

### Payback

#### Return suit money to taxpayers

**T**rust us, said Farmington Public Schools officials when they went to voters with a scaled-back, two-part bond proposal in September. The electorate did, passing both measures totaling \$93.1 million.

Now — thanks to the Durant settlement — the district will soon have an unexpected \$9.5 million on its ledger. Farmington is one of 84 districts statewide to share in the \$211 million settlement over state unfunded mandates.

Here's a chance for school officials to repay that faith and further establish a covenant with taxpayers, many of whom who don't have children in the district: Give the money back in the form of a tax reduction.

Such a good-faith effort will be appreciated by those who voted for the bond to refurbish district buildings. The move might even sway a few hard-boiled cynics who think schools are bloated bureaucracies out to shake down taxpayers at every turn.

Other options district officials are considering — setting up a "wait and see" to pay for possible construction cost overruns or a projects fund for technology replacement or stu-

dents services — sound somewhat vague.

Technology — mainly the request for \$23 million worth — is what torpedoed the district's \$110 million bond request in March 1997. Are people going to make the distinction between "replacement" and "new" when it comes to computers? We think not.

The "wait and see" tactic gives the impression district officials underestimated costs of renovating facilities, or even worse, be misconstrued as school officials not being upfront with voters in September.

Farmington Public Schools can give the \$9.5 million windfall back to taxpayers without causing so much as a dink in its \$114 million annual operating budget.

More so, there is talk of the district joining in on a second lawsuit against the state over unfunded mandates. Money from a potential settlement could be used for technology or costs associated with upcoming renovations.

In the meantime, reinvesting that \$9.5 million in many of those who support public education and allow the district to prosper is the best course of action.

### Our mailbox is always open

If you regularly or even occasionally read this space, chances are you're interested in opinions — reading others', expressing your own. This page is set aside in our Farmington Observer newspaper to share opinions about pertinent issues for people in our community. Our viewpoints show up on the left half, yours on the right half.

That starboard side keeps this opinion page afloat, as the most important space on this page. Our Letters to the Editor space works as sort of a town square where readers can stand up for a position, issue or person; complain about or compliment a story; or issue a challenge on a subject.

It's also a section of the newspaper that generates plenty of questions from the public. With that in mind, it's important that we share our philosophy of letters.

We publish nearly all of the letters we receive. The exceptions are those that are libelous — meaning publishing them injures someone's reputation — and those that are not signed or their authenticity cannot be determined.

Local letters with local content get top priority. Those written by people who live or work in our community that deal with local issues are of keen interest to our readers. Letters written by people in our community that focus on state or national issues — perhaps even those we haven't written stories directly about — also get priority. Timeliness is also important, and we'll try to ensure that a letter regarding a proposed city ordinance decision, for example, is published before the vote on that subject.

Lower on our priority list are letters from those people who live in our community and send us one or more letters almost every week. If we published all of their letters, we wouldn't have space for any others and it wouldn't be fair. Lastly, people who live outside our community but send letters to local newspapers to advance their own personal or political agenda often get pushed to the bottom of the pile. Some will never run.

Please be succinct and concise. We ask letter writers to keep their comments to 300 words or so — so that lots of people can be pub-

lished on this page. We reserve the right to edit for length, style and, of course, grammar and punctuation.

(If you want a bit more space for a guest column, please call or e-mail the editor.) Shorter letters also make a difference around election time when we become deluged with letters urging yes or no votes on, for example, a millage election. In those situations, we're forced to decide on either first-come, first-served basis or sometimes by running a representative collection of the letters received.

Legibility is key. We want to get your words correct so we ask readers to please type and double space letters, though very clear handwriting or printing can be used too.

Agreement isn't necessary, either in grammar or opinion. We'll fix the English if it needs to be fixed to make readers understand your point. And, whether we agree with your point of view or not isn't a factor in determining which letters to publish.

Got the letters to us. We'll accept letters via e-mail (please send your letter in a text format), fax transmission, (248) 477-9722 — or traditional snail mail — with e-mail being the easiest for us to process. (E-mail address is: [dvarga@oc.homecomm.net](mailto:dvarga@oc.homecomm.net))

They must include a signature (other than e-mail), printed name, city of residence and telephone number. Only the name and city of residence (or title and group name if applicable) will be printed, but we use other information to verify the authenticity of letters.

Your opinions play a valuable role in your newspaper, so keep those letters coming. As always, if you have any questions about a letter you've sent or any of these explanations, call community editor Dave Varga at (248) 477-5450 or contact managing editor Susan Rosiek at (734) 953-2149 or e-mail [erosiek@oc.homecomm.net](mailto:erosiek@oc.homecomm.net).

Our Letters to the Editor space works as sort of a town square where readers can stand up for a position, issue or person; complain about or compliment a story; or issue a challenge on a subject.

Our Letters to the Editor space works as sort of a town square where readers can stand up for a position, issue or person; complain about or compliment a story; or issue a challenge on a subject.

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

What do you do for entertainment?



