

# Farmington Observer

## OPINION

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33411 GRAND RIVER, FARMINGTON, MICHIGAN 48335

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2000

## Computers

### Public access must be maintained

As the Farmington Hills City Council moves toward creating "paperless" packets of information for each of their meetings, caution must prevail.

There likely isn't a business or institution in the world that doesn't suffer a paper chase. It's cumbersome, sometimes overwhelming, and probably a waste of good paper.

But paper leaves a trail, and that is important in government and the public's easy access to information.

Technologically it makes sense to switch from mounds of paper in a notebook that council members receive the Friday before any Monday meeting to electronically delivered files of information on a laptop computer. It's the computer age, after all.

But city administrators and council members are cautioned to avoid getting so caught up in the use of computers to transmit information that they neglect to recognize the public's interest.

Perhaps it's just tradition, but paper has always been the public's way of keeping track of their government. Paper provides concrete evidence.

Certainly, the use of computers in city council meetings would streamline the information process and ease the paper chase for employees.

It's worth a try. But we are as concerned about this move as are some council members and administrators. In no way should the laptops the council receives be interactive, mean-

ing that all discussion and decision-making must remain in a public forum, not communicated between individual council members via computers.

As the computer age envelops government, we urge the city council and administrators to always keep in mind that the public's right to know and right to access to government remains as strong as ever.

While the city council may have laptop computers for employees and administrators to transmit information, not all members of the public have been as fortunate in tapping into the computer age.

City officials are urged to keep in mind that plenty of their constituents still like to stop by city hall and look things up - on paper, and that agendas, reports and the like must remain accessible to all members of the public, including those who are without computers or lack the desire to get involved in the computer age.

There is no suggestion here that the city council and administrators will be not be honest and open with residents. But information about government must always remain easily available to the public.

Caution must prevail as the city council changes its work habits from paper to computer. But always the public's interest must remain in the forefront. That's what the city council is there for - to serve the public, its needs and its interests.

## Make your kids wear helmets

It isn't possible to make sense out of tragic accidents, like the one that killed 7-year-old Joseph Michael Mouaikel of Livonia on Jan. 22.

Trying to make something good come from their son's death, the parents are trying to e-mail their message around the world. It's a simple message, marked with their tears of experience, and one that bears repeating: If you go sledding, put bicycle helmets on your children and yourself.

Back when many of us were kids, we didn't seem to worry as much about safety. For years, few Americans wore safety belts. Decades of death, injury and heartache taught people that they were safer with seatbelts on, and laws followed aiming to ensure safety and reduce the public health costs. Later, bicycle helmets moved into the forefront of the public, again through statistics and stories of injuries and deaths. Those are still optional, but strongly recommended for safe bicycling.

When it comes to bicycling or sledding, people will say, "We didn't wear helmets when we were kids and we survived." Others will say, "We cannot put our kids in a bubble and protect them from everything." Both points are true. But we can learn from experience and we can still enjoy the fun of something like sledding with a minor precaution that can, perhaps, save a life.

But don't take our word, listen to the words of Dianne and George Mouaikel:

"On January 25, 2000, we buried our 7-year-old son; our baby, our angel, our heart. He wasn't sick, he didn't have some horrible disease or tumor. He was, as most 7-year-olds are, a happy child full of life and love for everything and everyone.

"So how did he die? It was a horrible accident doing something that most kids love to

### ■ SLEDDING ACCIDENT

do. He was sledding down a snow-covered hill when the sled veered off course and went straight into a tree. He flew off the sled and his poor little head slammed into the tree. In a little over an hour our little boy lay lifeless on a table in a nearby emergency room.

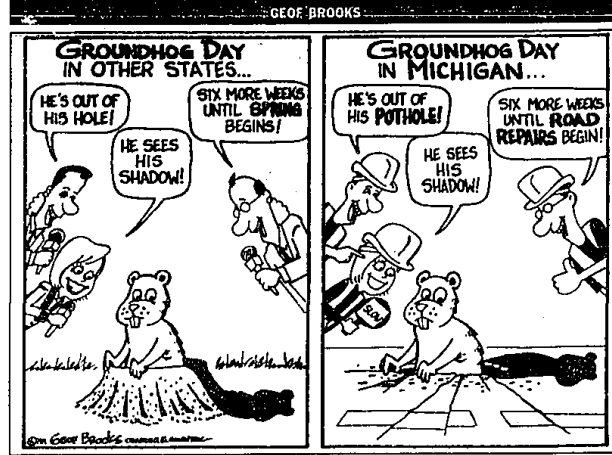
"Now then, why are we sending this e-mail?

