

Residents find answers, information at open house

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
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The first ever Farmington Hills municipal open house drew a fair crowd Wednesday as residents came to ask questions about city services or just meet the people who run the city government.

All city departments were represented, and most of them were giving something away. The clerk's office handed out maps of Farmington Hills.

The cops handed out erasers and rulers. The planning department had triangular, three-color highlighters. Almost all had brochures explaining their services.

Cookies, donuts and punch were laid out for the folks. Police Chief William Dwyer joked that his officers outside in the mobile command post were serving hot drinks but weren't.

Hills resident Leonard Zak was pleased to have met "all the celebrities" (city officials) and was surprised when City Manager Steve Brock remembered him from some trouble he had with Bofarford Hospital last year.

Jean Short said the open house was "very nice." She and her husband came to gather information on senior services, and she had the bag of literature to prove it.

Short also talked to city naturalist Joe Dorak and learned that at Heritage Park they have a number of bluebirds at the nesting boxes.

Gary Vessell came to remind Brock and Mayor Nancy Bates that he still wants the city and the county to do something to make left turns off 12 Mile Road into Harrison High School safer. Vessell found the open house to be "worthwhile and very informative."

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Prize winner: Max Madigan takes a spin around Costick Center on the new bike he won in a drawing at the city's open house, held Wednesday.

Costick Center project moves into high gear

BY RALPH ECHTINAW
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The \$300,000 renovation of the William B. Costick Center in Farmington Hills hit high gear last week when demolition of interior walls began, and the city's Special Services offices are expected to move there in 60-90 days.

The two houses behind the Hills police department (one of which contains the Special Services offices) must be razed to make way for construction of an \$11 million courthouse.

City Manager Steve Brock said the houses will be used by the fire department for training, then be cleared out by the end of spring as courthouse construction begins.

The planning commission approved the courthouse site plan last week with one significant change. The edifice and its parking lot have switched places, with the edifice now at the edge of the property line and the parking lot adjacent to the lot in front of the fire station.

Brock said it makes more sense to keep the parking lots close together.

The courthouse will be designed by French Associates of Rochester and Spillie Candelin of Washington, D.C.

Bids for construction work will likely go out in 30-45 days, Brock said.

The Costick Center work is being paid for by the parks and recreation millage. The courthouse will be paid for by a fee tacked onto traffic tickets, along with a 20-year bond.

Morawski added.

Hillsdale Elementary School kindergarten teacher Denise Rau, as a project for the Galileo Leadership Academy, proposed two years ago that Farmington schools pilot all-day kindergarten, which is an option in private schools and other public districts.

Rau's proposal ultimately was taken to the District Support Council and favorably received. It also became one of the recommendations of the Early Childhood Study.

Morawski also said "average" learners and even those at the top end also stand to gain from additional time in kindergarten.

For comparison purposes, data on this year's half-day kindergartners also is being collected, he said.

No matter how the pilot fares at William Grace, White said it is unlikely all-day kindergarten would "ever be district-wide."

White stressed the need for the pilot program to have a chance to take root, so that meaningful data can be generated.

"If the parents are interested in this," White emphasized, "we need to see it (in place) for three years to follow it up and look at overall achievement at the school."

But it could later be implemented at a few other elementary schools, depending on whether it would be considered a good fit at those other buildings.

"Look at private schools, look at other districts," Morawski said. "All-day kindergarten is there. We're not the first ones to do this. I think there's a place for it in the district. But whether there's a place for it in every school I don't know."

Round-up continues

Meanwhile, kindergarten registration at William Grace and throughout the school district begins Monday, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The sign-ups continue all week, after which Morawski will have a better idea about whether there will be one or two sections of all-day kindergarten next year.

Look for Tim Smith's schools coverage in the Observer. Call with story ideas, 248-477-5450.

Meeting at William Grace targets all-day kindergarten questions

BY TIM SMITH
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National research and support from the William Grace Elementary School community about all-day kindergarten contributed to the decision to pilot the program there in 2001-02.

But, if parents of incoming kindergartners still want or need more information about the concept, they are invited to attend a meeting 6:30-7:30 p.m. Wednesday. The session is slated for the William Grace media center.

William Grace will pilot the program in order to study whether increasing the level of educational services is beneficial in the long run for the youngsters. The district will monitor how well students do in the expanded setting and look at "the number of kids experiencing the need for extra support" no matter where they fall on the achievement scale, said Judith

White, assistant superintendent for instruction for Farmington Public Schools and a proponent of the pilot program.

Parents not comfortable with sending their kindergartners all day still will be able to enroll them in a traditional half-day program at Alameda Early Childhood Center.

