

Mayor stumps for classroom crowd

BY TIM SMITH
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As mayor of Farmington Hills, Aldo Vagnozzi acts, interacts and even oversees marriage pacts.

But Vagnozzi, during a recent question and answer session with third-graders at Highmeadow Common Campus, credited another reason why he has managed to be successful in the city's top elected job for five years.

"Sense of humor," said Vagnozzi, who is stepping down from the post in November due to term limitations. "Sometimes I'll be at a council meeting, and things get heated up. Just a little humor lightens things up."

Talking to people in the community is another essential, said Vagnozzi to the youngsters, now assembling information from officials and local businesses in order to create classroom "mini-liaisons."

That sometimes means going out and knocking on doors, where he hears about "a lot of problems" that aren't brought up at Monday night council meetings.

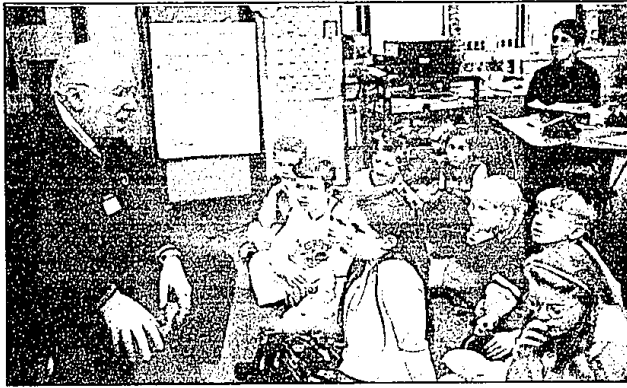
The mayor made sure to tell students about having self-pride, without becoming arrogant.

"Have pride in your work, certainly," Aldo said. "But you want to be humble. I really like this community because they treat me as an equal. So, don't get too high and mighty."

One student asked Vagnozzi how it feels to be mayor.

"It feels good," he replied. "I like it, especially when you can help somebody. That's the best part of the job."

As with any elected position,



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL LEBLANC

Hls honor: Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi fields questions from third-graders at Highmeadow Common Campus. The Farmington Hills mayor makes regular visits to schools in order to get children interested in government and politics.

things don't always go smoothly, he said, answering a question about pros and cons of the job.

His favorite aspect is getting stopped on the street and being told the city is being run efficiently.

The hardest thing about it? "When somebody calls you and you have to tell them nothing can be done to help them with their problem."

Students showed their environmental savvy by asking Vagnozzi about wetland protection. One asked about whether they are protected in Farmington Hills.

"(Wetlands) have to be five

acres or more to be protected," the mayor said. "We're talking about passing a local law to protect the smaller ones. ... The state law is, if you cover up a wetland, you have to build one the same size somewhere else."

On Friday, April 23, the students were treated to an encore of how local government works, chaperoned by Vagnozzi. They visited the Farmington Hills city complex, including the police and fire department, administrative offices and council chambers. Inside the latter, they took part in a "mock" session.

According to Vagnozzi, the youngsters "made some good suggestions," including issuing a bicycle helmet law, which the actual council is currently discussing.

That very bike helmet law was delivered into at Highmeadow as well.

Most students raised their hands after Vagnozzi asked them if bike riders should wear helmets. No one would argue about the importance of safety. But the mayor noted that it isn't that simple to enact a law.

"You just can't adopt a program and say everybody's going to wear a helmet the next day," he explained. "There's a lot of education that's needed."

Hills police nab teens camping in vacant house

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Farmington Hills police interrupted what appeared to be a burglary attempt at a vacant house on Pearl Street Thursday afternoon.

Those involved appeared to be using the house as a hang-out, police learned.

At 1:53 p.m. police arrived after a neighbor reported seeing two males climbing out a rear window. Police, entering through a car wash on Eight Mile and Pearl, saw two males wearing trench coats standing at the corner of the house when they were joined by another teen male. All three tried to run away, bumping into each other after seeing police.

Officers captured two of them near a creek in a nearby wooded area while a third was arrested after re-emerging on Eight Mile.

Inside the house, officers found a fire set in a toilet started with a notebook. Burn marks were found in the kitchen.

On Friday afternoon, police were awaiting possible charges.

Two teens, one from Redford and the other from Livonia, are juveniles. Police are petitioning the Wayne County Probate Court.

