

Seats beckon File now for school board race

We encourage interested residents to take the plunge and run for seats on the Farmington and Clarenceville school boards.

In both cases, there are incumbents on the board who are running for re-election. But that shouldn't be a deterrent. Anyone with a passion for education and a willingness to do the homework necessary to lead our schools should go for it.

Obviously, it's a lot of work. Trustees are expected to read packets of information; keep current on educational issues; show up for study, committee and board meetings; contribute questions and opinions; and make important, prudent policy decisions on behalf of the entire community.

They're expected to bring a knowledge of that community and the school district, with a willingness to learn more. They're expected to bring a record of community involvement. They're also expected to represent the district from ceremonial matters to settling employee contract issues and hiring/firing the superintendent.

In return, they get to help shape the direction of public education — and therefore the future of our young people.

Important educational issues abound in our schools: MEAP test scores, meeting technology



needs, teacher contracts and privatization are a few.

In Farmington, one big issue involves seeing through the \$93 million bond plan. There, incumbents Jack Inch and Cathy Webb have announced they'll seek re-election. As of last week, one other person had taken out petitions.

In Clarenceville, incumbent Linda Brandemuhl stepped out after 12 years, opening a third seat in the election. The other two open seats are currently occupied by Gary Garrison and Marita Neal, who was recently appointed to fill a vacant board seat. Garrison has announced he is seeking re-election.

Time is short for those interested in running for school board. Filing deadline is 4 p.m. Monday, April 6. Potential candidates need to contact the local board office, get a petition and start gathering signatures.

Often it's those who take the initiative to run for school board whose questions and issues help invigorate discussion and stimulate debate in these races, whether they win or lose.

Don't get this wrong, we aren't saying the incumbents deserve to be unseated. It's just that our governmental system thrives on competition and choice, and a ballot without choices or challengers is a disappointment.

Prepare for worst in Michigan

The first day of spring doesn't mean a whole lot to Mother Nature.

That observation came from Jeff Boyne, a meteorologist for the National Weather Service, in an Associated Press story about the winter storm (Ooops! Make that spring storm) that dumped from 2 to 4 inches of snow and sleet on southeast Michigan last Friday and Saturday — the first official days of spring.

The storm shouldn't have come as any surprise to Michiganders. Snow storms are not unusual in March and April. As Boyne pointed out, on the first day of spring in 1983 the area received 6 to 8 inches of snow. And 1963, coincidentally or not, was another year when El Niño was around.

The phenomenon known as El Niño — a complicated process that involves weakening trade winds, the eastward drift of warm Pacific water from Australia to South America, the jet stream and chain reactions in weather patterns — has received so much press in recent months that it has become almost fashionable to blame El Niño for whatever weather comes along.

If El Niño brought us snow on the first day of spring, it also brought the springlike weather that resulted in a snowless February. If El Niño was responsible for the remarkably mild winter that just (officially) ended, it may also be to blame if we are served up a cold and wet spring.

Meteorologists seem to refer to El Niño on just about every TV weather show we watch and even the editors of the Old Farmer's Almanac admit that yes, they considered the effects of El Niño when writing the forecasts for the 1998 edition of that classic work.



Frankly, we don't know what to make of it all. We don't dispute the prognostications of the professional meteorologists, but we also know that it's spring and it's Michigan and the weather is going to be unpredictable. Which brings us to our point.

Gov. John Engler has declared the week of March 29 through April 4 as "Severe Weather Awareness Week in Michigan," citing statistics that last year Michigan experienced 19 tornadoes, 72 episodes of flooding and many thunderstorms, resulting in seven deaths, 108 injuries and property damage of more than \$150 million. Western Wayne County seemed to get more than its share of this weather, with damage from tornadoes and flooding. The 35th District Courthouse in Plymouth burned to the ground after a lightning strike during one of those storms.

The Michigan Committee for Severe Weather Awareness is conducting a campaign to alert residents about the importance of being prepared for severe weather and to educate people as to how to react should dangerous weather conditions develop. All schools in the state are being asked to conduct tornado drills on March 31 so students can practice safety procedures.

We urge all of you to do the same. Develop a plan of action both at work and at home as to what to do should severe thunderstorms, flooding or tornadoes strike your area. Discuss the plan with your family and maybe conduct a drill or two in your own home.

You may not be able to predict the weather, but you can prepare for it when it turns bad. And if you aren't prepared, you can't blame that on El Niño.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

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

40 YEARS AGO — MARCH 27, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

Two petitions were filed with the county clerk which would bring about votes during the summer. One dealt with the annexation of about eight square miles in the southwest portion of the township to Farmington city. The other, for incorporation of a village in sections 15, 16 and 21.

Personal matters prompted Elizabeth G. Downey's resignation as secretary of the Farmington School Board.

25 YEARS AGO — MARCH 28, 1973

A spectacular, five-alarm blaze demolished Irving's Furniture store, Eight Mile and Grand River. It was the biggest fire in

several years in Farmington.

