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IN THE PAPER TODAY

New: The new hospice stamps are now on sale at the Farmington and Farmington Hills postal branches. /A9

COUNTY

Jobs: Engler says he plans to split the Jobs Commission. /A13

OPINION

MEAP: Engler's plan, unveiled in his State of the State address, merits some consideration. /A14

COMMUNITY LIFE

Consumers: Massage therapy is not just for the rich and famous anymore. Spa industry veteran Tamara Friedman offers consumers tips on what to look for in a good massage. /B1

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Judge upholds city view

An Oakland County judge ruled that Farmington Hills wasn't out of line to ask a gas and oil drilling company to study potential health risks at drill sites.

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Farmington Hills city officials believe a recent Oakland Circuit Court ruling puts teeth in its gas and oil drilling ordinance.

Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Denise Langford Morris ruled the Farmington Hills City Council wasn't out of line when members asked West Bay Exploration to do more studies on the hydrogen sulfide risks at a proposed drill site.

Hydrogen sulfide is a natural occurring toxin and a byproduct of oil drilling. In large amounts, hydrogen sulfide

OIL AND GAS DRILLING

— or H₂S — can be deadly. The Travorce Bay company sued the city after council turned down its application to drill for oil in the Nine Mile and Haggerty area December 1997.

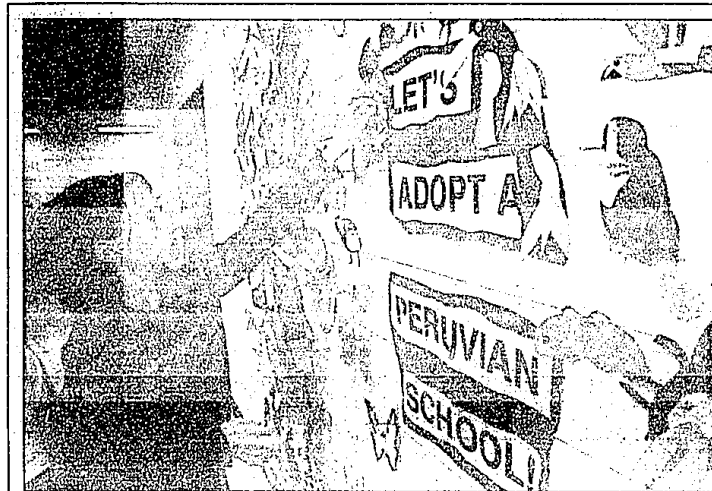
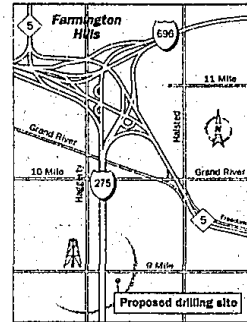
Council based the denial on its own city ordinance, which allows them to withhold drilling permits if there is a concern over resident's health and safety.

West Bay officials contend only a trace of H₂S is at the site. West Bay officials couldn't be reached for comment regarding the court ruling.

"Basically what the judge has said is they filed the suit too soon; they hadn't been finally denied," City Attorney John Donohue said.

West Bay wanted to drill two well heads in the area.

Please see DRILLING, A5



Raising money: Dana Nuccitelli of Power Middle School hangs a tropical bird on the rain forest mural that symbolizes the students' effort to raise money to adopt a school in Peru. Along the way, students are learning about the South American country and the rain forest.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HESLER

Students adopt Peruvian school

BY TIM SMITH
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All last week, Power Middle School students such as Michael Welsh had a choice: Buy another Twix candy bar or soda pop for lunch, or chip in a buck toward "adopting" a Peruvian school. Judging from the colorful, construction paper rain forest mural affixed to a cafeteria wall at the Farmington district school, Michael and most kids were making the socially conscious choice. Slapped onto paper trees — rising up from students' concept of the Amazon River — were nearly 400 paper animals and plants of the rain forest variety. All were researched and then crafted by sixth-graders in the Lan-

Please see PERU, A4

Child left on school bus; driver suspended

BY TIM SMITH
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At the end of her morning route last Thursday, Feb. 4, a Farmington Public Schools bus driver went home for a break before her next assignment.

