



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRIDGES

Assembly line: Eric Schmidke works with robotic help in the Visions program



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRIDGES

Putting it together: Left, teacher Karen Wichert oversees the work of students like Kurt Hillstrom (above) who works packaging plastic bottles.

## Visions focuses on special needs kids

This story marks the final installment of *Today's Lesson*, a series chronicling classroom activities in Farmington Public Schools.

BY TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
tsmith@oohomecomm.net

With a buzz in the air and 20 things going on at once, Visions Unlimited teacher Karen Wichert bounced from work station to work station to make sure the clusters of students at a table focused on their particular tasks.

There really wasn't much more for her to do, except to watch the special needs students in her product production class follow through on job instructions previously delivered by Wichert or classroom paraprofessionals such as Judy Chin.

Jessie, Nikaiya, Shantrice and Tanisha funneled no-longer-important pieces of paper (old letters, telephone messages, for example) into the shredder for Farmington Public Schools. Before they got their hands on the discards, classmate Jay readied them for shredding by extracting staples and rubber bands.

Aaron and Leon teamed up, using a paper template, to assemble round plastic forks, for Cookies Catering's carry-out business. Aaron tightly rolled up each fork and napkin combo, with Leon slipping on pastel rib-

bons for decoration.

At another table, Tom cut ribbon for candy wreaths while Angela used an embroidery hoop to create them.

Chin worked with Paulo, Ajay, Jason, Jon and Justin, what Wichert described as simulated task assembly. Each person in the group had a specific job to do to contribute to the finished product. Their goal was to work as a team, not produce something for the marketplace. Some of the other student stations were actually working on contracted tasks, for businesses.

"We set them up," Wichert said. "They come in and wait until they're given directions. Some (students) just came in from their work sites."

Angela, for example, is an employee at the Eight Mile-Hagerty McDonald's restaurant.

And what do they work on?

"What they do depends on what the need is. We make buttons and T-shirts and other different jobs. We get an order and that's what they do," Wichert said.

On the wall was evidence of other ongoing projects, such as new T-shirts emblazoned for SCAMP, a special education summer camp located in Bloomfield Hills.

### Training ground

"It's kind of like a sheltered workshop," Wichert said. "But we're preparing them for the world of work, staying on task, following directions, speed and accuracy."

Wichert said Visions Unlimited, tucked away in a Farmington

Hills industrial park near 10 Mile-Halsted roads, labeled the facility as a "well-kept secret." But the experience being gained by the students, who have a variety of mental and physical disabilities, is something worth shouting about.

"I think it's great," said Wichert, adding that students don't just toil away in a large assembly area.

They also attend enrichment classes (such as fitness and personal growth) and take Farmington district buses to actual jobs. "They have a great attitude, and this is just part of their day."

### Visions seeks business partnerships

BY TIM SMITH  
STAFF WRITER  
tsmith@oohomecomm.net

A Farmington district vocational school hopes to join ranks with area businesses who might have something useful and productive for students to do. Visions Unlimited vocational coordinator Ed Wolf said letters have been sent out by the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce to more

Please see VISIONS, A4

## S&P from page A1

knee-jerk reaction," he said. "Their heart's in the right place." Along with straight results, the Web site will include space for local comments, where school officials can offer additional

information — like the reasons behind low participation in MEAP testing. However, Maxfield stressed the district isn't taking a "defensive" stance. "Data is data," he said.

## S&P urges caution in accessing results

BY DEBRA PASCOE  
STAFF WRITER  
dpascoe@oohomecomm.net

May 25 marks the start of the Memorial Day holiday weekend — and a new access point for parents and administrators to view their schools.

The much publicized Standard & Poor's School Evaluation Services, which analyzes school districts on a specific set of criteria, will be available on the World Wide Web May 25 at [www.es.standardandpoors.com](http://www.es.standardandpoors.com)

The analysis looks at six core categories related to student successes and is based on data collected from S&P's own data bases and those of the state, municipalities and colleges, according to William Cox, managing director of S&P's School Evaluation Services.

### Management tool

"This is a management tool, not a media splash," Cox said, reiterating the company's claim that the purpose of the report is to help districts take a closer look at themselves and target areas of concern and improvement.

Cox admits that some information could be missing from the report, but he quickly pointed out that the problem lies with the state, not S&P. Those areas of concern, he said, are clearly indicated within the report.

The figures released in this report are for the 1998-99 school year, the most recent numbers available. This is the first of a three-year commitment by the state for S&P to perform this service. The next report, due out in December, will include figures for the 1999-2000 school year.