School district residents voted 3,553-1,261 to extend a 5-mill property tax levy for another 10 years to support education.

2 YEARS AGO — MARCH 25, 1996

Ameritech, known as a phone service provider, was proposing to offer cable service in the Farmington area. The service would have provided customers with 80-90 basic channels.

Farmington Hills Council members discussed disbanding an Ice Arena Advisory Committee after conflicts over plans for dry floor activities at the arena. Advisory group members said such activities would not be profitable and would drive away ice users. Council members, though, noted that during the campaign for voters to approve the arena they had promised to make it available for other uses.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Do you feel protected or violated after police brought dogs into the schools to sniff for drugs in lockers?

We asked this question of school students at the Burger King in Farmington.



"I feel protected. I don't want drugs in the school. The people that don't do drugs don't want (the drugs) there."

Joanna Murphy
Farmington High



"People only feel violated when they're doing something wrong."

Patty Jean-Louis
Farmington High



"I think that no matter what police do, kids will still have illegal drugs on them."

Mark Miller
Farmington High



"It was fine with me. They wouldn't open your locker unless they suspected."

Stefania Gavriloski
Farmington High

LETTERS

Legion serves community

I have lived in Farmington on the same street for almost 60 years. I am proud to say that I am a member of the Groves Walker American Legion Auxiliary No. 346. I was disappointed to hear that there have been complaints against our post. I would like to take the opportunity to tell you what our American Legion is all about.

It is not just a club for a bunch of drinking, partying veterans. It is a nonprofit organization that is made up of veterans and their families to donate and volunteer their time and money to help the veterans and families who need help. This is only a part of what the organization is all about. It is our obligation to serve "the community, state and nation."

Our money is earned by: offering bingo on Friday night, offering poppies on Poppy Days, once a month breakfasts (put on by our Sons of the American Legion, S.A.L.), occasional steak fries on Friday nights, raffles (licensed), concession stand at bingo (licensed), and rental of our hall for weddings, funerals, church and various other occasions. The monies earned from these funds go to maintain the building, and to help the veterans and their families of our community who need a little help. Our money earned from poppy donations goes directly to Veterans Hospitals or veterans.

Checks have been written by the Ladies Auxiliary to the following last year: Girls State, American Cancer, Karmanos Cancer, Michigan Cancer, Farmington Senior Emergency Fund, Farmington Area Lions, American Lung Association, Hospice, Focus: HOPE, Salvation Army, Farmington Area Goodfellow, Handicap Bowling, eight VA hospitals, Christmas Gift shop at Grand Rapids VA Hospital, Emergency Fund for Farmington Schools, scholarships, and many other groups in need of money. The post (the veteran members) have donated as much or more as the Ladies Auxiliary.

Don't misunderstand, we do have our fun times but as you can see it is also a lot of hard work by veterans and their family members. I guess what I am trying to say is, we do not want to have a dispute with our neighbors. We work for the community, not against it. Part of our Preamble says "serve our community." That is what most members are trying to do. On Memorial Day when we honor our dead, our veterans, and our service men and women, and you sit on the sidewalk or on the steps of the American Legion Post, please remember what the American Legion is and what we stand for and that the parade is sponsored in part by our American Legion Post No. 346. If you would like to come down as a guest or a new member, please feel free to do so.

Leah Brancheau
past president Ladies Auxiliary

American Legion No. 346

'Improvements' dubious

With all the needs in our school district, I can't help but think better uses exist for the \$700,000 proposed for lighting the high school athletic fields. As a parent and a taxpayer, I would like to offer some alternative uses. Maybe computers could be purchased for the classrooms. During the recent bond campaign, technology investment was touted as critically important. Yet a few months later, the board considers spending money for lights a better investment in our children.

Perhaps if computers aren't important enough, the money could be invested in continuing education for the teachers. Recently, I sat on a committee discussing technology needs in the elementary schools and I learned many teachers desire basic and advanced instruction on using computers in education. Certainly this would impact our children's education more than night football.

Maybe the money could be spent on developing a merit system where teachers are compensated on demonstrated results rather than tenure. Actually, this is a poor alternative. The money would be consumed by lawyer fees as the board defended against an NEA lawsuit blocking the implementation of such a system.

Or perhaps the most ludicrous alternative of all — improve the education at William Grace Elementary School. Their fourth-grade MEAP scores were abysmal last year and the worst in the district. I wonder if any of the lighting committee members have children at William Grace?

Also, I wonder about the Observer reporting that 75 percent support lighting the fields; 75 percent of what? The residents of Farmington or those who took the time to respond to the request for comments? I suspect the answer is the latter. If so, is that a valid sample upon which to proclaim overwhelming support? I don't think so. After all, 75 percent of a minority is not a majority.

To those who failed to make your opinions known, watch out! Flush with money from the bond approval, the board appears to be ready to waste your tax dollars on frivolous "improvements."

Steve Sutton
Farmington

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. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, Michigan 48335; faxed to (248) 477-9722; or e-mailed to dvarga@oe.homecomm.net

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— Philip Power