

LETTERS

MEAP: It should be mandatory

Proud of Fest of the Arts

I would like to personally thank the Farmington Observer for so eagerly supporting our great Festival of the Arts. We had excellent coverage by your Observer & Eccentric Newspapers to the tune of at least six separate articles plus various photos of the different participating groups per week. The arts reporter Frank Provenzano also aided us greatly by his interest and dedication to the various arts.

The Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, and the Farmington Observer, in particular, are the best local papers in the states; I've gone by car all over so I know. The reasons that our festival is so outstanding are: This event includes something for everyone; the price is right (it's free), and there is much support by the various participating organizations involved.

Mutual co-operation among the groups is essential, and we are proud that we certainly have it here in Farmington and Farmington Hills. There are a number of highlights and events that must be mentioned here; also some prominent individuals.

The only event for which there was a very minimal charge was *Starry Night*; the jazz performance by the popular Matt Michaels Trio, a talented and prestigious group of musicians, who drew quite an impressive crowd.

Betty Monson, who has been running the Ridgewriters group for 20 years, is herself is a fabulous writer and artist and has worked very hard to make this literary organization into a first-rate creator's unit that is unsurpassed by none. Most of the writers have been published commercially; we have some wonderful novelists and poets in the group. The poetry and commentary near the paintings at the festival exhibit were written by Ridgewriters; as was the Poetry for Paintings booklet.

Sally Wood, a very talented and beautiful ballerina, did her White Swan number. She's been dancing and teaching for 25 years and is associated with the Detroit Ballet and Betty Johnston Studio.

The artistic demonstrators at the festival, organized by Kathleen Erngren, also a painter and demonstrator.

Jim Patterson demonstrated with us; Jim is a real friend and a tireless worker who is the backbone of the Farmington Arts Club. He is the one who arranges the whole exhibit and sets up the exhibit screens that hold the pictures. Jim is a well-known commercial and fine artist in his own right, locally. He is always willing, ready and able to help out.

Gerard Panyard, who is a newish member of the Arts club, is very knowledgeable in

graphic and fine arts. He helped with demonstrations and painting set-ups; at true friend, honest and helpful.

We demonstrated for what seemed like 600 children, from the fourth grades. My booth was also popular because I had 650 cartoons prepared for these wonderful kids, which they took home as souvenirs. These darling children also drew cartoons for me at my table; I had them sign their names and will cherish their talents forever.

A major event was the roundtable discussion "Building Art from the Grassroots." This interested and interesting panel consisted of people devoted to the arts; all were professionals who shared their ideas and input with all.

Paul Barber, musical arranger and conductor of the Farmington Community Band, did the medley and musical finale that was a great climax to eight days of fabulous events at the festival. There must have been 1,000 folks present; refreshments were enjoyed by all present.

Sally LeFla-Perry, who coordinated the events, was very helpful to all and quite aware of what has to be done at all times; she herself visited each individual booth to help with input, ideas and worked at all the booths helping to display all our products and bulletins.

Margi Chellstorp, president of the Farmington Arts Club, is a recognized and well established artist herself, and associated with other art groups as well as our own.

As usual many unframed paintings were sold. And, some framed ones also. The prize-winners were outstanding. Photos were taken of most of the art works and given to the artists. The other photos are available to any who want them.

I am proud and happy to live in Farmington Hills and to be a part of this great and positive, successful and progressive community.

Leon Schoelich
Farmington Hills

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 space and clarity. 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. Or they can be faxed to (248) 477-9722. They may also be e-mailed to dvargo@oe.homecomm.net

What a mess! Responding to complaints about last year's Michigan High School Proficiency Test (remember, the one with "novice" and "not yet novice" ratings for those who performed poorly), the Legislature and the State Board of Education made changes.

They shortened the test from 605 to 370 minutes. They eliminated the pejorative rating nomenclature. They even changed the name of the test to Michigan Educational Assessment Program High School Test (MEAP).

So what happened? A shockingly high number of juniors in Michigan high schools skipped the MEAP test when it was given last month.

In Livonia, 50 percent skipped; in Farmington, only 18 percent took the test; in Birmingham, 90 percent skipped; in Bloomfield Hills, nobody took it. In Northville, where the boycott got a lot of publicity, only 92 out of a junior class of 310 took the test.

The MEAP test is a key part of the effort to reform Michigan schools. The idea is to set out what kids are supposed to learn and then test them on it. Scores would not only help parents and taxpayers decide which schools were doing a good job, but they would also help employers figure out which job applicants were up to the job and assist colleges and universities in making admissions decisions.

To have such a high percentage of no-shows casts serious doubt on the entire school reform movement.

In all this, there is plenty of blame to spread around.

Start with the State Board of Education, already badly split between moderates and radical right-wingers. In hindsight, it now seems clear the board fooled around with the test too much and too late, thereby confusing students, parents and teachers. And the board failed to set out compelling reasons for students to take the MEAP test, when lots of juniors are already taking the ACTs and SATs for college admissions.

Far worse, the State Board tolerated uncertainty about whether taking the MEAP test was required. In the January 1998 issue of "MEAP Update," the board proclaimed, "high school students must take the high school assessment ... the current policy of opting out is only to be used by parents of students with disabilities and limited English proficiency."

But State Board spokesperson Deb Small then conceded that "the law says you (the schools) must give the test, but there's no law that says you (the students) have to take the test ... We have a policy of encouraging all students to take the test because we believe it is the best way to



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measure what students know according to state standards. But the State Board has no authority to make laws; that's why it's a policy."

Schools were put squarely in the middle, required to give the test but denied the hammer to require kids to take it.

The fier put out by kids at Northville High School was tellingly to the point: "As of March 5 1998, there were no school or state requirements that state we must take this test to graduate high school. If the school board changes the requirements to make it mandatory for graduation after our testing, we will be exempt; we cannot be punished in retrospect."

Of course, the fundamental reason there is no law requiring students to take the test is because the Legislature is terminally scared (especially in an election year) to require anybody to do anything.

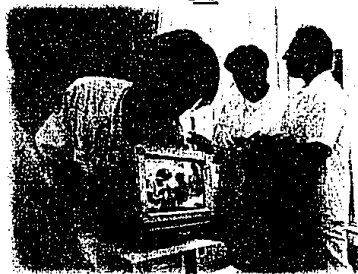
Some parents might wish to consider whether it's rank hypocrisy to argue, on the one hand, that it's unfair to force their kids to take the MEAP when it will have no effect on college admissions; and, on the other, loudly to insist that local schools be held accountable for the quality of the education they provide.

The business community has much to answer for in failing to require MEAP test scores be part of every job application. The universities, too, have been whining about poor high school preparation for incoming freshmen. But Michigan college presidents, when asked by Gov. John Engler to request MEAP scores on college admission forms, declined.

Enough is enough. Too much is at stake here to let the current round of finger-pointing go on much longer. The Legislature should pass promptly a law requiring completion of the MEAP test for graduation from Michigan high schools.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@online.com

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