

### Fill it out

## Survey crucial for arts planning

Farmington and Farmington Hills residents will receive an important piece of mail deserving more attention than that envelope with Ed McMahon on the front.

A committee of arts leaders want to know what people think and want from programs. A mail-in survey is being sent to households in both cities.

More than 6,300 Farmington residents are expected to receive the survey separately. Another 31,000 Hills households will see it as part of the city's bi-monthly June/July Focus newsletter.

The survey has 22 questions and requires those answering to circle a response or jot down a quick list. There are no right or wrong answers.

We urge residents to take time and fill out the survey and send it back as soon as possible.

At the very least, survey takers need a 20- to 30-percent return. We think residents can do better than that.

To give their two cents worth, residents don't even have to pay the 32 required for postage. That is pre-paid as part of the self-addressed, leaving respondents to just fold and tape (don't staple) the document.

While the arts are often subjective and often in the eye of the beholder, many can agree their mere presence enhances a community's vitality.

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In economic terms, a Wayne State University study revealed that for every \$1 of state tax money spent on the arts, there is a return of \$34.

By all accounts, Farmington and Farmington Hills have a vibrant cultural arts collective, which spans from painters, sculptors, potters to musicians, writers and poets.

The recent Festival of the Arts underscored the depth and range of creative expression within these city limits. Without an appreciative and caring audience, though, the arts are left to wither and fade.

That's why completing a survey is so critical.

Feedback from the survey will be used to lay the ground work for a cultural arts master plan, which is going to be incorporated in both cities' master plans.

A committee has been working more than two years to develop this blueprint. The cultural arts plan will serve as a guide well into the next millennium.

The voices of all concerned should be the cornerstone of any cultural arts master plan.

## Merger mania leaves less care

Hospital mergers — or health care alliances, as the industry likes us to think of them — are a good thing.

At least that's what we were told in the early 1990s as one after another, major trauma centers and community hospitals in southeastern Michigan began adding each other's names to the signs in front of their buildings.

St. Joseph Hospital became St. Joseph Mercy Health Systems, also affiliated with Mission Health (Providence Hospital). St. Mary Hospital was a partner with William Beaumont Hospital; and Oakwood Hospital took on Annapolis and Beyer to become the Oakwood Healthcare System.

Look at the efficiencies, we were told. A replication of services would lead to leaner staffs and lower costs. Expanded purchasing power would do the same, as would sharing of technology.

And for a while, it looked like it might be working. For about three years, health care costs — which had skyrocketed through most of the 1980s — rose in step with (or slightly above) the national inflation rate. That "progress," combined with a stellar marketing campaign by the insurance industry, increasing prevalence of HMOs and some severe missteps by the Clinton Administration, was enough to kill off talk of nationalizing health care.

Then Congress lowered what turned out to be the boom. The 1997 balanced budget deal included declining reimbursements for Medicare and Medicaid, government insurance programs for senior citizens, poor and disabled people. Beginning this year, hospitals in southeastern Michigan will receive \$400 million less annually from the state and federal government to cover patients in those programs, according to the Southeast Michigan Health and Hospital Council.

While the pain has been particularly sharp for urban-based health care networks like the

Detroit Medical Center, the shockwaves are reverberating for residents in western Wayne and Oakland counties as well — even in relatively well-off communities where a majority of residents carry employer-funded, private medical insurance.

This spring, for example, St. Joseph Mercy Health Systems closed its urgent care facility in Plymouth, opting to send those patients to a newer building in Canton Township. It also consolidated urgent care to one site (formerly two) in Ann Arbor. The moves will save \$3.6 million a year, a hospital spokesman said. Some 250 jobs will be cut this year.

Given the latest round of job cuts and endangered hospitals, the Observer questions what all this consolidation has really accomplished. A recent study showed southeastern Michigan hospitals with more employees and more acute-care beds per resident than the national average.

Much of that is due to generous health benefits tied to the auto industry, said Don Potter, hospital council president. A high demand for health care services has led to construction — almost all of it in the suburbs — and additional medical workers.

Potter also pointed out that doctors have taken a carte-blanche approach to ordering drugs through hospital pharmacies, further hurting the bottom line. It's odd that insurance companies have no trouble dictating their desire for generics and other cost-saving measures to the general public. Perhaps hospitals need better controls in this area.

One can hope that merger mania among hospitals will slow, now that most of the players have found their partners. But it isn't likely to reverse direction. That's too bad. Because in hindsight, the public might have benefited from more local competition, not less.



