

Farmington Observer

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THE WEEK AHEAD

SUNDAY

Music in the park: Students from Farmington, Harrison and North high school bands will perform at a free outdoor concert, 5-8 p.m. at Nardin Park Church. The church is located on W. 11 Mile, one block west of Middlebelt.

MONDAY

School bells: The 1999-2000 school year for Farmington Public Schools will open with a half day of classes throughout the district. All buildings have been deemed safe for students, following an inspection by local fire department officials. Construction is continuing at several sites.

WEDNESDAY

New ownership: The city of Farmington officially takes over ownership of the Civic Theatre in downtown Farmington.

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Gas leak sends children home

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Moms and dads frantically ran inside Child Time day care center only to walk out calmly with their children Friday morning.

Some 60 children were evacuated from the day care center on 12 Mile Road after a contract worker operating a back hoe accidentally ruptured a six-inch plastic gas line.

The gas leak closed 12 Mile Road, between Drake and Halsted, for five hours.

When firefighters arrived at 10:26 a.m., the day care had a natural gas reading of 20 parts per million, which is not considered hazardous. Children were sent home as a precaution, Battalion Chief John Wells said.

Employees at the day care phoned parents to pick up their children.

"I hung up the phone and picked up my keys and left," said Scott Cormier of Novi who had his son, 20-month-old Cooper, at the center. "I didn't even tell

my boss."

Said Tricia Garbarino, who arrived to retrieve 22-month-old son Anthony, "It's just a feeling of panic."

Parents who tried to enter through Halsted and 12 Mile became more upset when they encountered flashing fire trucks and police cars near the break. One mother said she could smell gas.

Jeff Fish drove from downtown Detroit to pick up his 3-year-old daughter, Alexandra. They tried to reach his wife, who works in South-



No: Paramedic John Wells warns Justin Spiro to not ride toward gas main break.

Please see OAS, A5

END OF AN ERA

Hohler family says goodbye to historic theater

STORY BY E. GREGORY HOHLER

Editor's note: We couldn't let the change in ownership of the Civic Theatre, a long-time fixture of downtown Farmington pass without some fanfare. Rich in history, not only of Farmington, but the changes in the world that affected the local community, the theater's history represents the changing seasons of our time. And who better to put its history in words than owner E. Gregory Hohler. Today and Thursday, read how the Civic came to be and why now the Hohler family is letting go of the theater that has come to represent our local community.

The Farmington Civic Theatre will soon celebrate its 59th anniversary, and change ownership from the Hohler family to the city of Farmington.

This anniversary and the impending change of ownership has inspired the writing of the Civic's nearly six decades of history and the story of how the Civic came into existence.

Fascination with movies

The Farmington Civic Theatre opened its doors on Sept. 20, 1940. The opening night was a gala affair, with my father, Edward J.

Hohler as manager. Just a year prior to this stood a grocery store where the Civic would now create its own history.

How did Farmington get its own movie theater? To answer this question we go back to 1924 and to a way growing up in Adrian, Michigan. Like so many others at that time, he became totally fascinated by the moving picture phenomenon. "Eddie"

Hohler was 12 when The Family Theatre was advertising for employees. He applied for the position and got the job. His first duty was ringing a gong for a silent movie.

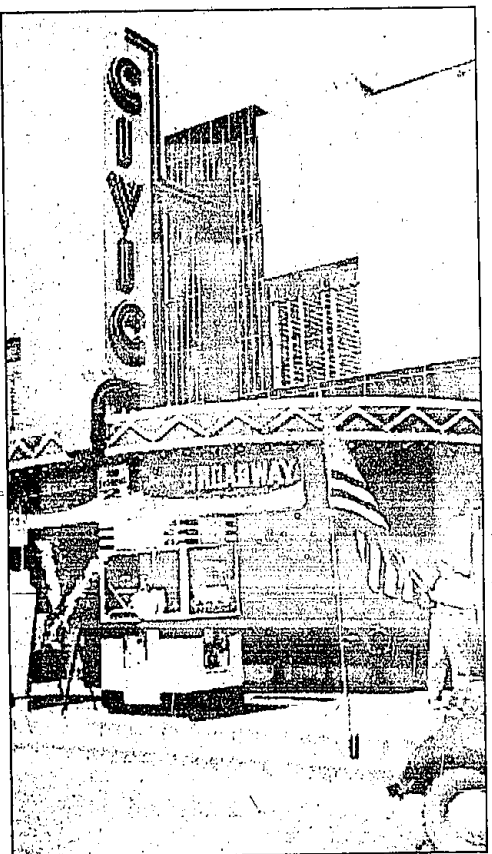
During his teen years Eddie's fascination with movies grew and he was hooked. Upon graduation from high school he became the manager of that theater. A career was born and later that career was passed on to the second generation and provided work into a third generation.

Theater managers of the '30s and '40s seldom stayed with the same theater for more than a few years, and so it was with Eddie. He had management jobs in Hillsdale, Lansing, Chicago and Ypsilanti before taking a job in 1938 for one of Detroit's largest movie exhibitors, Associated Theatres.

Eddie was assigned to manage the Granada at West Warren and Junction in Detroit. At the time he and my mother were living in Walled Lake,

Cooling off: Top, Farmington kids gather for an air-conditioned matinee in the early 1940s. Above, purchasers of War Bonds received a pass to see Mickey Rooney and Elizabeth Taylor in "National Velvet". Right, The Civic held a best-dressed contest for the opening of the 1940 Charlie Chaplin film "The Great Dictator".

Below, the Civic held a best-dressed contest for the opening of the 1940 Charlie Chaplin film "The Great Dictator".



and this involved quite a daily commute. Because there were no expressways at the time the route involved using Grand River Avenue, which of course took him right through the city of Farmington twice a day.

The only other theaters in the area at that time were the Redford Theatre on Lahser and the Northville P & A (now the Marquis). My father, having grown up in a small town, had the desire to return to that type of setting. He approached Associated Theatres owner Alec Schrieber and asked if he would like to take a trip to look at a location that would be a good site for a theater. My dad's only request was that if Schrieber were to build a theater there that he be considered for the manager.

The Civic is born

The site selected was occupied by a

Please see ERA, A2



Helping out: Top, during World War II a special booth in front of the Civic sold War Bonds to moviegoers. Above, local members of the Goodfellows delivered food to the Civic for distribution to Farmington's needy residents.

Observer & Eccentric offers merchant discount card

Just what you need, another discount card, right? Right!

Today marks the debut of the Observer & Eccentric's HomeTown Savings Card Program for annual subscribers. If you renewed your subscription in July or August, you'll soon receive two cards in the mail, one for your wallet and one for your key chain. These cards are good for special dis-

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