

CHAT ROOM



JERI FELLWOCK

Boy with a big heart reaches out

On Oct. 8, 1990, my grandson, Jeffrey Matthew Neracher, was born with hypo-plastic left heart syndrome, a congenital heart defect, treatable only by transplant or a series of high risk surgical procedures. Three days after his birth, he had his first life saving open heart surgery. By age 4, he had his third open heart surgery.

These surgeries were very difficult for Jeffrey, especially the first two. With his second surgery, he spent over five weeks in the hospital with several life threatening complications. With the help of God, prayers and the cardio-vascular surgeons at Children's Hospital, he survived.

Wish granted

In 1994, Jeffrey received a call from the Rainbow Connection, a nonprofit organization founded in 1985 by L. Brooks Patterson and Janet Dobson, in honor of her two children who were killed in a plane crash. The Rainbow Connection grants wishes to children ages 3 to 18 who have a life threatening illness. Jeffrey was granted his wish, a trip to Disney World made possible through the Rainbow Connection and the Farmington Neighbors Club.

Jeffrey is a caring, compassionate and amazing child. On his 10th birthday, Oct. 8, 2000, he hosted a benefit to raise money for Rainbow Connection. He raised over \$1,000, enough to co-sponsor along with Rainbow Connection, James Luckey, a 6-year-old with a life threatening blood disease. James and his family went to Disney World.

For this deed, Jeffrey was one of 20 children chosen to receive the Kids Make a Difference award, co-sponsored by radio station 96.3, WXYZ-TV Channel 7, and the Observer & Eccentric newspapers. These children were recognized for doing outstanding deeds for people in their communities. The event was held Nov. 12, 2000 at Oakland Mall, and yes, it did make the 5 o'clock news, the kind of news we all like to see.

Jeffrey's 11th birthday party was held Oct. 14, 2001. His objective was to raise more money for the Rainbow Connection and grant another wish. My daughter and her husband rented a room. Despite rain and cold weather, over 100 people came. The children versus adults baseball game is one of the annual events at Jeffrey's party. Of course, the children won, no contest.

With rainbows and pumpkins all about, Jeffrey's "net of gold" for the \$2,500. His special party guest was James Luckey and his family. James is the wish-child Jeffrey co-sponsored in 2000. This was the first time the two boys met. It was a warm meeting. We all took pictures and wiped away tears. Also attending the party were representatives from the Rainbow Connection. Jeffrey's dad took a group picture and we all released rainbow colored balloons, with messages inside about Rainbow Connection.

Jeffrey thanked everyone for coming and introduced James Luckey to the crowd. He told everyone he hoped to raise enough money to send another child to Disney World. It's Jeffrey's goal to be a lone sponsor to grant a child's wish. Jeffrey plans to have these annual charity parties. I know he'll reach his goal. He donated \$40 of his own money plus his allowance. A neighbor boy brought his piggy bank and emptied it out. It's a wonderful lesson for all children. This is his way of paying back the Rainbow Connection and Farmington Neighbors Club.

Jeffrey lives in Wixom with his parents, Judy and Eric, and four younger brothers. He's in fifth grade at Wixom Elementary. Although Jeffrey's condition doesn't allow him to participate in organized sports, he enjoys playing sports with his brothers and friends. He's an avid fan and stays glued to the television when the Tigers, Lions or Red Wings are playing. What a great example he is setting for his brothers, and an inspiration to all.

Jeri Fellwock has lived in Farmington Hills for 21 years.

Hills' mosque welcomes visitors

BY MARY RODRIQUE
STAFF WRITER
mrodrique@oe.homecomm.net

More than 600 guests visited the Tawheed Center on Saturday afternoon for the first ever open house hosted by the Farmington Hills mosque, which was established in February 1994.

"A connection was made. We all feel part of the same community, and that makes us stronger," said Sohail Khan, a spokesman for the mosque at 29707 W. 10 Mile.

He said the turnout was higher than expected.

"It was a joy to host all of the guests. It was a wonderful enriching experience for us all," Khan said.

Some 85 members of the Tawheed Center, from kids to men and women, were assigned to various stations in a well organized program where visitors first signed a guest book and women received a head scarf (hijab) to wear on the tour, which snaked through tents and several buildings on the grounds.

Some volunteers explained the major beliefs of Islam, while others presided over a tour of the mosque, short videos on various religious aspects, and an art and literature display that included intricately woven prayer rugs. Guests had an opportunity to watch men and women engaged in one of the five daily prayer sessions required of Muslims.

