee and past Legislators for trying with proposals in 1968, 1972, 1980, 1981, 1989 (two of them) and 1992 (two more).

■ "Remember the 17-year-old court fight over special education funding? We fixed that problem," Engler said. Yes, and we remember he was the governor fighting the suburban school plaintiffs for seven of those 17 years? Moreover, the problem is far from "fixed." How does his administration propose to deal with the way special education pupil loads and costs are outstripping the rate of revenue growth? He didn't mention it.

Long before Engler created his world in 1991, city officials were talking about "urban sprawl" — the abandoning of older cities, the paving over of meadows for malls, the subdividing of farms though there was meager population growth. The protest was bipartisan; it was from Grand Traverse, Muskegon and Ottawa counties as well as Washtenaw, Oakland and Wayne.

The governor proposed a \$500 million bond issue, with \$400 million for restoring polluted and abandoned sites; \$50 million for protecting drinking water; and \$50 million for upgrading facilities at our 96 state parks. Great idea. The Legislature should polish it and put it on the November ballot.

Engler mentioned a 1988 parks and environment bond issue of \$800 million, but only because Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld was involved. He skipped other contributions of the 1970s and '80s — the 1976 bottle deposit bill and the 1984 Natural Resources Trust Fund.

We give Engler credit where he has earned it. But he is no Pericles, leading us to a Golden Age. John Engler has never broken with the past. His "taxpayer's agenda" has given us tax cuts along with hefty increases in the sales, use and gasoline taxes. If he appears tall, it's because he stands on the shoulders of people like Milliken and Blanchard.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

If you could pick one place in the world to travel to, where would it be and why?



"New York. It's the fashion capital and I love shopping."

Jane James
Mercy student



"Greece, because that's where my ancestors are from."

Maggie Jallo
Mercy student



"Italy, because my parents went there and they said it was really, really pretty."

Laura Hurches
Mercy student



"Indonesia, to work with people of different cultures."

Katie Mato
Mercy student

We asked this question at Mercy High School in Farmington Hills.

LETTERS

Protect our gun needs

Your recent article, "County holds tight rein on guns," of Jan. 22, really shines of "big brother." As the Oakland County's CCW licensing board seeks "...to respond to applicant's needs, as opposed to the wants," I wonder what they were thinking when sworn into office, "to uphold the constitutions of both United States and the State of Michigan." In the case of the U.S. Constitution, the Second Amendment states that the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed.

The Michigan Constitution also states that "every person has a right to keep and bear arms for the defense of himself and the state." So what we have here in Oakland County is a requirement to "document an elevated need" in order to exercise our constitutional right. Somehow I don't read this as "...shall not be infringed." Am I missing something here, or as citizens, are we allowing a constitutional right to be maintained by the state as a privilege? What differentiates the want, from a need, to protect oneself? Think about it, your want to defend yourself lies in the hands of an Oakland County approval board. If you apply for a CCW permit, let's hope your wants are considered before the real need is necessary.

Mr. Cibor and the other members of the Oakland County CCW licensing board should consider that the real "elevated need" does not normally give much warning. If it did, we could all depend on 911. I'm sure glad we haven't yet reached the point where someone else determines our "need" versus or "want" to vote.

Roger Suter
Farmington

Moffitt impresses

Recently, Oakland Family Services had occasion to seek assistance from Mr. David L. Moffitt, Oakland County commissioner, in a matter involving contract procurement. We found Commissioner Moffitt more responsive than we reasonably could have hoped. We called him on Sunday, explaining that we were working under a deadline, and he took time from his busy schedule to see us the following day.

He not only gave our concerns his full and immediate attention but also generously provided the benefit of his legal counsel regarding contract procurement. Without our asking, he publicly supported our position.

We hear unending commentary about politicians, most of it adverse, and perhaps much of it deserved. But dealing with Commissioner Moffitt was refreshing and restorative. We were most impressed.

Michael S. Earl, president
Oakland Family Services

Ameritech editorial erred

Your recent editorial, published Jan. 22, is filled with errors we'd like to clarify for your readers.

Your assertion that Ameritech Michigan cross-subsidized Ameritech New Media's Ameritech program is absolutely false. Ameritech New Media offered a promotion that its cable TV customers loved but other cable companies hated.

Rather than take their case to customers and compete with better service, quality programming and attractive prices, our competitors took their case to regulators.

We believe the courts ultimately will decide in favor of the customer and the Ameritech promotion. In the meantime, we will continue to bring area residents innovative products and services at competitive prices.

You are wrong in describing the Ameritech calling card. The card gives customers the protection they want against price gouging at some pay phones. By using the Ameritech card, customers receive reasonable rates for local, long-distance and international calls.

You are wrong in describing Michigan's local phone market. Today, every single Michigan resident could have a choice of at least one additional local phone provider.

The long-distance companies have local-service licenses, they have access to the local phone network and they have rates filed with the Michigan Public Service Commission. Yet, they refuse to sell local service to residential consumers.

Are these the "local" phone companies the Observer & Eccentric would like to see providing service to consumers? If these companies are ignoring residential customers now, why does the Observer & Eccentric believe they'll suddenly be eager to serve customers in the future?

Customers in Michigan have an excellent local phone company in Ameritech. We spend more than \$1 million every single day in this state to build and maintain one of the nation's most technologically advanced communications networks.

The Ameritech companies are among Michigan's largest employers, with more than 16,500 total employees in the state. Ameritech hired more than 2,300 people in Michigan last year and we're still hiring!

We are attentive to customers' needs and provide communications service like cellular, paging, Internet, cable TV and local phone services that make their lives easier.

Bob Cooper
president
Ameritech Michigan

Farmington Observer

DAVE VARGA, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450
SUSAN ROBERT, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149
HUGH OLLANDER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118
KATY HIRSCHFIELD, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 248-901-2501
LARRY DEGER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234
BANKS M. DISMON, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252
RICK FIORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JOHN REDDY, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD AGINIAH, PRESIDENT
OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and the Farmington Enterprise.

40 YEARS AGO — FEB. 6, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

Statements of new assessed property values were being mailed off by Farmington officials to reflect the citywide reappraisal of all real and personal property.

25 YEARS AGO — FEB. 3, 1973

Marinus Van Ameyde was named to fill the post of Farmington School District superintendent, a post he had filled temporarily for three months.

2 YEARS AGO — FEB. 6, 1996

A Farmington jeweler vowed to bounce back after a Christmas burglary in which more than \$400,000 in jewelry was stolen.