

Theater from page A1

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Jim Walter
—Great Eastern



Eastern Theater Company said she believes larger multiscreen venues in Commerce Township and Southfield hindered business at the Old Orchard, which closed July 12.

Unlike many older theaters that show movies for \$1.99, the Old Orchard continued to show first-run films such as "Godzilla."

Like the monster remake, the return in terms of attendance at the Old Orchard didn't meet expectations. Jim Walter of Great Eastern termed the venture as a "very disastrous business move."

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turned down the owner's previous request to qualify the site as a planned unit development, which included a restaurant and retail store.

The commission also turned down a request to rezone a parcel behind the theater from residential to a parking district. The theater is zoned for office use.

The owner hasn't submitted any new plans, said a Farmington Hills Planning Department spokesman.

"I have no idea of what they intend to do," said Ed Gardiner, Hills planner. "It's up to them to submit some type of proposal."

A spokeswoman for Great



Closed: In the last go-round of closing and opening (upper left), workmen got the theater ready. But the days of driving by and noticing the marquee may be over—at least for awhile. The Old Orchard Theater stands empty today.

Development from page A1

The above example of students play-acting to learn about digestion is the "engaging" kind of instruction that more Farmington teachers are moving toward, Fouchey said. They spark learning through a variety of techniques, such as a book report here or Internet-researched project there.

Because information about how people learn keeps changing, it is imperative that teachers stay on top of it, challenging themselves and their students. To that end, and led by Fouchey, teachers go to workshops and other staff training endeavors. They don't just open the classroom door and throw their books on the desk. In the late 1990s, they know that staff development is a crucial element to nurturing faculty members to be successful, particularly as the educational landscape keeps changing and—some say—developing ruts and cracks.

The district insists that all teachers, whether kindergarten or 12th grade, do their jobs with passion, with the ultimate district objectives in mind. Why? Because going through Farmington Public Schools is considered a 13-step process, with each step directly pertaining to the next. "By the time somebody has finished an undergraduate degree or has a teaching certificate," Fouchey said, "they have a major and a minor in their content areas. They have had practice teaching, by way of student teaching... They arrive here ready to teach."

But can a history teacher take that college background, mesh it with the specific curriculum, textbook materials and sequence of a course, and "package it in a way that fits the district and fits the kids? This is a 13-year set of experiences that we have for kids, and the fact it is thought out and sequenced is becoming more critically important over time," Fouchey said.

What a difference

Farmington's focus on instilling an "on-the-same-page" philosophy was made clear during the mid-August teacher orientation. In fact, one newcomer, who came over from a charter school in Detroit, said he couldn't believe the difference between his old and new employers in the staff development and nurturing arena.

"It's nice to be in a system where you have a whole building for teacher training," said Benjamin Knapp during the orientation.

According to new Dunckel Middle School teacher Chris Bruce, "All of these factors are important in building the type of district Farmington would like to be and, as far as I can see, is well on the way to becoming." Staff development, available to all Farmington employees, is one of the main ingredients to cooking up a prevailing "culture of excellence here," noted Debbie Wilson, a fifth grade teacher at Wooddale Elementary School. "That means teamwork, empowering teachers, empowering parents and empowering students."

The commitment to staff development enables teachers to see very clearly what is expected of them, said Lloyd Lewis, principal at Forest Elementary

School.

If they take advantage of the growth opportunities Fouchey's department makes available to them, Lewis emphasized that there is no reason for people to not be able to acquire the kind of skills they need to serve our kids and to be the best we can for them."

Of course, being the best isn't such a cut-and-dried concept anymore, particularly as districts such as Farmington continue to move away from the old "one size fits all" mode of instruction. "We have to keep looking outward, look at the research... and keep making classroom practices reflect what we know from research," Fouchey said.

"We have to keep looking outward to employers, to the public, to higher education, to the folks who are consumers of our product and say, 'How are we doing?' to increase chances of graduates having success in life."

Making it work

Staff development helps teachers do their best job for students in another way. According to Fouchey, the built-in training, support and "Team Farmington" approach helps teachers stay sharp, be lifelong learners and avoid burning out.

He compared Farmington to districts he worked for previously, as part of a regional job.

"We are constantly exchanging information of how to do it better," said Fouchey. "In those districts where staff development was not valued or supported, and that comes down to dollars, you had folks who tended to be isolated or burn out quicker. (There) you had more traditional approaches to instruction. If folks don't know any differently what else are they going to do?"

Farmington district students won't have to worry too much about that, as staff training endeavors become more entrenched. Teachers hired by the district possess quality traits that only are enhanced by constant networking, Fouchey said.

"As a staff developer, I believe in the science of teaching," he added. "But there's also this intuitive, artistic stuff which many of our teachers come to us with."

"They have the skills, but they also have a sense of reaching kids, of anticipating their needs, matching instruction with learning styles, knowing when to push and when to pull. That's something that comes with time."

And with teamwork.

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Jerry Fouchey
—Staff development director

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