## LETTERS

### Helmet foe off base

In the May 13 Observer, on the issue of helmets for bike riders, roller bladers and skateboarders. Robert Igrisan was quoted belittling the seriousness of injuries resulting from accidents involving bikes, rollerblades and skateboards. He stated that when a person falls off a bike he simply goes "boom-boom" and sustains "just cuts and scrapes." Igrisan went on to state that "a helmet is not going to protect a rider if hit by a car."

Such statements reflect ignorance, insensitivity and irresponsibility. The testimony of pediatricians and neurologists is clear; such accidents can and sometimes do result in death or in head injuries which permanently reduce the child's cognitive abilities — reading, writing, thinking. Conversation with such professionals, or a brief review of scientific evidence in the area, should be the baseline for public discussion of the issue.

Furthermore, remarks belittling such injuries are insensitive to those families which have suffered losses. Such remarks do nothing to advance public understanding.

Finally, like all important public policy issues, there are legitimate points on both sides of the bike helmet ordinance debate. But participation in public discussion at a crucial moment deserves a responsible approach. Head injury is a serious issue. One expects more than what Igrisan delivered.

Congratulations to the community of Farmington Hills on thoughtful consideration of the issue and on the commendable decision to back up ongoing educational efforts with an ordinance on helmet safety. We look forward to continuing the public dialogue in Farmington.

Julie and Tim Devine  
Farmington

### Helmet law not needed

On May 10, you passed an ordinance saying that everyone under the age 18 must wear a bicycle helmet when riding their bike, in-line skating, and skateboarding. Then does that mean that we can't just go to the skating rinks to have a fun time?

Or do we have to remember our helmets, and worry about helmet hair and how ridiculous we look? And by the way, helmets don't fit over ponytails.

I also have a couple of ideas to also help ensure the safety of our children. If we have to protect our children when riding their bikes, in-line skating and skateboarding, then what about swimming? Kids could drown when swimming. So I think that anyone under the age of sixteen should have to wear a flotation device when in the water.

What about riding in a car? That can be especially dangerous. I think that everyone of all ages should have to wear a specially designed helmet to wear when in the car. And

when people are walking they should also wear protective gear including a helmet, knee pads, elbow pads, and wrist guards. You never know when a rock could suddenly appear and you could trip and fall and seriously hurt yourself when walking.

And now, I get to eating. Forget that! You could choke if food is not chewed properly, so I think that we should not be able to eat. It's hazardous to our health.

When listening to the radio, CD's, or any other electronic device, we should have to wear leather gloves, because if our hands get wet and then we touch the devices in the wrong places, we would get electrical shock, and might die.

All of these things are hazardous to our health and safety, but in my point of view there are some things that we can and should control, and some things that we can't and shouldn't be able to control.

Catch my drift? No one wants to wear a helmet, (at least none of the people that I've met do).

And I know that if it was that EVERYONE, both adults and children, had to wear safety helmets when riding, blading, or boarding then we would have a lot more people walking, instead of riding their bikes, using their in-line skates, and skateboards.

Jill Alseph  
Farmington Hills

### Misguided anger

On Saturday morning, April 3, you leaned over and rolled down the passenger side window of your car while stopped at a red light in front of Another Way Pregnancy Center. Our front door was open and one of our counselors was seated at the reception desk just inside the door. You shouted obscenities at her and accused her of being a baby killer.

We at Another Way want you to know that we are pro-life. We offer a variety of free services that help women choose life for their babies. We also help them pick up the pieces in the aftermath of abortion. Though we are glad that you are strongly against the killing of babies, we pray that you will refrain from yelling obscenities at those whom you think are abortionists. That's not in keeping with the example Jesus set.

Romans 2:4 says that it's God's kindness that leads people toward repentance. So be kind to everyone, pray for those who are living in the dark, and trust vengeance and justice to our merciful Lord.

Julie Nordberg  
Public Relations Director  
Another Way Pregnancy Center

Opinions are to be shared: Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to 248-477-9722.

## COMMUNITY VOICE

**QUESTION:**  
What was the last movie you watched and did you enjoy it?



"The Phantom Menace." I thought the other (Star Wars films) were better.  
Linda Nielsen  
Farmington



"What Dreams May Come." I thought it was interesting.  
Shella Rajdev  
Farmington Hills



"The Phantom Menace." I loved it.  
Douglas Daskin  
Farmington Hills



"Phantom Menace" I thought it was weak, not very good. It was too confusing between.  
Jay Fitzpatrick  
Farmington

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— Philip Power