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SEVENTY-FIVE CENTS

Only 70 tickets left

Tickets for the Saturday Jan. 8, 2000, "Grand Re-Opening" of the Civic Theatre gala are "going like crazy," said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff.

He said only about 70 of the \$50 tickets remained as of Monday. They can be obtained (check or cash only) at Farmington City Hall, 23800 Liberty Street. Only 268 tickets were originally available.



they will be open from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday, Dec. 27, through Wednesday, Dec. 29. Tickets are subject to availability, Lauhoff said.

IN THE PAPER TODAY

Fired up: An architect was tapped to begin developing plans for a new Farmington Hills fire station. /A2

Civil War revisited: Artifacts help teacher bring 1860s North-South showdown back to life for Our Lady of Sorrows students. /A3

COMMUNITY LIFE

Pet gifts: Bottled water, sweaters, toys...no, not gifts for people, gifts for pets. /B1

AT HOME

Party of the century: Planners have a variety of creative ways to greet the new year. /D8

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District to unveil 'safe schools' plan



Farmington school board members will release details of a crisis intervention plan in January. The plan enables the district to work in conjunction with other Oakland County districts and law enforcement agencies.

BY TIM SMITH
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Strict guidelines for responding to "critical incidents" that threaten the safety of students and Farmington school district employees will be unveiled next month by the board of education.

A policy for "Safe Schools and Crisis Management" in the district had its first reading at the board's Tuesday, Dec. 14, meeting. The second reading and adoption is expected for Tuesday, Jan. 11, said Superintendent Bob Maxfield.

According to the policy, subject to final changes, guidelines "will include

general building and transportation security issues and will establish protocols for responding to critical incidents" both district-wide and building-by-building.

Those guidelines would be reviewed every three years.

"A Safe Schools and Crisis Management Plan was in the works long before Littleton (in April 1999)," Maxfield said. "... Local planning is at the heart of a responsible approach" to emergencies.

Input from the Farmington Hills Police Department, Farmington Public Safety Department, high school police liaison officers and Estraleo Michael-

son, director of Safe/Drug Free Schools, helped spur the district's plan, Maxfield said.

Board members, at the Dec. 14 meeting, also approved a resolution to participate in a statewide school safety information network and adopt the so-called Oakland County Plan for safe schools.

About the latter, there are 21 reportable offenses, including a bomb threat, hostage situation, bus incident, personal threat, sexual assault, death at a school site (including suicide) and disruptive student. "Whatever that means," Maxfield went on.

Please see SAFE, A4

You gotta believe: Santas 'see' into hearts of children

BY TEDD SCHNEIDER
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Oh, they know. Yes, they do. Just like the song says. In only a few short minutes with your child, these men can magically discern if Justin or Jessica has been bad or good. For the whole year.

As if that weren't impressive enough, they also respond appropriately to your child's personality. Outgoing and energetic, or cautious and quiet; they pick up the signs in a flash and know just what to say or do.

And here's the scary part. Many area Santa Clauses say they can get a pretty good indication of parents' character and demeanor by observing them as they stand in line with their offspring.

So you adults had better be good for goodness sake, says Eric Stopa, who has donned the red suit and stocking cap on and off for 11 years, including the last three in downtown Plymouth's Kellogg Park for the city's annual Christmas tree lighting ceremony.

Precious moments
"Really though, I think the best thing is being able to listen to the kids and not worry about the parents," the Plymouth resident says. "The moment a child is with you is precious and if you handle it right there is an immediate bond."

For "Santa" Jack Lawing of Livonia there is no better time in the world than the 90 seconds or two minutes a child spends in his lap. "I'm very gentle with them. Even though it's a short visit, the key to being a good Santa is to go very slow and not force any kind of discussion out of them."

Lawing, 68 and a retired Farmington Public Schools administrator, has come down from the



STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HUBBARD

An armful: Santa holds Michaela Keils of Farmington Hills, 6 weeks, and her sister Olivia, both dressed for the visit with the jolly fat man at Laurel Park Place recently.

North Pole to Livonia's Laurel Park Place for the first time this year. He's previously played Santa at schools, for corporate functions and private parties.

"Santa" Joe Homick and "Santa" Andy Barnaby share time playing the jolly guy at Westland Shopping Center. Plymouth resident Homick takes the morning shift and has a soft spot in his heart for certain children.

"We had a group of special education kids visiting," he said on a recent snowy, slushy day. He showed off some of the sign language expressions he has mastered to talk with hearing-impaired youngsters.

"I just can't describe it in words. I get goose bumps."

They are paid for their time and expertise. And most will acknowledge that their presence is meant to boost holiday sales. But Christmas tradition and a genuine love of children are strong motivating factors for their work, area Santas believe.

An American tradition

While Santa Claus may seem these days to be a figment of American commercialism - what with all his mall appearances and the endless stream of TV pitches - it wasn't always that way.

The American incarnation of St. Nicholas actually has Dutch roots. It was early Dutch settlers in New Amsterdam (New York) who began telling stories of Sinter Klaas, a merry old man carrying the spirit of Christmas around in a large sack, as he made his rounds in the 18th century.

Post Clement C. Moore and newspaper cartoonist Thomas Nast literally rounded out our holiday hero into the figure we greet each Dec. 25 with milk and cookies set near the fireplace.

Moore's 1823 poem, "A Visit from St. Nicholas," described the chimney entrance and cherry-red cheeks to a T. Moore was reportedly inspired by a Christmas Eve sleigh ride with his children.

The whimsical poem was a bit of a departure for an author whose most notable prior work was the

Please see SANTAS, A4

It's lonely at the top: It appears that everyone is ignoring Santa at last year's Canton Seniors party at the Summit on the Park, but in reality they were simply lining up for lunch after visiting with the jolly old elf.

STAFF PHOTO BY PAUL HUBBARD

Youth Summit

Students talk about tougher drunk driving penalties

BY TIM SMITH
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During last week's Youth Summit, teenage students in Farmington Public Schools learned that some pretty severe consequences confront those who choose to drink and drive.

They also found out that peer pressure can be a good thing, particularly if it helps steer classmates away from the potentially dangerous behavior.

"How many in this room have heard of the term peer pressure?" asked Duane Fox, police liaison officer at North Farmington High School during the summit held at the Farmington Training Center. "How many have heard about negative peer pressure? How about positive peer pressure?"

Approximately the same number of student leaders from various high



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL WAGNER

Q&A: Student Jessica Sapik asked a question about a teen's legal liability if the adult driver of the car they are riding in is under the influence of alcohol. The answer is that they are not legally in trouble, but they are in physical danger.

Please see SUMMIT, A7

Council won't 'duck' fowl issue

BY JONI HUBBARD
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Though they may ruffle a few feathers, Farmington Hills City Council members introduced an ordinance Monday designed to diminish a growing population of water fowl in some residential areas.

"We do have some significant cases in this city," said city attorney John Donohue. "We think this is going to be an effective tool."

Officials first considered an ordinance in September, based on con-

Please see COUNCIL, A3