

# Diversity

## Invite your neighbor for coffee

Students who spoke at the fifth annual kickoff of the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural/Multiracial Community Council thanked the adults in their world for giving them opportunities to live and learn in a racially and culturally diverse community.

Harouna Alameddine, a Lebanon native, longtime school district linguistic arts teacher and a driving force on the community council, suggested that neighbors — regardless of their heritage, skin color, religion or culture — should get to know each other.

How simple and yet how true. Inviting a new neighbor of a different race or culture in for coffee can accomplish more in pulling the world together than can the United Nations with all its resolutions and peace efforts.

Cultural and racial understanding, as well as peace, start in the local community. Clearly the movers and shakers of the multicultural/multiracial council recognized that when they began their efforts years ago.

Farmington and Farmington Hills are known not just for diversity in the community, but for how such issues are addressed on various levels of the community, particularly the schools.

Credit must be given to all the members of the community council, past and present, and particularly the participating students who have given their time and efforts to close the gap on differences.

The community council not only offers programming to raise awareness of diversity, but to create an opportunity for people of various races, religions and cultures to come together to discuss their differences and develop understandings for living together peacefully.

The council has not chosen an easy task. As much as many people are open-minded, there's an equal number who don't want to open their hearts.

That's why the involvement of students in the council and in programming throughout the community and schools is so important. Perhaps with their help adults can reach a new level of understanding.

If students can leave high school with no fear of other groups who have friends of all religions, races and cultures, and understand that, like themselves, others just want to live healthy and happy lives, the world will be much better off in the future.

We are counting on students in the school



Interviewed: North Farmington Principal Rick Jones talks diversity with Channel 7 newscaster Mark Hayes at a recent community forum.

district to accept each other, to learn about each other and to show the rest of the world the way.

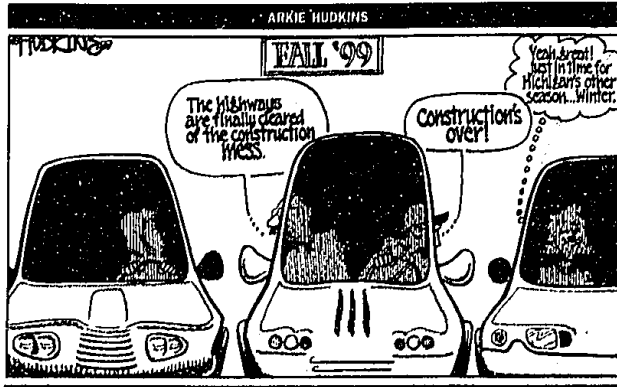
Bigotry and disdain for others who may be different are born of insecurity and fear. Yet Farmington and Farmington Hills — with the help of the community council — have shown that diversity does not detract from or diminish any one person's cultural, racial or religious background.

The programs offered by the community council give residents and students a chance to talk. Sometimes that's all that's needed to create understanding.

The next event on the council's schedule is at 8 a.m. Thursday, Oct. 14. The discussion will focus on broadening participation in community groups. In November, the topic will be recruiting and training a diverse workforce.

So invite the new neighbor over, encourage and support your children when they bring home friends who may be different, and drop in on some of the community council's programs.

**■ The council has not chosen an easy task. As much as many people are open-minded, there's an equal number who don't want to open their hearts.**



### 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 48336, faxed to Joanne at (734) 460-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.homecomm.net

#### Utility firm still in denial

The Michigan Public Service Commission and Detroit Edison: After listening to many of our residents tell our city council about suffering through a series of electricity service outages the last several months, I was outraged at the response that Detroit Edison gave the media to the effect that there was no problem in Farmington Hills and that power losses are rare.

This was after some 8,000 Farmington Hills residents suffered an extended period of power losses. With Detroit Edison in a state of denial that a problem exists how are we ever going to get the corrective action we need?

You claim that less than 1 percent of all customers suffer power losses, a claim that, based on our own city's problems, we find ridiculous. For several years now we have requested regular reports on power outages in our community. Those reports have not been forthcoming. Therefore, it is hard to challenge your claim except from the number of complaints we receive far too frequently. Those outages have taken place even in sunny weather and a few breezes.

In fact, one resident told council he lives in a gentle breeze subdivision. Every time there is a gentle breeze his electricity goes out. The old argument that it is the trees that cause outages is also a phony one in the most recent power losses, most of which occurred in subdivisions that have underground wiring.

At our Aug. 9 council meeting we adopted a program that will require Edison and the Public Service Commission to do their duty and institute a series of reforms, including a system wide review of all equipment and the replacement of worn out equipment.

Even the suggestion of having Edison make arrangements to provide dry ice to our neighborhoods was met with the defensive claim that it would slow down repairs. We haven't had dry ice at all and that certainly hasn't sped up restoration of service. How much warmer can it get?

I call on Detroit Edison to act like a public utility. And I call on the Public Service Commission to remember that taking care of the public needs is its prime responsibility.