There are about 40 kindergartners enrolled at William Grace this year. Many already stay at the school for the entire day, because of their participation in the half-day tuition-based enrichment program, known as Educare.

"We're so excited," said William Grace Principal Mark Morawski about the pilot program. "It's going to be a wonderful, wonderful tool for the kids here."

When school parents were surveyed last year about the concept, approximately 75 to 80 percent responded that they would welcome it into their school,

Morawski added.

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C'ville students face college hurdles

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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Clarenceville graduates perform well in the college classroom, but they have a few hurdles to overcome, according to a Schoolcraft College profile.

Under state law, community colleges are required to furnish districts with the academic status of their graduates. Of Clarenceville High's 2000 graduating class, 26 students - or about 25 percent - attended the Livonia community college during the fall semester.

More than half posted grade-point averages of 2.0 or above. Ten freshmen - or 38 percent - earned a GPA of 3.0 or higher.

That compares favorably with other incoming students, 35 percent of which had 3.0 GPAs or above.

A troubling statistic, though, shows 69 percent of Clarenceville grads scoring

below college level in English and math based on entrance exams. At least 12 - or 46 percent - also performed below college level in reading.

District officials are not certain to the cause.

"The general assumption would be those who tend to do really well in high school usually go onto four year universities," said Barb Church, Curriculum and Instruction. "Whereas students who may be weren't as strong in certain areas may go onto community college. That may be a generalization ..."

Aside from GPA and academic levels, the profiles include attendance patterns, course enrollment and programs students enrolled in.

More than half of Clarenceville's Schoolcraft students - 65 percent - attended the college full time, while 23 percent went there part time. Three Clarenceville grads

dropped out.

At least 15 students - 58 percent - are working towards transferring to a four-year university while nine are pursuing career-related courses.

Clarenceville does its own graduate surveys. Last year, 76 percent said they planned to attend college while 16 indicated they would be getting a job.

Of college-bound grads, 12 planned to attend Michigan State while another 11 wanted to go to Madonna. Other choices included Central Michigan (8), University of Michigan (6), and Western Michigan (6).

Schoolcraft was the most popular two-year college choice, with 29 saying they planned to attend. Oakland Community College was No. 2 on the list with 12 students.

The district includes portions of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford.

Residency inspires doc's thriller

BY HUGH GALLAGHER
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When Gene Rontal was a young resident doctor, he performed surgery at a state prison in Minnesota. It was there that a frightening discovery became the inspiration for Rontal's medical thriller, "Sterile Justice."

The infirmary at the prison was operated by inmates, working with a couple nurses and the visiting doctors.

"I noted the high number of infections with patients," Rontal said. "It turned out that if the inmates didn't like the guy on the table, they didn't sterilize the instruments."

The original paperback thriller is a swift moving, intriguing cross-country chase involving a doctor trying to keep one step ahead of the law to save his already damaged reputation and find out who has been spreading a deadly bacteria.

Through the first published, "Sterile Justice" is actually Rontal's second book featuring Dr. Ben Dailey, with a third already finished. Dailey shares a

specialty in otolaryngology (head and neck surgery) with Rontal and is Rontal's age. But Dailey leads a more troubled life than Rontal, who has operated a clinic with his brother, Dr. Michael Rontal, in Farmington Hills for the past 28 years.

"I wrote another book, 'Death Wish' in the first book Ben Dailey is accused of killing a patient and there's a malpractice suit," Rontal said. "His practice went to nothing, his marriage failed. He was reduced to giving physicals for an insurance company and living in a sailboat in St. Clair Shores."

In the new book, Dailey is still living in his sailboat, even as winter weather is coming. He's doing malpractice investigations for an insurance company. An old nemesis is accused of killing a young boy by not properly keeping the operating environment sterile. But soon the suspicion shifts to Dailey and someone ends up dead, setting the doctor on a search for the murderer.

Dailey is different than your standard thriller hero, who is

usually a lawyer in his early to mid-30s. Dailey is a doctor in his early 50s, who shares some qualities with his creator.

"It is written in the first person, the points of view are ideas of mine," Rontal said. "But I don't have the strength or energy to do that kind of thing. I wanted a guy who had fallen from grace. I wanted a guy with foibles, flaws. A guy gets flaws by living, 45, 50, 55, you realize some things about life."

Other characters are not biographical, though the characters are based on those Rontal knew. Dailey's girlfriend and his pursuer Lt. Sennett are fictional. The city of Detroit is real, but some of the suburbs are given aliases as well.

Doctors aren't usually involved in the kind of adventure that Dailey encounters. "The difficult part was putting a doctor in a mystery situation," Rontal said. "Doctors aren't usually in a mystery situation. Doctors aren't usually detectives."

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