

Q & A

Intelligent voting gets tougher

Voting will be tougher than usual this Aug. 4. Or perhaps we should emphasize intelligent voting.

The reason: Term limits are kicking in for the state House of Representatives. Statewide, 66 of our 110 representatives aren't allowed to seek re-election. Many are retiring, but just as many are running for Congress, the state Senate or even county commissioner.

Races will be hot for the state Senate, even though its term limits don't take effect until 2002.

In the 15th District, Farmington and Farmington Hills term limits affected the race by putting out state Rep. Barbara Dobb, R-Commerce Township, from the 39th District. So, she's challenging Sen. Bill Bullard, R-Highland Township. Bullard won the vacated Senate seat in June 1996 (beating Dobb) and is limited to one more term. One Democratic candidate will challenge in November.

Nearby, in the 9th District (Canton, Plymouth, Northville, Livonia and Redford), Republican incumbent Bob Gaake of Northville Township has chosen to retire, and three eager candidates are battling for the GOP nod. The Democratic primary has drawn two candidates. And so on.

On the House side, Reps. Lyn Bankes, R-Redford-Livonia, and Deborah Whyman, R-Canton, are seeking other offices. There are primaries in those districts.

Voters will have to begin studying early. They shouldn't rely on familiar "names." And they should ignore last-minute personal attacks, particularly in pamphlets distributed on the Sunday morning before the primary.

Voters should be wary of candidates advocating a single issue. They need to ask candi-

dates tough questions. We offer these suggestions:

■ What one or two deeds do you consider your outstanding civic accomplishments that fit you for the Legislature? Make them talk about what they have done for the community rather than what jobs they may have held. A person who has run a successful PTA bake sale may offer more than one who has held a 9-5 position that sounds important.

■ What is your attitude toward open government? Should local boards be allowed to hire in secret? Should the Freedom of Information Act be considered an impediment to "efficiency" or a right of the people?

■ In the last decade, Michigan has lost the equivalent of 37 townships to development, while population has increased little. Do you view "sprawl" (eating up open space faster than population growth) as a problem? If so, what should be done about it?

■ Are rising state university tuitions a problem? What should be done about them?

■ What is your attitude toward public transportation as provided by SMART?

■ Should the Legislature encourage more "charter academies" and end the ban on "vouchers" and "parochialism"?

■ What can the state do to assure a work force that is prepared to handle the jobs of the 21st Century?

We recall the advice of H.L. Mencken: "Democracy is the theory that the people know what they want and deserve to get it - good and hard." Will the candidates you nominate Aug. 4 and elect Nov. 3 serve you and the next generation - or give it to you good and hard?

Intelligent voting will be tougher than usual this year.

Zest fuels mentorship success

Anyone who has ever raised a child through those early teen years knows that the words "enthusiastic" and "listener" rarely find themselves next to each other when they're describing the communication between parent and child.

My seventh-grader may talk enthusiastically about "relationships," music, movies and "X-Files"; it's just that she rarely shares that enthusiasm when talking to dad or listening to his opinion. Maybe it's just for show, but my viewpoint is definitely not cool.

On the other hand, my Farmington schools mentor this year, eighth-grader Bethany Chismark, actually seemed interested in my opinions and the work we do here at the Observer.

The bright Farmington Hills teenager spent the past six months visiting our Farmington office for a couple hours once a month learning about the newspaper business through a Farmington schools' mentorship program begun this year at East Middle School.

We gave her a chance to do some writing, some reporting (working up the nerve to ask strangers our Community Voice question) and to visit the scene of a real, live blaze where officials set an old house on fire to train newer firefighters.

Some of her experiences weren't quite so much fun, more like the real world. She got a chance to join a staff meeting (oh boy!); watch the computerized layout process (yippeee!); and help clip and file newspaper stories (yeeah!). Those forgettable visits surely demonstrated that mundane duties are part of every job.

Yet, it seems she got a lot out of the visits - based on the extensive portfolio of clippings, her thank-you letter to me and her mother's response. The program's coordinator, Mary Beth Sikora, told me several times how excited Bethany was with her opportunity here.

From our side, we got a younger perspective on our newspaper and what we do, while learning a bit more about what's going on in the community. Besides, it feels good to contribute a bit to education, especially when the pupil is so interested and enthusiastic.

That feeling of contributing was emphasized last week during the Celebration Breakfast for the 18 students and 18 mentors during this debut program.

Sikora said she's a strong believer in "celebrating our successes," then joined other school officials in thanking those involved. "We couldn't have done it without our community," she said.

Part of the celebration required students to report aloud about their experience and what they learned.

■ Mark Machley, whose mentor was Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer, talked about trying out the driving simulator, shooting range and spending time in a squad

car. Hills officers, he said, are "very inviting, unlike some of the police officers I've previously met."

■ Another student had a once-in-a-lifetime chance at the city's ice arena. "It was cool because I got to drive the Zamboni," said Erik Stephenson of his time with Richard Lampi of the city of Farmington Hills.

■ Part of the learning experience, it seems, was proving that they don't call it work for nothing. "I decided I don't like to sit in a lot of meetings," said Camille Hines, who worked with Hills Assistant City Manager Steve Brock.