Aldo Vagnossi, mayor  
 Farmington Hills

#### How old?

How can you tell if you're kind of old?

- If you attended the red brick schools in Farmington.
- If Mr. Sutton was your gym teacher.
- If Lulu Loomis was your third grade teacher.

■ If you remember when the Civic Theater opened.

■ If you remember when the Lone Ranger lived in Farmington.

■ If you remember Joe DeVriendt as chief of police.

■ If you remember the Farmington Dairy on Grand River.

■ If you remember when the Farmington Library was in the Masonic building.

■ If you remember the trolley tracks on Grand River.

■ If you remember Gildemoister's Mill, where Arbor Drugs is now.

■ If you remember the boys' swimming hole behind the Baptist church.

■ If you bought a new 1950 Ford.

■ If you remember Rendezvous Drive-In on Grand River.

■ If you bought a new 1929 Ford.

■ If you remember them selling war bonds at the Civic Theater.

■ If you remember Eddie Alexander managing the bowling alley on Grand River.

■ If you remember the population of Farmington and Farmington Township as 2,000.

■ If you remember when Grand River, east of Wyoming, was a gravel road.

■ If you remember when the Grand River Drive-In Theater was built.

■ If you remember when Joe Louis beat Billy Conn on a questionable decision.

■ You're really old if you can't remember how old you are.

Kenneth Kemp  
 Farmington

#### Federal giveaway

I recently became aware of the digital spectrum trillion-dollar asset, which was given to the media moguls by Congress in the Telecommunications Act of 1996. This "act" was equivalent to giving away the state of Alaska with its oil assets. This corporate welfare of several billion dollars was achieved by the National Association of Broadcasters and Licensing, which used misleading "issue advertising" to frighten the public and Congress, by stating that the government was going to "tax the airwaves."

We are writing to advocate that the beneficiary of this trillion dollar giveaway provide free air time for all political candidates, including the third party candidates who did not have the opportunity to object to giving away a public asset.

The National Association of Broadcasting and Licensing can yet redeem themselves. Free air time for political candidates would in effect create campaign finance reform.

Bonnie and Dumont Hixson  
 Novi

# Cell phones: No more laws

We've seen the bumper stickers. Maybe you have too. One says: "Drive now — talk later." Another states: "Why don't you drive while I shove that cell phone...?"

Well, you get the idea. People are becoming concerned about the ubiquitous cellular phone, especially when it is used by motorists who need to keep their eyes on the road, their hands on the wheel and their minds on the task at hand: driving.

A recent Observer article pointed out that, according to medical and academic research, talking on a cell phone makes a driver four times more likely to be involved in an accident, roughly the same rate of increase experienced by drunk drivers.

Think about that: If you believe the studies, yackers can be almost as bad as loozers behind the wheel.

Several countries (Spain, Portugal, Israel, Italy, Brazil and Chile) have responded to the danger by banning cell phone use while driving. Similar attempts in the United States have little support.

And, as the article pointed out, it is unlikely that the Michigan Legislature will act any time soon to ban or restrict the use of cell phones by motorists. Why? Because something like three quarters of our state senators and representatives make liberal use of them on those long drives to and from the Capital.

"We'd be hard pressed to vote in something like that," an area state representative told our Lansing reporter Mike Malott. "It would be a case of 'Do as I say, not as I do.'"

Well, we believe the use of cell phones in cars should be neither restricted nor banned. To do so would be an illogical reaction to a technology that is quickly becoming an integral part of the communications and business worlds.

A little common sense on the part of the phone-packing public and some thought and innovation by the industry itself should make

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legislation unnecessary, we think.

Cell phones are today what fax machines were a decade ago — the latest communications gizmo. Thing is, few drivers felt the need to send or receive faxes while barreling along I-898 or I-75 at 70 miles per. Portable phones are, however, completely adaptable to the automobile.

With cell phones, people are no longer out of touch while they're getting from here to there. As the Nextel advertisement says, cell phones are "How business gets done."

So use cell phones, but use them safely. A few tips for motorists (and forgive us for stating the obvious):

■ Remember that driving is Job one. If traffic is getting a bit too hectic, better ring off and call later on a land line.

■ Whenever possible, leave the phone in its holder on the dashboard and make use of the speaker feature. You can pay closer attention to the road when the phone isn't jammed between your head and shoulder.

■ Use speed dialers or voice-activated dialer if there is one. Perhaps the cell phone industry should make voice-activated dialers standard.

■ If possible, let a passenger make or take the call.

■ Pull off the highway, perhaps into a parking lot, to make your call. Remember, though, police say it can be dangerous to be parked on the shoulder of a busy road.

States have laws on the books against careless driving. Of course, they would apply to drivers who happened to be on the phone when they were stopped for, say, weaving in and out of traffic. We don't need more laws to cover the same thing.

# Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power