

On with the show... City is right to buy the Civic

The Farmington City Council's purchase of the famed Civic Theatre from longtime owner Greg Hohler is smart for the downtown and the community.

The council's ratification of a \$316,500 purchase agreement and approval of a contract with Wixom-based M.K.A. Inc. to manage the building and the business will go a long way in ensuring that the theater remain an integral part of downtown.

And so it must. Too often we have seen older, independently owned theaters — the kind that make you feel like the movie is personally showing for you — turned into other types of businesses, including adult movie houses and peep shows. Or they are simply torn down.

A theater like the Civic gives downtown Farmington a tradition and a sentimentalism that many other communities don't have.

Other bedroom communities struggle without a downtown or device would-be downtowns out of a corner of the community. Farmington's heart is well-known, appreciated and healthy because of efforts to maintain what has made the area successful.

City Manager Frank Leuhoff has long been concerned about the Civic's future as a theater and as an anchor in downtown. Maintaining the Civic as a family movie theater will continue to ensure the downtown's health.

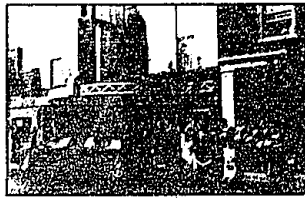
The theater has always brought patrons — many from other communities — downtown. It's a great way to showcase what Farmington has to offer, both as a community and as a retail center.

Perhaps the continuation of the Civic as a family movie house and the city's faith in the theater business as a draw for downtown, will instigate more investment into the city's center by other businesses.

And perhaps the decision to keep the theater open will signal to other businesses the need to stay open later to catch the movie crowd.

We applaud Leuhoff and the city council's leadership and foresight. And we urge both to stick to their guns and promise the Farmington taxpayers that the theater will remain in business and that they will never bear the tax burden should it fail.

While the move to hire a management company makes sense, there needs to be assurances that the city council still has its hands in what becomes of the Civic. Promises can be



Heartfelt: The Civic Theatre has always played a key role in the Farmington community and particularly the downtown. While movies has been the theater's steady fare, other important happenings have occurred there, such as this wedding.

made, but it remains up to the city administration and city council to serve as a watchdog on both M.K.A. and the Civic.

As multi-screen theaters have popped up all over surrounding communities, the Civic has continued to provide movie-goers with first-class entertainment at bargain rates. And you still have plenty of money left for popcorn — and maybe even a little more for a cup of coffee after the show.

We encourage Leuhoff and the city council to indeed follow through with plans for the Civic to offer weekend matinees, which were discontinued by Hohler seven years ago. It would be yet another tool to keep the theater in business and to bring business downtown.

Thanks must go out to Greg Hohler and his family who have owned and maintained the Civic for the past 69 years, especially in the face of stiff competition from multi-screen theaters owned by large corporations.

The council's decision to buy the Civic is one step in the right direction for maintaining the building as a family theater and for maintaining a traditional and recognizable anchor for downtown.

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Reflect growth on court bench

It's been 30 years since there were substantial changes in the Michigan court system. In 1969, through Public Act 236, the state established 101 district courts to handle local criminal cases and smaller civil matters. Twenty of those districts, with 28 judges, are in Wayne County outside of Detroit. Oakland County has 10 districts and 32 judges.

Almost everything that affects the legal system in southeastern Michigan has changed in three decades — except the courts themselves. Population has shifted, traffic patterns are different, as are trends in education, employment and technology. Even our views on crime and the way society deals with it are radically different than they were in the 1960s. After all, who ever thought the state would spend nearly twice as much on prisons (the 1999 corrections department budget is \$1.44 billion) as education (\$870 million)?

Recent changes in state law also play a role in how many people walk through the doors of local courthouses each day, particularly in heavily-populated suburbs. The limit on civil cases handled at the district level went from \$10,000 to \$25,000 several years ago. And more criminal misdemeanors are likely to be heard locally now that the property theft/damage limit has been bumped from \$100 to \$1,000.

The Observer urges the state legislature to move court reform to the front burner when it reconvenes in September. State representatives and senators will have this chance when the Michigan Supreme Court submits its report on judicial resources.

Specifically, the House and Senate must take up legislation that addresses a growing imbalance in the most basic level of the judicial system — and the part which has the widest impact on the majority of Michigan citizens — its district courts. While we don't believe a major overhaul is required, the court system must be given freedom to create additional judgeships where needed. That means doing away with the current reapportionment

system, which requires consolidation in some districts before others can be expanded. Partisan politics has rendered such redistribution an unlikely, if not impossible, task.

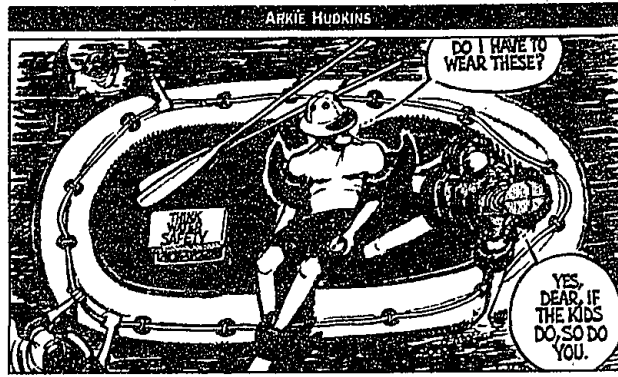
The 35th District Court — which handles cases in five growing communities, primarily in western Wayne County — would be a good starting point for adding a judgeship. So would the 47th District Court, which covers Farmington and Farmington Hills.

