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contemporary and appealing," said Watts, of Watta-Up! Inc.

For example, gone from the Downtown Farmington Center parking lot will be the trademark yellow circus tent. In its place, vendors will display and sell their wares from underneath small, white pop-up tents.

"It will be more of a street art fair set-up," Watts said. "We felt that the (yellow) tent created a barrier and made it real obtrusive to the rest of the festival."

"Time will tell," said Farmington Assistant Manager Bill Richards, about whether the changes will have a positive impact on the future economic viability of the festival. "The festival board believes they have done due diligence and have considered all the alternatives and options."

Richards said changes are plentiful, such as being held in June, focusing more on fine arts crafters and incorporating Kids Day as part of official proceedings.

About the event being held in June instead of July, Richards added that festival officials will quickly try to "see how well we have communicated that change to people who are used to coming to the festival in July. That is the big question mark."

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According to Watts, 75 crafters will work from the downtown center, with 46 of them being newcomers to the Farmington event.

Now showing ...

Fine arts displays also will be featured at Memorial Park. Watts estimated that 10-15 fine arts crafters will be stationed there, as will a children's crafts area.

One of the biggest changes is the month in which it is being held. In previous years, through 1999, the then-Farmington Area Founders Festival took place in July. But it suffered in the attendance category because it often was scheduled at the same time as similar festivals in other communities.

Simultaneous festivals also meant some crafters had to

decide which one to work at. This year's Farmington event kicks off earlier than ever (on Thursday, June 22) and only faces competition that weekend from the Livonia Spree.

"Everything's fine," said Watts, hired in early 1999 along with his wife Sandra to take over management of the re-organized festival, which had been struggling financially and in need of new direction. "Everything's up from last year and the move to this time frame (June) will benefit us in the long run."

Before Watta-Up! took over, festival costs were underwritten by the Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce.

Indications are that some earlier problems are being smoothed over. In February, the Downtown Farmington Merchants Association was restructured after a four-year hiatus. The merchants did so in protest of a \$50 fee to display goods on sidewalks in front of their businesses, implemented by the festival board.

Also a source of friction were \$50 fees for crafters to set up their booths either at the privately owned Masonic Temple or First United Methodist Church, with that money to be used for festival insurance and media promotions.

First United, meanwhile, is charging their crafters \$100, with none of that money headed for the festival's coffers, said Richards, an interim member of the Farmington Area Founders Festival Inc. while City Manager Frank Lauhoff recuperates from back surgery.

Watts said feedback has so far been positive about many of the new features, such as a free shuttle service from Farmington High School to the downtown area; the Kids Day at Shiawassee Park (noon to 5 p.m. Thursday, June 22); and the Community Music Night.

For the latter, also Thursday, from the Downtown Farmington Center, the Farmington Community Jazz Band and Farmington Community Chorus will perform, at 7:30 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., respectively.

Enough volunteers have also signed up to help distribute information at the festival's booth, to be located near Starbucks Coffee. "We're hoping a lot of new people will come to town," Watts said.

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with a device that will allow them to be read from a distance. Officials say "drive-by" readings will reduce labor costs and the possibility of injuries for meter readers.

Those costs, along with a 64-cent increase to account for higher-than-normal amounts of water loss, will be reduced by interest earnings of \$333,708. (Water loss is the difference between the amount of water pumped by the county, based on master meter readings, and the amounts billed to customers, based on individual readings.)

Although overall sewer rates are going down, the Drain Commission has asked for an

increase in the projected amount of lawn sprinkler use by residents, based on the results of a dual metering system installed last year. The system more accurately accounts for the affect sprinkling has on sewer revenues.

According to Hills Public Services Director Tom Bissell, water and sewer rates both increased last year, by 29 cents and 69 cents, respectively.

If approved, the changes would show up on August billings, for water and sewer use on and after July 1. The June 19 meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. at city hall, corner of Orchard Lake and 11 Mile roads.

Swing to 'The Sounds'

"The Sounds," an evening concert series, will take place at 7:30 p.m. Fridays, now through Aug. 4 in the gazebo in downtown Farmington's Village Commons on Grand River.

The concert series will feature:

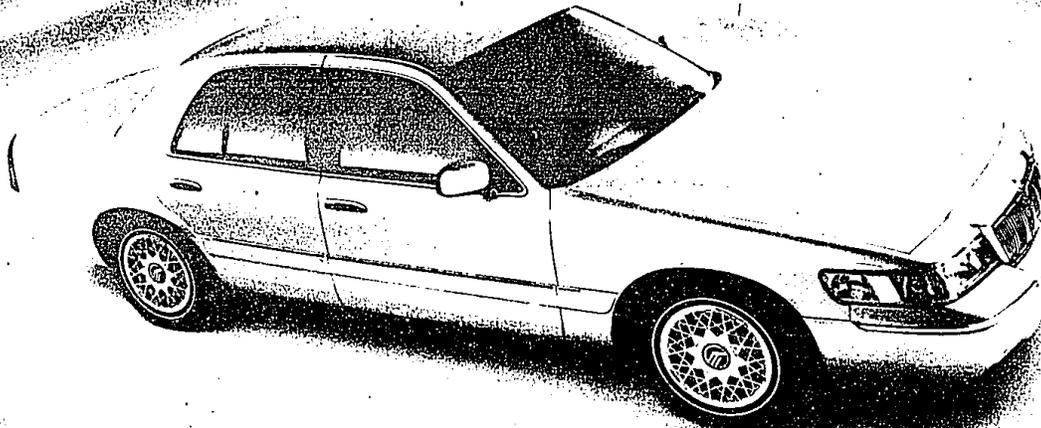
- June 9, The Red Garter Band, playing 1920s, 1930s, 1940s music and Dixieland tunes
- June 16, Horizon, performing Motown hits
- June 23, no concert

- June 30, Willy George Band, performing big-band 1940s tunes
- July 7, The Hits, a tribute to Jimmy Buffet

- July 14, Bob & Carl, country oldies and Top 40
- July 21, Motor City Brass Band, 27-member traditional brass band

- July 28, Triphonics, nostalgic music of the 1950s and 1960s
- Aug. 4, Baldus Mountain Ramblers, bluegrass.

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