"I'm a hockey fan."  
Carl Savage  
Livonia



"I'm a basketball fan. My grandson is Jared Hopkins, playing for Harrison."  
Margo Savage  
Livonia



"I like to go to the movies and go to friends' houses."  
Danielle Strickland  
Farmington Hills



"I play soccer and volleyball."  
Abbey Houser  
Farmington Hills

### LETTERS

#### Smoking mad

I was very disappointed to learn the Farmington Hills Family Buggy Restaurant will be a nonsmoking restaurant. I am an adult smoker. I (and my family and many friends) have eaten at the Buggy for approximately 20 years. I can't believe the restaurant is ignoring its customers — taking away the smokers' rights. I and many local people I know will not patronize that restaurant in the future.

Some of these people are not smokers, but they, too, believe this act is unfair and inconsiderate of his customers, and said they too will not eat at the Buggy. I think Mr. (Don) Payne should be in that restaurant himself at lunch time when people are standing in line for the smoking area or many evenings when the same situation is true. I know of two restaurants in our area that went nonsmoking — one closed and one admitted its mistake and now has a smoking section. It will be a shame for the employees at Buggy (who are very nice people) to lose their jobs if the Buggy has to close to satisfy a new crusade. In your Feb. 12 newspaper, Payne talked about accommodating the nonsmoker. I have been in the line many times waiting for a smoking table and many people ahead of me took a smoking table because they didn't care if they were in a smoking section or not. A nonsmoker can take a place in the smoking section but a smoker cannot take a place in a nonsmoking section. Maybe if Buggy had a better air circulation system, they wouldn't have a problem.

D.F. Carcy  
Farmington Hills

other businesses in the Village Mall and surrounding area complained to the owner of the mall. Well, I am a little confused about this. A small business doing well, attracting customers from all over the area who may also shop the other stores in the mall as well as in the downtown Farmington area should be a good thing. So I just wanted to show my support of a small business doing a great job. Keep up the great business, Debi!

Mary Jane Leininger  
Novi

#### Light the way

I am writing to you concerning whether Farmington High School should have lights on the athletic field. I believe that it is a good idea because it would allow the field to get more use.

Practices wouldn't have to end so early because of the dark. Later games and track meets would be able to take place, so working parents could come see their children compete. With more people coming to the events, the school would make money selling refreshments, raffle tickets and other memorabilia.

In September, a bond issue was passed for school improvements, and some of this money could be used to pay for the project. So, with the bond and profits from games, money shouldn't be a problem.

As you can see from the facts presented, having lights installed on the athletic field would be a good addition to Farmington High.

Laura Babinsky  
Power Middle School

#### Minding her business

Being a shopper, I appreciate doing business in a store that is friendly and fair to its customers. Having been a small business owner myself, I know some of the hassles associated with running that business.

I have been shopping at Deb's Crafts for a while now, purchasing gifts for others, items for myself and Beanie Babies. As you may know, this "toy" has become a very popular item and is, at times, hard to get. One of the reasons I shop at Deb's Crafts is Deb, the owner, has been most fair in handling the sale of her shipments of Beanie Babies. She always informs her customers days ahead when the sale will be and only charges the suggested retail price. Even the extremely popular, like Princess Bear, are being offered for that low suggested retail price through a lottery. She does not inflate the price to take advantage of this phenomenon.

On Saturday, Feb. 7, I was in Deb's Crafts to purchase Beanie Babies. I do admit the store was a little crowded and the parking lot full, but what a concept — a small business with customers. I understand some of the

#### Stop messenger

More than Bill Clinton's use of illegal drugs and smiling on his reflection and recollection, his many trusts and dalliances with ladies of the evening, his refusal to serve in the Armed Forces, his sojourn to foreign countries to organize, participate, and lead demonstrations in contradiction to our country's policies — his ideological preferences for big government, burdening redistribution of income, and the reordering of world order priorities will prove to be more damaging to our welfare.

We must stop both the message and the messenger.

Neil Goodbred  
Livonia

Opinions are to be shared; We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to (248) 477-9722.

### 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. 20, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)**  
An official from the Automobile Club of Members of the newly-formed Farmington City and Township Traffic Safety Advisory Committee that the area's traffic problems "were just beginning."

A Wayne State University scientist and mathematician was scheduled to speak about the need for "early occupation of the moon" as part of a talk on space travel at O.E. Dunckel Junior High.

**25 YEARS AGO — FEB. 17, 1973:**  
A fresh trail of snow prints led Farming-

ton police to three burglars — including one who sought refuge in a tree house — at Drake'shire Apartments.

Farmington Public School District students have a chance to "lay it on the line" with school administrators under a new round-table format. Kids' concerns were confined to student council sessions.

**2 YEARS AGO — FEB. 19, 1996:**  
Farmington Board of Education Trustee Helen Prutow announces she'll not seek a sixth term. Prutow had been on the board for 20 years.

Downtown Farmington Business Association plans its first-ever Moonlight Madness sale as an attempt to revive what had been an inactive organization.

### Farmington Observer

DAVE VARGA, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450  
SUSAN ROSE, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149  
HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118  
KATHY HIRSCHFIELD, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 248-901-2501  
LARRY GEDDER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234  
BANKS M. DASHMAN, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100  
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252  
RICK FICORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.  
PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JOHN REDDY, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD AQUINA, 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