While not intended to "rate or rank school districts," as Cox has emphasized during the plan-

ning process, the Web site includes averages of the target school compared to statewide averages, county averages and peer groups selected by the program that possess the same basic characteristics of the school being studied.

Cox said the report was purposely written in laymen's terms for parents and taxpayers. For those seeking a summary, a printout of the charts, supporting information and S&P's analysis that highlights the district's strengths, challenges and risks in an impartial manner is available. The data is the same as the main search; however, it is not as detailed.

### First-time users

Cox strongly suggested first-time users take advantage of the User's Guide link, which explains how to use the site and where general or more specific information can be garnered. He also suggested spending a bit of time browsing the FAQ link, which provides answers to questions the company has been asked about the site and the information contained within.

That first page also includes a link to the district's perspectives written by each local school district superintendent. Cox said the information received from the districts are not edited, unless they contain data that questions the integrity of the report information.

With another click of the mouse, users can find the school district they are interested in viewing and see in chart form data on a series of categories, including student results, spending, learning environment and demographic information.

Users can also customize a search by selecting a group of

Local school officials will have additional insights after they've had a chance to study results and determine whether any data corrections need to be made, Maxfield added.

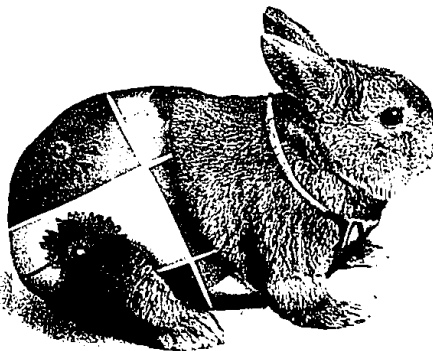
Each line of data can be clicked on and an explanation of terms, additional information as to where that information was derived, term definitions and disclaimers (if necessary) will pop up in a separate window.

Cox said he's heard grumblings from superintendents who have questioned how graduation and dropout rate information was compiled. The window related to that entry point will explain it came from the state's data bank and how the state records that information.

Users can also click on finances and get a layout of where the district spends its money; on test scores to see MEAP, ACT and SAT results; and other information. Superintendents from across the state were expected to receive a copy of the summary "as a courtesy" this Friday, giving them a week to review it before the public and the media can access the information.

"We didn't want them to be the last to get it," Cox said, adding S&P was advised not to release it early by its National Board of Advisors. Once up and running, Cox said he doesn't predict users will have a tough time accessing the site. It is built to accept 3 million hits at once, with the potential for an increase if necessary.

(Calling all beach bunnies!)



## Swimwear

30% off\*

- La Blanca
- Gottex
- Tommy Bahama
- Adrienne Vittadini
- Anne Klein
- XOXO
- Esprit
- Slimsuit® by Carol Wior
- and more!

Save on a sunny selection from Women's, Clairewood and Ms. J!

\*Savings off original prices of selected styles. No adjustments made on prior purchases.

# Jacobson's

MON-SAT 10-9 • OPEN SUN AT NOON | Farmington • (734) 844-8000 | Livonia • (734) 891-7996  
Rochester • (248) 631-8000  
[jacobsons.com](http://jacobsons.com)

## Oliverio from page A1

my motivations for running." Oliverio also wants to maintain a culture and atmosphere that makes Farmington Hills a great place to raise kids. The city, he said, is close to being completely developed.

"The name of the game now is redevelopment. Do we want a city that's concrete buildings?"

Based on a study done by The Detroit News, Oliverio also believes Farmington Hills residents are not getting the best value for their tax dollars and has criticized this year's budget, which he said has increased spending at twice the rate of inflation. He said city residents pay about 50 percent more for

water than other Oakland County users.

"Why are we paying a surcharge for our water? It's a concern."

Oliverio has admired the work of former Hills Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi in a battle waged with Detroit Edison over improving service, the integrity and honesty of former mayor and county commissioner Don Wolf and the responsiveness of state Rep. Andrew Raczowski.

"That's something I believe should be a pre-requisite for public service, the ability to get results and solve problems."

A 14-year resident of the community and Vietnam-era veter-

an, he holds a bachelor's degree in management from Detroit College of Business. He is director of Bonal Technologies, based in Southfield, and has published a book about three Revolutionary War ancestors. His volunteer contributions have included the now-defunct Hills Ethics Committee, Detroit Edison Oversight Committee, the board of Longene House, tutoring at Boys and Girls Republic, being a Scout, baseball and soccer dad, as well as a Farmington High football booster.

Oliverio has a campaign website: [www.members.aol.com/oliverioformayor](http://www.members.aol.com/oliverioformayor)