

## POINTS OF VIEW

# Dog park is best solution for community

**F**olks, it has come to this: There is an underground dog movement in Farmington Hills.

Let me put that another way. On Monday night, several dog owners admitted — in a public forum — they've taken their pets out to run unleashed in this community, in "undisclosed" places. Why?

It's illegal to let your dog run free or to walk your dog on a leash in any public park. This knowledge came as a shock to a number of dog owners who moved to this community expecting they could take their pets along on a family outing. It seems like a natural assumption.

I've never lived anywhere that didn't allow dogs in parks, and I've stepped in my share of doggie-doo. More than my share, I think. I once tossed out a pair of tennis shoes rather than try to clean the brown gunk that had squished in between the grooves on the soles.

What's more, I'm a dog-bite survivor. When I was just a tiny reporter, an ornery, stray mutt sank his teeth in just under my eye. I underwent a series of painful rabies shots and struggled with a near phobic fear of dogs for most of my life.

Still, I can't understand why any community would simply ban all pets from all of its parks. Certainly, it makes sense to restrict them, but no dogs at all?

At Monday night's city council meeting, Mayor Nancy Bates quoted from a raft of letters sent by Hills residents who support that position. One woman, a responsible pet owner, doesn't mind cleaning up after her own dog. She's tired of picking up poop from other people's pets and doesn't want those irresponsible folks free to roam city parks.

A member of the Audubon Society worried about the danger to fledgling birds and other wildlife. A mother had concerns about her children, who are afraid of dogs.

With their winding trails, athletic fields, emphasis on nature and secluded locations, Hills parks don't lend themselves to dog walking. Certainly, many owners are responsible, but one only has to walk down the street or near any public area to see many are not.

An ill-fated attempt to let dogs roam free at North Farmington High School ended after a few, irresponsible owners spoiled the experience by failing to clean up dog droppings and allowing their

unleashed dogs to charge and frighten others. If it happened there, it'll happen in our city parks. And nobody wants to see those community jewels sullied.

That's why the idea of a "dog park" makes perfect sense. Fencing in an area where dogs can roam free will contain the nuisance factor and the doggie-doo.

It won't keep irresponsible owners from leaving messes elsewhere. No amount of fencing will eliminate stupidity, and no city ordinance will keep people from behaving thoughtlessly.

This will, however, allow responsible owners to come out from the shadowy underbelly of this community's open spaces. It

will free them from the surly bonds of civil disobedience and allow them to walk proudly with their dogs, instead of having to look over their shoulders for fear of being caught in the act.

Discussions about costs and liability should certainly play a part, but the fact of the matter is, for 25 years, dog owners have been denied a level of service

open to everyone else.

Parents bring babies to city parks and leave behind disposable diapers filled with human waste. Kids visit city parks and toss pop bottles, candy wrappers and other trash on the playground. Walkers and joggers and rollerbladers traffic the trails wearing headphones and sometimes not paying much attention

to what's going on around them.

We don't punish any of those people by banning them from public property.

No, dogs aren't people. But a quote read at Monday night's meeting provides an important perspective: "A community is judged by how well they treat all the members of that community."

Please see PETs, A14



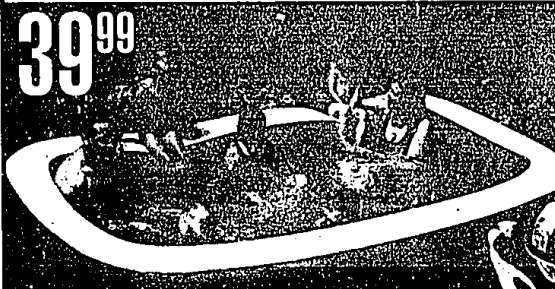
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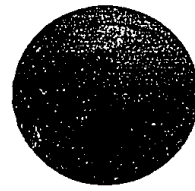
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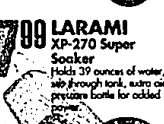
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