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STAFF WRITER

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Keeping in touch

In an effort to keep in touch with the people we serve and our readers — the Farmington Observer staff is returning to a method we hope will help us do just that: citizen advisory panels.

The panel will consist of approximately eight to 12 members representing a cross-section of citizens from around the community. The panel would meet several times throughout the year, discussing with the editorial staff the content of the paper, what readers would like to see, what the paper is doing right and what it's doing wrong.

We already have several volunteers, but are still looking for a few more. We hope to have the first meeting by the end of February, beginning of March. Meetings would probably be scheduled quarterly, perhaps with more frequent meetings at the beginning of the process.

Anyone interested in serving on such a panel is invited to call the Farmington community editor, Joanne Maliszewski, (248) 477-5450, or e-mail her at jmaliszewski@homecomm.net.

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Richards in final field

BY TIM SMITH
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And then there were four.

From an original field of 27 candidates — 14 of whom were interviewed — Farmington Assistant City Manager Bill Richards is one of only four finalists for the job of Novi city manager.

Richards learned Monday night he is the lone Michigan finalist still in the running for the position soon to be vacated when Novi City Manager Ed Kriwall retires effective Feb. 11.

"I'm obviously very excited and very gratified, professionally and personally, to be selected," said Richards Tuesday. "I consider it to be a great victory to be the only finalist from Michigan."

Others still in the picture to succeed Kriwall are Richard Helwig from

Please see RICHARDS, A9



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Cell tower proposed for center



A proposed cell tower at the William Costick Activities Center has caused some concern and confusion. The city council in 1998 agreed to a lease with Nextel, but the Sisters of Mercy who are next door aren't happy.

By JONI HURRED
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A lease agreement that would put a 120-foot cellular phone tower at the William Costick Center in Farmington Hills has some city officials and residents scratching their heads.

The central issue has to do with the city's dual role as landlord and governing authority, and it's not easy to understand.

While the record shows a lease was approved in November 1998, not everyone who voted for it thought they were

giving final approval. Council member Vicki Barnett believed officials would get another shot at it.

"My impression at the time was that this was not a final deal," she said. "At no time did I assume that was the last pass I got at it."

In Barnett's mind, the proposed lease was something like the first draft of an ordinance. Council members approve a first reading, then move on to a second reading for discussion. Any concerns can be addressed and changes made with the second reading and final ordinance adoption at a later date.

Please see related story page A6

"There are some times we vote for things in the first stage, and when it's in the final stage, we may not vote for it," she explained.

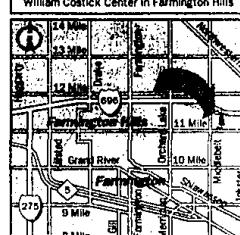
At the time, then-Mayor Aldo Vagozzi voted against it based on his concerns for the residents at Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, a residential facility for retired Sisters of Mercy. His concern persists today, as do the concerns of the home's residents.

In a statement issued Jan. 28, spokesperson Sharon Grangata said the community already has two leases, one with Ameritech and one with Cellular One, for towers on its campus at 11 Mile Road.

"In 1999, Ameritech twice requested

Please see TOWER, A6

Proposed site of 120-foot cellular phone tower
William Costick Center in Farmington Hills



Please see TOWER, A6

Board of Review scheduled

BY TIM SMITH
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The city of Farmington won't mail out 2000 assessment notices until Friday, Feb. 25 or Monday, Feb. 28, said

FARMINGTON

John Sailer, city assessor.

When owners of residential, commercial or industrial properties open up their envelopes, most should expect to see an increase of 1.9 percent, Sailer said.

That means that increases in the state equalized value of homes don't cause as much concern for homeowners because their taxes won't go up more than the rate of inflation. This year, that's 1.9 percent. Under Proposal A,

Please see BOARD, A6

Transition eased for freshmen

BY TIM SMITH
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Statistics show that American ninth graders struggle to become accustomed to high school, which is quite a different world than middle school. That problem occurs in the Farmington district, too.

But, as outlined during the Tuesday, Jan. 25, meeting of the Farmington Board of Education, high schools and middle schools here are coordinating many programs and activities — some of them including parents — to help ease the transition.

So far, those efforts seem to be improving academic performance and school spirit among freshmen.

Farmington High School Principal John Barrett cited the "Freshman Academy," now in its first year with 80 hand-picked ninth graders of all ability levels and interests. In a self-contained cluster apart from other students, academy members attend a handful of core curriculum courses, go on field trips and even have their own home-

Please see FRESH, A12



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREWER

On stage: In the Farmington High production of "Damn Yankees," the Devil, played by Matthew Gwynn, introduces Lola, played by Julia Macmillan, to Joe, portrayed by Gabe Holland.

Behind the scenes

With 'Damn Yankees'

BY TIM SMITH
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When stage lights shine 8 p.m. Thursday during the opening scene of "Damn Yankees" at Farmington High School, the audience will see disgruntled Washington Senator fan Joe Boyd and his wife, Meg, sitting at opposite ends of their living room. He's watching — of course — a baseball game. She's knitting and unsuccessfully trying to catch her husband's attention.

For cast members, please see A12



Artful: Pamela Ringstrom helps Devin Perdue with stage makeup. In the background, John Sloan III is powdered by Sarah Grossbart.

Blakeney's: Changing times close well-known Hills eatery

BY JONI HURRED
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Chuck up the loss of a Farmington area institution to changing times.

Customers of Blakeney's Ranch House on Grand River in Farmington were stunned to find the doors of the restaurant closed after the first of the year. Owners Robert and Diane Blakeney didn't give much of a hint that the landmark business, opened 31 years ago, would be no more.

"We'd been there a long time, and that was probably part of it," Robert Blakeney said. "It was time

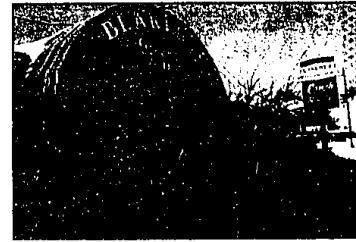
for maybe a life change."

Still, he said, it wasn't easy to let go. The place on Grand River had been part of Robert's life since it was built in April of 1968.

Blakeney's was founded in the 1930s by his parents, Bill and Kay, who have been active members of the community since moving here with their business.

"My husband and I opened the Ranch House on Davison. He built it the year before we were married," said Kay. "We built the one on Grand River

Please see BLAKENEY'S, A12



Closed: Blakeney's, an area institution for 31 years, closed after the first of the year.