

Appliance doc will talk to homeowners

BY RICHARD PEARL
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Joe Gagnon, the "Appliance Doctor" of metro Detroit newspaper, radio and cable television fame, will discuss consumer issues for homeowners in a special program



Joe Gagnon

Sept. 20, in Farmington Hills. The free program and discussion featuring the Observer & Eccentric! columnist and WJR radio personality will take place at 7:30 p.m. in the William Costick Activities Center, 11 Mile and Middlebelt roads.

Gagnon's appearance is the first program of its type sponsored by the Farmington Hills Consumer Protection Committee, which was formed 16 months ago by the city to help consumers with product problems and rip-offs by unscrupulous vendors.

"He's a wonderful activist for people who need help," said Masha Silver, committee chairwoman.

"He's probably the foremost consumer expert on appliances," said Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi.

"He's well-respected and has helped thousands of consumers both with appliance mechanical problems and with consumer rip-offs," said Vagnozzi, a consumer advocate in his own right and, according to Silver, the driving force behind the committee's efforts to bring Gagnon here.

"This program is a feather in the cap of the committee," the mayor added.

The protection committee, which works closely with Hills Detective Sgt. Tim Swanson, the city's police liaison, now has about 17 cases on its docket and already has mediated a couple of others,

Silver said.

Among the problems it deals with are contractors who don't finish jobs or who don't return after taking deposits.

It is beginning to influence repair companies to properly register with the city and to have their employees wear appropriate identification when making repair calls, she added.

The committee is now using displays at the public library and the mall to keep consumers informed about store items not being priced as the law requires, or stores whose scanners overcharge. It also has established a telephone hotline (248-428-4450).

But one of the biggest problems is residents being victimized by scam artists, Silver said.

"It's not hard to fall for a scam," she said. "Just like we work hard to do good at our jobs, they (scam artists) work hard to do good at theirs."

And, she said, the general public "still tends to have faith in society," which means people can be, and are, duped.

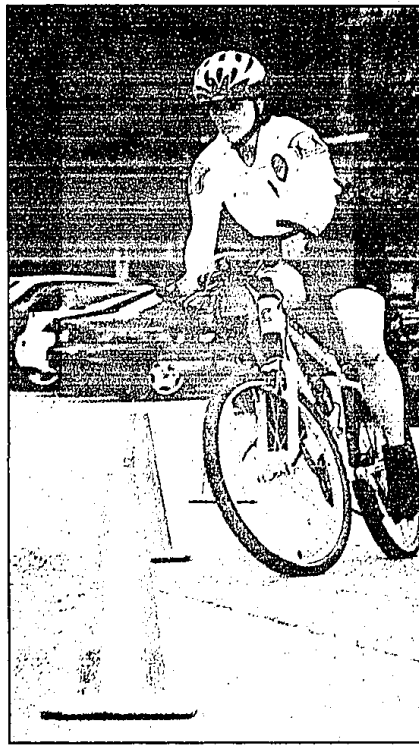
"The worst part is the seniors, who are especially the ones being targeted," said Silver.

Gagnon (rhymes with "cannon"), told Vagnozzi he's happy Farmington Hills has invited him to speak on such topics and hopes more cities will do the same.

The owner of Carmack Appliance and Service Center in Garden City since 1979, Gagnon has been in the appliance industry 20 years.

He got Michigan to outlaw fire-causing plastic or vinyl-covered clothes dryer vents, has become an expert on the dishonest tricks used by some in the service-repair industry and is seeking more legislation to protect Michigan consumers.

Gagnon is president-elect of the Great Lakes Chapter of the Society of Consumer Affairs Professionals.



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL TREMBLE

Safety: Farmington Public Safety Cmdr. Maria Putt, a member of the bike patrol, practices safety while riding an obstacle course (above) and stresses the need for helmets (at right).

Safety Rodeo lassos kids

BY TIM SMITH
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Farmington and Farmington Hills youngsters have a chance to go to the rodeo - a bicycle rodeo, that is.

They won't have to bring their ropes to get in on the fun. But they will need to bring a bike, wear their helmet and lasso in a parent, adult or guardian in order for them to participate.

Farmington Public Safety Cmdr. Maria Putt said the bicycle rodeo will take place from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 25, in the west parking lot of Shilohwase Park, located at Shilohwase-Power.

"There's no age limit (to attend), but this is designed for children," said Putt, who comprises the public safety bike patrol along with officers Terry Purves and Chip Hennessy.

Bicyclists will get to make their way through seven different stations at the rodeo. They will complete a variety of handling tasks (turning, braking) and demonstrate their knowledge of hand signals and rules.

"Bikes are considered as much a vehicle as a car," said Putt. "They have right-of-way."

But bicyclists must also stay as far to the right curb or shoulder as possible, and go with the traffic flow, she added.

Targeted for the rodeo are younger kids so that they will find out more about bike safety and say hello to the helmeted police officers at the same time.

Putt said flyers are being distributed to elementary schools in the city.