In the last tent, visitors were invited to sample foods from around the Muslim world and pitch questions about Islam to a panel of scholars who stood ready to answer any query. A myriad of pamphlets and books, including the Koran, were offered at no cost.

Catholic nuns, Farmington Public Schools administrators, city officials,



STAFF PHOTO BY SAIBOR LEMAY

Women's role: Asma Zahaor, of Farmington Hills, mother of three, office manager at Advanced Sleep Neuro Diagnostics, presents how Islam elevates women.

teachers and curious neighbors were among the visitors.

"I was there for two and a half hours," said Mary Bush, Farmington councilwoman.

Her group included Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Gosa, Mayor William Hartsock and councilman Jim Mitchell.

"It was time well spent," Bush said. "It's always very interesting to learn about other cultures and religions, I think especially in light of recent

events. To understand and get to know other cultures is very important. They are very kind people."

Khan said the mosque has grown in membership since it was built seven years ago. Today it boasts about 500 members, primarily from Farmington and Farmington Hills but also from Novi, Redford, Northville and Bloomfield Hills.

There are more than 7 million Muslims in the U.S. and some 1.2 billion worldwide.



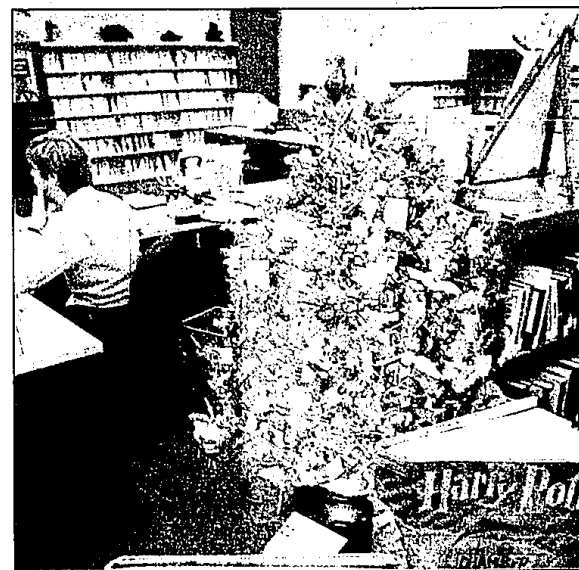
Shoes: Visitors and members alike put their shoes back on after leaving the mosque.



Call to prayer: Hammad Aftab, 10, of Farmington, recites the "call to prayer". With him is Abdul Mejeed of Farmington Hills.

Festival of Trees

Harry Merry Christmas at Farmington Library



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRANLEY

Harry Potter: The Harry Potter theme tree can be seen at the Farmington Library branch in the children's department. Pat Brown is a temporary librarian. Top right, a hand-made bubbling cauldron ornament.

Visit the world of Harry Potter. Take the Hogwarts' express to downtown Farmington where the Harry Potter Tree is on display at the Farmington Community Library through Nov. 15.

Created by the wizards from the Newcomers and Neighbors Club of Farmington/Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield, the tree has over 400 lights and 120 handmade ornaments featuring Harry Potter.

From Nov. 18-25, the Harry Potter Tree will be on display at the Festival of Trees, the annual fund-raiser for Children's Hospital of Michigan held at the Cobo Convention Center in Detroit.

These contributing decorations to the tree include Rita Achenbach, Rosemary Detskas, Kathy Furuusawa, Patricia McCabe, Marina Pesseri, Chris Piotkowski and Darlene Sweeney.

The Newcomers Club, formerly Welcome Wagon of Farmington/Farmington Hills, is a community social organization with a wide array of activities designed to help both new and established residents of the area meet and make new friends. The club meets monthly with social and informative programs, has activities from bridge to quilting, and has a strong commitment to community service. New and longtime residents of Farmington, Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield are welcome to join. Call president Bettina McGimsey at (248) 489-3855 for more information.

Festival of Trees will feature 630 decorated trees, 47,500

ornaments, 60 wreaths, 50 gingerbread houses, 31,000 feet of garland and 1,780,000 lights. It runs Nov. 18-25 with a gala preview party Saturday, Nov. 17. Other special events include a teddy bear brunch and a swing dance. For more information, call (313) 966-TREE or visit the Festival of Trees Web site at www.fot.org.



Harry Vision: Harry's famous taped glasses are one of the special ornaments on the tree.