

Farmington Observer

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Keep Warner Mansion as open as possible

"We would like to live as we once lived, but history will not permit it."
—John Fitzgerald Kennedy

It's sad to see Café on the Porch at the Governor Warner Mansion come to an end.

Founded by an inner circle of Mansion friends, the Café became a regular Tuesday night stop for dozens of folks who enjoyed sitting with the ghosts of Farmington's past. It ended last week, as city officials have begun to re-examine how to manage the home.

The porch became a portal to a more peaceful, simpler time, when families shared conversations and laughter instead of sitcoms and videos, when an hour could last just as long as you wanted and a cool glass of lemonade was all you needed to beat the heat.

We hope the Blue Circle members who gave the community this gift will find a way to keep the spirit of the Café going, even if the location changes.

That may have to happen, in order to preserve this most precious community resource.

The Farmington City Council has been exploring a shift of philosophy in the way the Mansion has been operated. While these changes may be necessary to preserve this historic treasure for future generations, we urge city officials to use as light a hand as possible in making them.

Built in 1867, the Warner mansion was once occupied by Fred Warner, the first man to serve three consecutive terms as Michigan's governor (1905-1911). Warner's heirs donated the home to the City of Farmington, and for more than 20 years, volunteers have made it not only a showplace but a real learning center, with docent-guided tours and a greater access to many of the exhibits.

The city has long been in the market for a director, someone trained in preservation. While the central focus in the past has been to keep the Mansion as

open as possible to the community, a greater emphasis on preservation will likely mean a more "hands off" approach. Volunteers are concerned the Mansion will become a cold and distant monument, not the warm and inviting home visitors have come to appreciate and value. The Café brought a new awareness of this treasure; this should be an ideal time to encourage people who have a new love and enthusiasm for its preservation.

However, the weekly influx brought about by the Café's success inevitably leads to an increased level of wear on the facilities. Maybe it doesn't seem like much now, but in years to come, keeping the mansion as open as it is now could

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result in serious, long-term damage.

And we all know accidents happen. An accident that destroyed a piece of Farmington's history would be a tragic loss.

It would be equally tragic for the heart of this community's history to stop beating from lack of use. Folks who have invested their hearts and souls in the Warner Mansion — as well as those new to its circle of friends — have understandable concerns. Like them, we hope any new policies and procedures will allow the greatest possible access to the facilities and exhibits.

We also understand that a failure to treat the Mansion and its contents properly will one day leave us with no access at all.

zone where closed exit ramps, overpasses and turnarounds over the freeway are changing every day — why can't these signs tell us more useful information than travel times? And put up some more of those portable signs, not just on I-275, but also on I-96, to give drivers even more advance notice of what's ahead. And, while we're asking: Is there any reason the road crews couldn't have made these merge lanes and yield signs a bit more uniform along I-96? Some entrance ramps gave drivers plenty of space to pick up speed and get into traffic, others were shorter. Of course, it would help if all drivers were courteous in letting fellow drivers join the flow.)

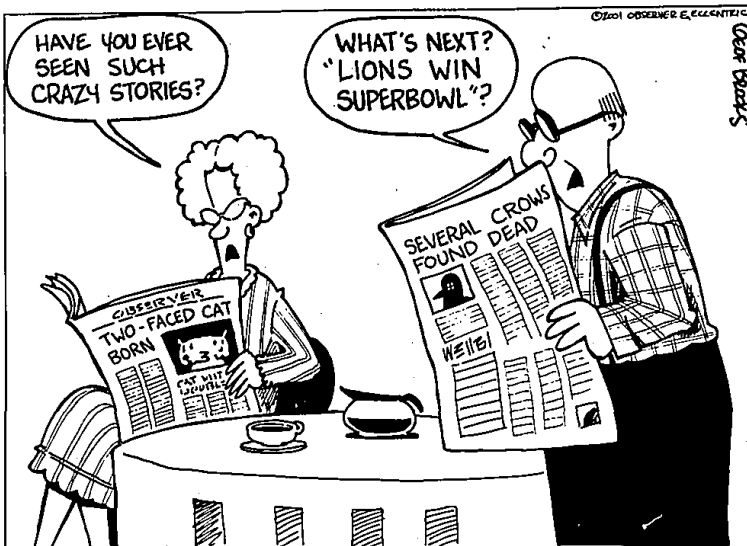
Those 60 mph speed limit signs seem to be a misnomer. Most people aren't driving 60 there, unless there's a police

There's a lot of work — In all, it's costing around \$51 million — and being tough and adaptive, like we are, we're figuring out ways around this mess to get ourselves to our jobs, schools, recreation and homes.

officer within sight or the roadway is backed up with traffic. Otherwise, drivers are pushing 65 and more, which is sort of understandable since the work areas are pretty few and far between along that roadway right now.

State officials say this is one of the most complicated freeway projects, especially since the roadway remained open during it all. And yes, we can thank Gov. John Engler for his Build Michigan II program has finally tended to our former decrepit freeways.

The project, which is supposed to be complete next month, could have been improved with better placement of signs and other changes. But that's all right, we're tough. We can take it.



LETTERS

■ To the Mayor

An open letter to Mayor Nancy Bates:

I was disappointed by your inference that I was a "bomb thrower" in the Observer Article on mayoral candidates dated August 30, 2001. Bomb is not a proper metaphor for truth.

May I suggest we keep this campaign on the high road and stay out of the political gutter? Negative campaigning is no substitute for good honest debate, and it is not respectful to our fellow residents to campaign like contestants for the Jerry Springer Show.