A third member, a 17-year-old Redford male, would be charged through the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office.

Arson charges are not likely, police said.

"There was incense and smoking going on inside," said Farmington Hills police Sgt. Tim Swanson. "They were certainly careless ... but there doesn't appear to be any intent for arson."

White paint was splattered inside. Similar paint was found on the three taken into custody.

All three told police they had been kicked out of their respective homes and had been staying at the home, which is up for sale. All three had lighters on them.

The homeowner said he is selling the house, which had been locked. A front door was found kicked in.

Coincidentally, the same police officer arrested the 17-year-old for breaking into the same house a year ago.

OCC hosts wine event May 12

The Culinary Arts Department at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus presents the Fourth Annual Great Lakes Great Wine Walk Around & Tasting 6-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 12, in the campus J building.

As an added feature Great Lakes dishes from such top area

restaurants as Tribute, Fox & Hounds, Mae & Rays, and the Golden Mushroom will be presented.

Admission is \$40 per person and all proceeds will benefit the OCC Culinary Arts and Hospitality Management Scholarship Fund. For reservations and ticket information call 471-6340.

Pet therapy group drums up interest

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At Michigan State University, where veterinarian Dr. Sally Walshaw teaches prospective vets, students already have a profound love of and for animals.

Walshaw hopes to also instill in them a desire to volunteer time for organizations such as Pet-A-Pet. She plans to attend Pet-A-Pet's annual meeting this week, and then take back some useful information back to the East Lansing campus.

"I'm going to ... talk to students about it, give them the names of people like (Pet-A-Pet founder and president) Ruth Curry," Walshaw said. "I would encourage people in the community to think about becoming involved in this program. Even if you don't have a pet, there are a lot of other things you can do."

The non-profit organization's annual meeting is scheduled from 7-9 p.m. Thursday, May 6, at the William Costick Activities Center, on 11 Mile Road east of Middlebelt in Farmington Hills.

"The most important thing you can share with your community is time," Walshaw said. "If you have a friendly animal that you are willing to take to a facility, like a nursing home, it brings a special opportunity to those people. They have a chance to inter-

act with animals again."

Walshaw said pet therapy helps nursing home patients, for example, to "meet new friends at both ends of the leash," the animal and pet owner.

But organizations such as Pet-A-Pet don't just benefit recipients of visits from dogs and cats, said Walshaw, holder of a doctorate of veterinary medicine degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

Volunteers who bring their pets to nursing homes, hospitals, assisted living facilities become energized themselves.

"After an hour of bringing smiles to people, and that's what the animals do, you, the volunteer, ... have a real burst of energy," Walshaw added.

Still, Pet-A-Pet is always in need of more volunteers of the animal and human variety, said Curry.

Keynote speaker on Thursday evening is Michelle Koonz, who will discuss the topic: "Bonding with Your Dog Through Activities."

Providing entertainment will be K-9 Kicks.

Also expected on hand will be Renee Esordi of San Diego, Calif., whose book about pet therapy is due out this fall. Esordi's book tentatively is titled "You Have a Visitor - Observations on Pet Visitation and Therapy."



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Warner Middle School trio makes grade in essay contest

Three students from Warner Middle School in Farmington Hills have been named local winners in the 30th Annual America & Me Essay Contest, sponsored by Farm Bureau Insurance.

The three students, who earned the first-, second- and third-place awards for their school, are Chelsea Johnson, first, Michael McIntosh, second, and Alexa Feldman, third. All three received award certificates for their achievement. As the school's first place winner, Chelsea's name will also be engraved on a plaque for permanent display in the school.

Chelsea's first-place essay now advances to the state level competition, from which the top 10 essays in Michigan will be selected. The top 10 statewide

winners, who will be announced in April, will receive plaques, cash and U.S. savings bonds valued from \$500 to \$1,000. In addition, the top 10 essayists will be honored at a banquet in Lansing, meet with Michigan's top governmental leaders and be the featured guests at a Lansing Lugnuts minor league baseball game dedicated in their honor.

Several thousand eighth-grade students from nearly 500 Michigan schools participated in the 1998-99 America & Me Essay Contest. The topic of the contest was "My American Hero."

Started in 1966 and open to all Michigan eighth-grade students, the contest encourages Michigan youngsters to explore their roles in America's future.