"We're trying to spark a reaction, a reaction that will spread fast and wide so that no other family, for that matter no other community (his church, his school, the YMCA and the many fathers and sons at that camp that were there that day, his friends, our friends, etc. ... this tragedy has touched so many here) will never face and feel what we are feeling now. The feelings at the loss of a child cannot be described unless you have lost one yourself. We hope you never do. So here is the reaction we're looking for:

"Joseph's death could have been prevented if he had only been wearing a bicycle helmet or some kind of protective helmet on his head. We realize the news media has just started talking about accidents that happen while sledding and how many children and people are hurt every year, but unfortunately sometimes it takes a tragedy to get the point across.

"So we're asking everyone ... forward this e-mail to everyone you know, we want the message to spread across the world. Please make sure that your children are wearing their protective helmets when they're riding their bikes, rollerblading, skate boarding and please, please when they are sledding too! And parents, your children love you and they need you, wear your protective helmets too."

It's a message worth thinking about.



### 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 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.homecomm.net

### Crucial Issue

Mr. Power, we would like to thank you for your outstanding article in "Points of View" on urban sprawl in the Jan. 20 edition of the Observer. Also, the editorial on transportation shows vision and courage.

We are very pleased you will continue to cover these crucial issues. We moved from Novi to Farmington 22 years ago because we wanted to live in a community where we could walk or ride a bike to stores, parks, etc., and not be dependent on a car. Places like downtown Farmington, Northville and Plymouth are rare jewels that sprawl should not be allowed to destroy.

We agree that poor public policy is part of the problem, along with such factors as cheap gas (despite what people think), home mortgage deductions and new road construction versus repair of what we already have. We also lack real regional planning and not enough media awareness of what the problems are and what can be done.

We see the issue of sprawl as a moral issue because it is causing degradation of the environment, loss of good farmland and animal habitat, wasteful use of energy and perhaps even contributing to strain in family and friend relationships because of time wasted and tempers raised just trying to commute.

You and the Observer staff are to be highly commended for addressing this issue to raise people's awareness and help put forth some suggestions. If other journalists in the Detroit area would follow suit, we could make some progress. Thank you for taking a leadership role on what will undoubtedly be one of the most crucial issues of this new century.

Pam & George Wright  
Farmington

### Acts of kindness

Thank you to the community for the numerous expressions of sympathy and heartwarming acts of kindness. My 24-year-old son, Wally, died recently. He attended Farmington High School special education and Visions Unlimited for the developmentally disabled. We have received an outpouring of support from Visions, Highmeadow Common Campus (our daughter's school), and the community.

The special programs provided through the Farmington Public Schools are invaluable to the students and family of special adults. The

teachers, administrators and staff have devoted their lives to teaching, consoling, and loving others whose abilities are different from the general population.

The residents of Farmington/Farmington Hills should be proud to support the outstanding programs at Farmington High School, Visions and Cloverdale. We moved to Farmington Hills because of the house and location. We stay because of the people.

Linda, Wally, Molly Tyza  
Amy (sister) and David Anselm  
Farmington Hills

### Impossible to enforce

Attached is my letter to the Farmington Hills City Council regarding the recent bird feeding ordinance:

To put it simply: the council has been, possibly inadvertently, acting dumb or dumber. In my judgment, it should truly be embarrassed by the wording in the ordinance it passed. But, unfortunately, to its shame, it probably remains impervious to it all.

Moreover, also to our shame, the council seems to remain pleased about the ordinance. It passed 5 to 1.

The city council should look carefully at the wording in its ordinance and then assure the citizens of this continually evolving city that they don't border on the ridiculous, if not the bizarre.

This ordinance, at the minimum, is impossible to enforce.

E. McGinn  
Farmington Hills

### Over-staying welcome

Wild geese forage for food, fly south in the winter, or die. It is nature's way of controlling their population. By giving them food and shelter, some residents of Farmington Hills created a dependent mob of protesting honkers. These are not the beautiful animals pausing in their travel to distant lands; these remain behind to become filthy intruders over-staying their welcome.

Nature lovers can enjoy wild things without feeding them. Handouts corrupt animals as well as people.

Hank Borgman  
Farmington

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

Wednesday was Groundhog Day. Did you expect Punxsutawney Phil to see his shadow?

We asked this question of staff members at Eagle Elementary in Farmington Hills.



"He's going to see his shadow because winter came so late this year."

Pat Garszynski



"No, I don't think he's going to see it."

Diane Catlin



"I don't think he'll see it. I used to take kids outside and do shadows. I think spring will come earlier."

Carol Lawrence



"I think he definitely will see his shadow. We haven't had a long enough winter."

Adriana Genfob

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— Philip Power