

Students take over the city government

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER
rpearl@eo.com

Pamela Ringstrom learned that everyday people can have a lot of clout in local government.

Ashley Pope learned that the magic of television is still pretty impressive, even after you understand some tricks.

And Cory Engel learned why keeping a curfew on juveniles under age 18 is a wise move.

The three seniors were among 21 from Farmington High School who gained special knowledge earlier this month as volunteers for Student Government Day in the city of Farmington.

The special program, in which FHS government class students shadow city officials to learn the workings of municipal government, is the first of two co-sponsored annually by the Farmington Public Schools district and the governments of Farmington and Farmington Hills in conjunction with the cities' Rotary clubs.

On Tuesday, Nov. 30, seniors from Harrison and North Farmington - 22 from each school - will get their chance to shadow Hills elected and administrative officials.

Ed Davis, veteran North Farmington teacher, Student Government Day coordinator and a supporter and advocate throughout its 15 years, calls it

STUDENT GOVERNMENT DAY

"a great program" which gives students "the chance to learn on-site, with real-world experience, what running a community is all about."

Staci Fields, FHS government teacher and government day coordinator, said the program "benefits all students" because "they see how local government benefits them and how they themselves can have more impact" than that at the state or federal levels.

She said it also helped to bring home to the students the fact only 12 percent of the registered voters turned out for the Nov. 2 elections.

"The city officials were just wonderful" in giving the students insight, she said. "I think the kids got a lot out of it. Absolutely."

She also lauded the Farmington Rotary Club's helping "provide a link between the high school and the community."

9 a.m. start
Nov. 9 began at 9 a.m. at Farmington City Hall for FHS seniors with an orientation

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meeting featuring Carleigh Flaherty, president-elect of the Farmington Rotary Club, and then-Farmington Mayor Mary L. Bush.

Afterwards, each student spent the morning following their respective counterparts in city government, with everyone meeting later at the Farmington Training Center for lunch co-hosted by the city and the Rotarians.

The day concluded with a student-run city council meeting in council chambers. The students, gavelled to order by Bush's counterpart, student Patti Wheeler, and sworn to office by Deputy City Clerk Janice Schmidt's counterpart, Christa Doot, then gave reports on city business completed that morning.

Reports included the status of Civic Theater renovations, presented by Fallon James, who worked with City Manager Frank Lauffhoff on completion and usage of the Shiawassee Park "Kids World" PlayScape, presented by Ringstrom, who shadowed Assistant City Manager Bill Richards; and reports on voter turnout and financial conditions, given respectively by Doot and Nicole LaVake, who worked with Deputy City Treasurer Joyce Griffiths.

Ringstrom, an FHS Marching Band piccolo player who plans to study biology in college, admitted she "never knew much about city government... There's been a lot of stuff I never heard before."

But, through Richards' tutelage, she learned how the various departments function and relate to the city manager's office and the big role played by volunteers, including those who helped build the PlayScape.

"I didn't realize how much effect the private citizen has on government," Ringstrom said.

Pope, a defensive lineman on the Falcons' football team, learned from Eric Angot, video operations manager for the Southwestern Oakland County Cable Commission, such things

as how subscriber fees to Time-Warner Cable Co. help provide regularly televised government programs for SWOCC's member cities of Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi.

Doing fades

He also showed Pope how a television camera and the switcher - the broadcast control panel - do fades, image mergers and other things.

"I always thought it was technical, but thought it was really complicated," said Pope, who plans to study criminal science.

"It's still pretty complicated, but (at least now) I know what goes on," added Pope, who helped tape that day's student city council.

Engel, who shadowed Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss, was probably the one most in his element: He plans to get a criminal justice degree and go into law enforcement.

One of the surprises he got - besides learning Farmington police are cross-trained as firefighters and medics - was just how much schooling and training is involved in law enforcement.

"Most people think you can get a (police) job out of high school," he said. "But there's... a lot more schooling than most people realize."


He also learned from Goss why those under age 16 need a curfew.

"Minors tend to be noisy," Engel said. And a recent study showed "a correlation between minors and crime rate."

"Across the nation, the juvenile crime rate is up, but the crime rate overall is falling."

Those reasons are why he would tell the student city council that afternoon, "This is no time to be fooling with the curfew."

LIBRARY Books in Demand



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- The A Memoir, Frank McCourt
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