

Family bonds insure this business success

DIANE GALE ANDREAS
SPECIAL WRITER

While large corporations around the world are gobbling up smaller ones like appetizers, it makes us appreciate more the family owned businesses in our midst. Like Grace Insurance Agency, which was established by Clare J. Grace in downtown Farmington in 1919. Now owned by Craig and Glenn Grace, the company was handed down three generations and has been in the same location, aside from a 10-foot move down the block on Grand River east of Farmington, during the 1950s.

"In today's time when everyone is buying out existing businesses from other people I think it's a pretty good achievement to run the agency from three different generations successfully and to have remained in the same community," Craig Grace said.

Add to that watermark another significant achievement - Glenn and Craig still represent their grandfather's first client, which was Citizens' Insurance Company of America.

"As far as we know we are the oldest agency that has remained in a family for Citizens' independent agents," Craig Grace said.

It all began when the insurance business was established in the Grace Hotel, which was built in 1899. The three-story building was essentially used as a boarding house and was established by Ulysses Grace, Craig and Glenn Grace's great-grandfather.

Next door to the hotel, the Grace family sold Packards in a one-room showroom. Their new venture required the family have insurance, which gave birth to the Grace Insurance Agency.

As it turned out, the Packard business died away and the insurance company became a family legacy that still thrives.

Gerald C. Grace bought the insurance business from his father, Clare and in 1981, Craig and Glenn Grace bought it from their father, Gerald Grace.

"As far as the next generation it's hard to say," Craig Grace said. "The industry is changing so much with mergers and consolidations that it is doubtful that it will go on to the next generation."

The 80-year family business milestone went public recently at a Farmington City Council meeting when the Grace family was presented with a page-long proclamation stating: "Craig and Glenn Grace have nurtured the business as it has grown and have been active members in the community devoting extensive volunteer services to city government and local business associations..."

The proclamation went on to say that their service and contributions to the community enhance the reputation of the City of Farmington. These fraternal businessmen also remain a living thread to important historical events in the community.

The Grace family roots in Farmington go back even further than Ulysses, Craig explained, with Ulysses Grace's father, Benjamin Grace.

The latter was a farmer who traveled to Michigan from Farmington, New York with the Quakers.

"That's our family's first settler in Farmington that I know of," Craig Grace said. "I grew up hearing stories about how the hotels, Grace, and the Owen House across the street, were more like boarding houses," Craig Grace said. "In the Grace Hotel, on third floor, was a ballroom and Henry Ford would come and dance there, at the Botsford Inn and the Owen House."

The Grace Hotel was leveled to make way for the rear parking lot in the early 1960s.

Craig Grace also recalled stories about how the building was assembled with bricks that were fired on Grand River. Carriages were kept behind the building. "One of my customers came in and returned the cash register that he purchased when the Grace Hotel was demolished and on the bottom of the drawer it had a delivery date with my great-grandfather's name on it."



Full of Grace: Glenn and Craig Grace carry on the family tradition, operating an insurance agency that has become a fixture in downtown Farmington.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRENNER

AGENDAS

Farmington City Council
City hall, 474-6600
8 p.m. Monday, Nov. 15
Agenda items include:
■ Organization of Council, including Oath of Office for newly elected Council members, appointment of temporary chairman, election of mayor and mayor pro tem;
■ Public hearing on 2000-01 Community Development Block Grant program;
■ Reports by Boys State Representative Benjamin York;
■ Introduction of Nancy Coumoundouros, new Cultural Arts Coordinator for Farmington/Farmington Hills;
■ Update on code enforcement by Director of Public Services Kevin Gushman;
■ Proclamation of National Family Week, Nov. 21-28;
■ Consider resolution regarding the formal process for cable franchise renewal;
■ Consider approving budget adjustment for 47th District Court roof repair.

Farmington Hills City Council
City Hall, 474-6115
7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 15
Agenda items include:
■ Add Button Orchards house to Historical District;
■ Consider approval of service agreement with ABC and Northwest cab companies for senior adult transportation;
■ Consider amending the city code to provide for registration of establishments and to provide certain license requirements to promote the efficient administration and provision for public health and safety measures;
■ Consider amendment to allow temporary wall signs to be displayed a maximum of four times a year;
■ Consider authorizing the city manager and city attorney to negotiate a land purchase and development agreement for the development of Eleven Pines.

Annual 'Raider Rake' grows as leaves fall

BY RICHARD PEARL
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The "biggest and best" Raider Rake in the six-year history of the North Farmington High School service project bagged leaves for 33 senior citizens and shut-ins recently.

"We had 115 rompin', stompin' students" participating Saturday, Oct. 30," said a proud Ed Davis, North government teacher and Raider Rake co-ordinator and founder.

"We filled 'em up with cider and doughnuts, all those carbohydrates, and turned 'em loose," he said.

Also helping out were 10

North teachers, who donated their time to help coordinate the raking and cleaning project.

Juniors and seniors with driver's licenses provided their fellow freshmen and sophomore participants with rides, Davis said.

Davis said it was very satisfying to see the students "realizing it's important to give back to the community" by taking part in the Raider Rake.

Names of residents needing the help were submitted about equally by the Farmington Hills Home Chores service, churches and synagogues and "the sweet little neighbor ladies," Davis said.

Workshop to offer insight for the politically curious

BY RICHARD PEARL
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Got an itch to seek local public office, but don't know what that entails?

You're in luck. Farmington City Councilwoman JoAnne McShane and three other current officeholders will discuss the subject during a workshop entitled "Me? Run for Public Office?" slated for 7 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 18, in Bloomfield Township.

The workshop at the Bloomfield Township Public Library, located on the southeast corner of Telegraph and Lone Pine, is co-sponsored by the League of Women Voters, Oakland Area the Women Officials' Network and the library.

"It's nice to pique the interest of people who might even think of possibly running for office," said McShane, who has served 10 years on the city council and won re-election to it earlier this month.

"It's so important to prime persons who might have any interest" in running for office, she added - "giving them an outline holding their hand and offering them mentorship."

Although she isn't part of Thursday's program, Judge Maria Parker of the 47th District Court nevertheless

endorsed it: "Particularly in this age of term limits, there's a constant need for new leadership," she said.

"People have to be encouraged to be leaders," said Parker, who last year won re-election to a second six-year term. Knowing "what it's all about may inspire people" to take a role in government.

Joining McShane as panelists will be Anna Fidler, Rochester Hills Library board member; Debbie Macon, West Bloomfield Township trustee and Geri Rinschler, Birmingham board of education.

They will share the decision-making process each went through; tell what went into preparing to run and discuss the time commitment required by their respective offices and also the rewards and challenges of being an elected official.

Afterwards, panelists and attendees will meet in small groups for more in-depth discussions.

McShane, who served as mayor two of her 10 years on the council, has been in community service for 28 years.

The League of Women Voters is dedicated to encouraging the informed and active participation of citizens in the government. The Women Officials' Network supports female elected officials through networking and educational opportunities and encourages other women to run for office.

For additional information about the program, call the LWV at (248) 647-1350.

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