"Interaction with young residents is a big thing," Putt said, "so they feel at ease. Seeing us

(officers) on the bikes makes us seem like more regular people to them."

Co-sponsoring the event is the Farmington Public Safety Department, Health & Fitness Bicycle of Walled Lake and State Farm Insurance.

Meanwhile, the public safety department will issue bicycle licenses for a nominal fee.

Gary Goss, director of the Farmington Public Safety Department, said the licenses would help locate the owners of bikes that are stolen or found.

"We find a lot of bikes, maybe a dozen a year," Goss said.

For more information about the bicycle rodeo, call Putt at (248) 474-4700, extension 248.



City hosts meeting with Detroit Edison

The city of Farmington Hills will host a meeting of the Detroit Edison Citizens' Committee at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 23, in the multi-purpose room of Fire Department Headquarters (Station No. 6).

Fire Department Headquarters is directly behind city hall at the corner of 11 Mile and Orchard Lake roads in Farmington Hills.

The meeting agenda will include discussion of reliability of service, call-in procedures for power outages, emergency response to power outages, equipment and line replacement programs, line clearance (tree trimming) programs, and other issues relating to electrical service.

Representatives from Detroit

■ The meeting is at 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 23, in the multi-purpose room of Fire Department Headquarters (Station No. 6).

Edison will be available to respond to questions and individual concerns. All interested residents and businesses are encouraged to attend. Any citizens who are not on the Detroit Edison Citizens' Committee but wish to receive an announcement for the meeting may call the city manager's office at 473-0502.

North Farmington hosts band festival

The Eastern Michigan University Marching Band and six of the area's top high school marching bands will perform at the first-ever North Farmington High School Marching Band Festival from 5-9 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 29 at North Farmington High School.

The event is open to the public and participating groups will include the Harrison, Farmington, North Farmington, Southfield Lathrup, and South Lyon High School marching bands. Highlights will include a performance by EMU, and massed band presentation to close the

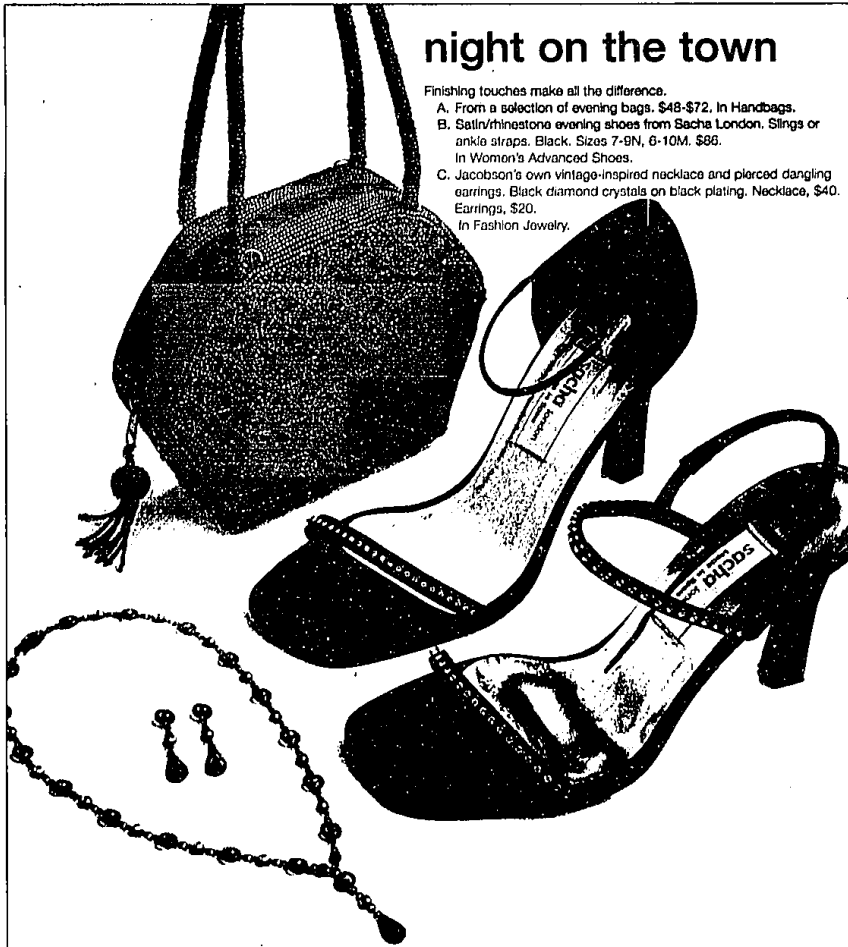
■ The festival will be 5-9 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 29

event. Admission, at the door, is \$2 for adults and \$1 for students. Concessions will offer food and refreshments at a nominal cost. All proceeds will benefit student musicians at North Farmington High School. The school is located at 32900 W. 13 mile Road, just east of Farmington Road. Call Jason Lowe at 489-3545.

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