The driver, a 24-year vet of the district's transportation department, made the 10-minute drive from her last stop, Highmeadow Common Campus.

But when she got off the bus at home, so did a 6-year-old Highmeadow first-grader.

Because the employee did not follow school district policy, namely to walk from the front to the back of the bus at the end of every run to make sure nobody is still on board, she was indefinitely suspended, pending an investigation.

"It's part of their requirement, to go

to the back of the bus," said Bill Touseley, transportation supervisor for the district. "... The bus driver feels terrible. Nobody wants to leave a child unattended, intentionally or unintentionally."

According to both Touseley and Cheryl Cannon, the assistant superintendent who oversees transportation, the little girl was not harmed and safely made it to Highmeadow last Thurs-

day. The girl exited the bus at the driver's home and went to a neighbor's house, calling her mom from there. Touseley met the girl and her mom at the school and discussed the episode with them.

He described the mom as being "calm" during their discussion of the incident. "She just wanted to know what happened."

Please see BUS, A6

Recycling: a priority to Hills folks

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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When it comes to curbside recycling, Farmington Hills residents get off their cans.

Recycling and diversion is up in the Hills, according to Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County's annual report for last year. Farmington Hills is part of the eight-member authority, which includes Farmington, Novi, South Lyon, Southfield, Walled Lake, Wixom and Lyon Township.

By recycling, residents keep landfills empty. That also helps save energy and reduce pollution, as well as reduce pollution, RRRSOC officials said.

The diversion rate, which includes recycling and composting, is up to 27.3 percent

Please see RECYCLE, A6

CITY OF FARMINGTON HILLS
1998 Solid Waste Disposition

Landfilled 72.7% Composted 15.5% Recycled 11.8%

Source: Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County (RRRSOC)

SMART

It's all about student choices

Editor's note: This is the second of a two-part series on block scheduling.

BY TIM SMITH
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It's apparently smarter for Farmington High School students to get the most out of their twice-weekly SMART sessions.

And it's all about choices, whether to take personal responsibility and maximize the 9:14-10:38 a.m. blocks of use-as-they-wish time Tuesdays and Thursdays, aptly called SMART for "Student Managed Academic Resource Time."

To get credit, and completion of SMART is a graduation requirement, students must regularly attend sessions that have some connection to their various classes and activities. Beyond that 75 percent requirement, they can pretty much free-lance. Those who don't complete the minimum must go to a summer makeup program.

"Better students love SMART," said Farmington High principal John Barrett, "because they can still go get time from their chemistry teacher, from their math teacher, go have another rehearsal session with their band ... It's phenomenal to see 35 students getting a mass tutorial."

"Now, the student who doesn't do well in math, who decides, 'I'm just not going to do



well in math' and doesn't get help, that's their choice."



Whether or not top students really do love the SMART menu of enrichment opportunities is open for debate, however. In an independent evaluation of block scheduling at FHS by Greentree Research and Development Services, "high-achieving students generally prefer to spend SMART receiving assistance from their own teachers."

Please see related stories, Pages A3 and A7

For all students, meanwhile, it's a kind of a balancing act between exploration of interests, responsibility and getting any extra help with lessons that they need.

Students have the chance to attend two half-hour c'lunks each SMART session, followed by a 14-minute "core group." In the latter, they can discuss with teachers how they used the day or what they plan on doing in upcoming sessions, Barrett said.

"They're bringing in receipts from where they were," explained Barrett about core group. "It's like a mini-home room. There's PA announcements, teachers talking to kids about the choices they made ..."

Please see OPTIONS, A7



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL HESLER

SMART: Vicky Pittman searches for college scholarship information in the computer lab.