I've heard some people complain that the district needs to move faster and more forcefully into school-to-work internships, mentorships, job shadowing experiences, etc. These programs, however, require certain processes and safeguards to help ensure success.

This year's trial run at mentorships featured a valuable ice-breaking meeting between students and mentors. Mentors had to fill out some paperwork and get an on-site visit by Sikora to ensure a good environment for the students. There were updates during the year, and there was a worthwhile celebration at the end.

While I heard that not every mentorship was a success, this program's first voyage seemed destined to succeed, thanks to the hard work and zest of school folks, committee members, business volunteers and students. What was learned this year should help the program this fall, as it expands into all of Farmington's middle schools.

I wish the program good luck. But the key to success will really be enthusiastic students like Bethany.

I hope my teenager is listening.

Dave Varga is editor of the Farmington Observer.



DAVE VARGA



Typecast: Bethany Chismark was a familiar sight at the Observer.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What is your favorite Frank Sinatra song?



"I did it 'My Way.'" Francis Higgins Redford



"My Way." I've always liked it. I like his voice." Marliou Barnes Farmington



"I can only name one song. Did he sing. 'I did it My Way'?" Shely Jones Farmington



"I don't like 'My Way.' I don't like 'New York, New York.' 'The Lady's a Tramp.'" Judy Cook Farmington

We asked this question at the Farmington Community Library in downtown Farmington.

LETTERS

Invest Durant refund

Is the Observer listening to all the citizens that I heard at the public board meeting discussing the Durant refund? Was the Observer listening at previous parent meetings, millage or bond issue meetings?

While the Durant money was in the state treasury from our district, the money was not available for extra programs or new ones. The recent bond issue was passed for bricks and mortar, not programs. What about the need for future programs and keeping our present academic programs on par?

The senior citizens that speak at board meetings rarely seem to want any money spent - on programs or physical plant improvements. No one expects a spending frenzy to result from the Durant refund, but consideration should be given to investing the money (and using the interest) to fund and maintain programs.

Reading in the newspaper last week, I found it interesting to note that NONE of the other recipients of the Durant money in Oakland County (including those that have had recent bond issues) were giving refunds to their residents. A refund will not even necessarily go to the residents who paid the original taxes.

The Board of Education needs to give strong consideration to investing the money (at least part of it) and not automatically refunding it to the taxpayers. We all should continue to invest in the future of our children.

Tina Jensen
Farmington Hills

Vote Webb: Insure future

Seldom in life are we fortunate to have someone of Cathy Webb's persona; who is a hands on person, and has helped build a base of educationally minded people throughout our combined communities.

Cathy is a very able administrator, as well as a down-to-earth advocate; working with all the children, regardless of the problems.

I ask you to help insure the educational future of your children, your grandchildren, and your great grandchildren. Vote for Cathy Webb on June 8 for re-election to the Farmington school board.

Jack (Uncle Jack) Curd
Farmington

Inch recommended

The Farmington school board election will soon be here. We all need to exercise our right to vote. I have been a resident of Farmington for thirty years and have known Jack Inch for most of that time. He has made a significant contribution in his many capacities on

the school board. I highly recommend him for another term.

Jo Pogue
Farmington

Coverage stoked success

On behalf of the Farmington Area Arts Commission and the Artist-In-Residence Committee, I would like to thank you very much for the wonderful press coverage of the annual Artist-In-Residence program provided by your newspaper.

We are very happy to have honored Artist Danguole S. Jurgutis as the Artist-In-Residence and Artist/Art Teacher Ellen Wallis and Dance educator Virginia Lee Dickerman as the distinguished service to the arts recipients.

Thank you again for your involvement in making the Artist-In-Residence program such a tremendous success.

Bon Scaglione, chairwoman
Artist-In-Residence Committee

Follow rules for safety

Now that the Farmington Downtown Center parking lot has been reconditioned and restriped it may be time to review the rules as governs the alternate striped black and white pedestrian walkways. For the pedestrian, this marked walkway is for your safety and your help to the motorists by concentrating the walkers in one area rather than all over the driving area. For the motorist this means that a pedestrian in the striped area has the right of way. Cars must stop.

Utilization of the denoted crosswalks by the pedestrians, adherence to the pedestrian right of way by the motorist and obedience of the no parking, no standing signs along the raised sidewalk should reduce the many near misses that have been witnessed prior to the new paint job.

Dick Carvell
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 and brevity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a daytime contact telephone number. No anonymous letters will be published.

The week prior to an election, this newspaper will not publish letters that discuss new issues, since last-minute attacks don't allow a chance for rebuttal. Responses to already published issues will be accepted.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335; faxed to (248) 477-9722; or e-mailed with your name, city of residence and phone number to dvarga@oe.homecomm.net

Farmington Observer

DAVE VARGA, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450

SUEAN ROBER, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149

HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118

KATHY HIRSCHFIELD, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 248-901-2501

LARRY GOSCH, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234

BARBARA M. DOWNS, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100

STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252

RICK FROELICH, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

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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