Caseloads in the 35th District (Plymouth, Northville and Canton townships; and the cities of Plymouth and Northville) have increased steadily over the last five years to nearly 42,000 in 1998. Two judges preside over criminal and civil matters for a geographic area that contains 84 square miles and nearly 140,000 people. The 35th District now handles 21,500 cases per judge, per year — far in excess of the state recommendation of 13,000. (The court brings in a visiting judge several days each week to help with caseload.) By comparison, Dearborn's 19th District Court has three judgeships with a smaller caseload, geographic area and population.

While caseloads have remained relatively stable in the 47th District, population has grown substantially within its boundaries. Its neighboring communities in Oakland County include multiple districts (48th, 50th, 52nd) with three and four judges serving combined communities with smaller populations and lower caseloads per judge.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency by municipalities to use district courts as highly principled but easily-disguised revenue centers. We see that every time a new courthouse is built or major expansion is approved for an existing one. That's one reason why we must take a cautious approach when adding judgeships.

But we see no reason why exploding growth in parts of southeastern Michigan should continue to be under represented on the district court bench.



LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (248) 477-9722 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.hometown.com.net

Findings and observations

My wife Annabelle urged me to attend a Farmington Hills council meeting with her last Monday evening and I did. The meeting was called to order by the mayor, minutes approved and the evening agenda commenced.

Agenda items moved along with dispatch until we got to the safety helmet issue. Many people spoke and some heated exchanges occurred over this issue. In wrap up the mayor said he heard good arguments on both sides and the vote was entertained. I will say that most of the arguments were against the ordinance mainly because of parental initiative. However, the Farmington Hills police chief got up and said quote "we already have 80 percent compliance with the use of helmets."

An observation:
I deliver the Farmington Observer newspaper over an area of 11 streets. School has been out for several days. Young people are out-and-about. As I delivered my papers last Thursday through the Floral subdivision — from Orchard Lake across and including Hawthorne (five streets), also Erick on the northern side to Shawwasco on the south side, and further east including Cera, Haynes, Springbrook, Tuck, Montclair and Aster — I was able to check for myself how many younger or older people were protected with helmets between 9 a.m. and 1:30 p.m.

Findings:
I saw 15 young people on two-wheel bicycles, one adult — 36 years, one child coasting along on Rollerblades, one mid-teen with helmet riding a motorized bike; out of the total number of 17 only two girls probably 10-12 years were wearing safety helmets while riding their bikes on this pleasant, partly sunny, 75-degree day.

Accepting the accuracy of the Farmington Hills police chief's compliance statement, I wonder under what circumstances he meant by the 80 percent compliance with the use of safety helmets.

Bruce Gabel
Farmington

A big thanks

The Farmington Community Band is just completing its 33rd season of providing concerts and musical entertainment. On behalf of conductor Paul Barber and the 60-plus members of the Farmington Community Band, we would like to thank you and the Farmington Observer for your coverage of our events during this past season. Your coverage and listing of our concerts helped to communicate to the community the support and cultural enjoyment the FCB brings to the Farmington and greater metro areas.

Thanks again for your support. We look forward to working with you for the 1999-2000 season which will be the 34th concert season for the FCB.

Robert V. Whaley
Vice President
Publicity

Enforce more old laws

I thought Phil Power's article "Culture dog wagged by tail," June 10, 1999, was right on and to the point — i.e., how did the entertainment industry people "get to have such colossal influence over the culture which defines the world in which I and my family live?"

Now we come to the Detroit Free Press editorial regarding the "Cussing Canoeist," June 12, 1999. This article feels sorry for the cussing canoeist, because he was convicted under a 19th century Michigan law, and anyway "adults are more likely to be offended by what comes out of the mouths of children than vice versa."

Now folks, where does that leave us, when the Detroit Free Press and the American Civil Liberties Union think that the law regarding using vile language in front of children should be thrown out? Some say it's up to the families, religious organizations and schools to straighten things out.

I say, these groups have been trying, and it's proved to be a losing battle. I personally think we need more enforcement of these types of 19th century laws, perhaps even 18th century laws, and maybe somebody ought to investigate who finances the American Civil Liberties Union. Do you know, I don't!

Ralph C. Bolz
Livonia

Was election necessary?

Can an election with only a 3 percent voter turnout fairly represent the will of the people? The Farmington School Board policy of wanting separate elections seldom produces higher participation.

The choice was between candidate Melody Jaske and incumbent Gary Sharp. The Farmington Observer endorsed Sharp and printed letters supporting him for various reasons. One question did not appear in this edition.

"Was this election necessary?" Jaske favored consolidating school elections with general elections to obtain greater voter participation. Sharp feared mixing school issues with partisan politics would confuse voters. How dumb does he believe the constituency is?

Hank Borgman
Farmington

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— Philip Power