Hopefully, this is a one-time occurrence and you will stop any further name calling, directly or inferred. I look forward to debating you on the issues in the proper forum.

Ron Oliverio
Candidate for Mayor of Farmington Hills

■ No right

On Sunday, Sept. 2, the Farmington Observer printed a report on the fact that school superintendent Robert Maxfield had informed a group of dog owners that the soccer field at North Farmington High School was no longer to be used as a dog park.

Yet as I drove by North that morning, the soccer field was filled with 40 to 50 dogs, the owners' cars parked illegally along the access road to the field. As a longtime dog owner, parent of former soccer players, North parent, taxpayer and voter, I am appalled by the attitude of those who feel they "deserve" the right to establish a dog park on a school district athletic field.

There are several issues that have become confused here. First is the idea that since they pay taxes, they have a right to use the property as they wish. Such logic could reasonably be applied to a number of ludicrous scenarios: since I pay taxes for main roads, shouldn't I be able to block them off for neighborhood get-togethers? Or the library's meeting room for Tupperware parties?

Also at issue is the assumption that since we pay to fund services for children (other people's children at that), we should fund services for pets. The flaw in this logic is that as we provide for children, we wish for school, athletic facilities, or after-school programs, we are investing in our future, whereas when we provide for someone else's pet, we provide for...well, someone else's pet.

The final contention is that dog parks are a necessity, as these dogs have nowhere else to go. "What about backyards? I can't help but think that it is not the dogs' need for a place to exercise so much as it is the desire for a place for the owners to congregate that is the issue here.

Perhaps the solution should be the use of that used to create the many swim clubs in this area. Dog owners could purchase an interest in the dog park association, buy the land, and pay yearly dues to provide for the upkeep. Memberships could be bought and sold as necessary.

If there is such a demand for this type of facility, there should be no problem keeping it viable. When one chooses to include a dog in one's household, one takes on the responsibility of providing for that dog's needs, including a place for the dog to play. It is up to neither the school district

nor the city to fund such a provision. Personally, I resent the inference that my property tax money should be used for a playground for someone's dog, and will actively oppose any candidate for public office who is a proponent of such an action.

Denise Moll
Farmington Hills

■ Quiet, please

A quiet environment is a cause not getting anywhere.

Sound barriers, erected at great expense, lower street noise but look like the Berlin Wall. Airlines are asked to use different routes and quieter engines so homeowners can enjoy cookouts. Noisy yard and construction crews are expected to begin work when residents are through sleeping. That is all well and good.

Ambulance sirens scream at 2 a.m. when no other vehicles are in sight. Laws give these "midnight cowboys" permits without requiring discretion. Motorcycles and snowmobiles would be as much fun if mufflers were required, and far less objectionable. Today's music is played so loud that conversation must be shouted. Vehicles shake pedestrians on sidewalks with deafening amplifiers.

I usually leave receptions and parties when boom-box entertainment begins. Sometimes I turn my hearing aid off, making it an earplug, and sit in my own silence. I choose restaurants by noise levels, and then quality. "Smoking or Non-smoking" sections are choices that don't bother me, but I would be a frequent customer to a "Quiet" section.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

■ Mansion is "home"

There are valuable lessons to be learned out of the events that have occurred over the past several months. One of them is that it is possible for a group of interested citizens to come together with an idea that unselfishly benefits the entire community. Another lesson is how well received this idea was by the community at large, and how a "coming together" took on a life of its own. But the most important lesson is seeing how well the community connected with our "Home of Farmington History."

This home is a living, breathing entity. One that is admired and embraced by more people than has ever been realized before.

This is the first time people of our community have been able to feel ownership in our city's greatest resource — our history and our heritage.

It felt good to meet with neighbors, friends, and church groups, play groups, book clubs and family get-togethers. People were young and old, married and single, friends and strangers.

It felt good to hear the air filled with the music of Michael Varverakis or Skip Rosenthal, but mostly with the music of laughter and conversations that created the ambience on our porch electrifying.

It felt good to see the smiles and the appreciative looks of people's faces that came back week after week or the looks of pleasant anticipation of strangers coming to us for the first time.

It felt good to visit with the people from the surrounding neighborhoods of Farmington/Farmington Hills, but even more surprising were our visitors from Warren or Redford, Livonia and Southfield, West Bloomfield or Novi.

What is most important — this last lesson — is the connectedness we all felt at our Home of Farmington History. We all feel the need to be in touch with our history and our heritage. We have all "sipped" from this well we call our Home.

We all realize the need to have a certain level of preservation so this resource can be enjoyed by generations to come. We also need to embrace this community focal point with arms of togetherness as well as responsibility. We need to ask ourselves how the community can best enjoy this Mansion. I suggest the example given by this small group of interested citizens (Blue Circle) and their contribution to the community with Café on the Porch is an indicator of how our community wishes to utilize this precious resource. More community involvement and "hands-on" activities are what our citizens are thirsting for.

The need for study and scrutiny by the Governor Warner Mansion Committee is our next logical step. I hope to be able to aid our committee to steer this valuable commodity in the direction that our community sees best. When they think of community togetherness, history and heritage, they think of HOME. The Governor Warner Mansion-HOME of Farmington History.

Brian M. Golden
Vice President, Farmington Historical Society
Commissioner, Farmington Hills Historical Commission
Treasurer, Blue Circle Governor Warner Mansion Committee

Share your opinions

We welcome letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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