

## Farmington Observer

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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

## Hollywood's openness with the media pays off

Farmington Hills Police Chief Bill Dwyer doesn't care much for the nickname made famous in a November 2001 issue of "Hour" magazine, which profiled him as one of the most visible law enforcement officials in the state.

The article quoted an unnamed detective saying Dwyer's staff calls him "Hollywood" because of his close relationship with television and print reporters. The appellation harkens back to Dwyer's days with the Detroit Police narcotics squad, when he'd take heat from his superiors for tipping the press about big drug busts.

Heck, we've used it once or twice ourselves around the newspaper, generally when our parking spot at city hall has been usurped by a television news truck.

But no matter what anyone might think about his relationship with the media, Dwyer's rapport paid off last week in the battle to save a young woman's life.

The 27-year-old complainant in a high-profile stalking case that involves a Farmington Hills dentist held up in a Hills hotel and called Kathy Tiano, lead detective in the case.

The victim had brought along a shotgun, which she held under her chin for most of the day. Convinced no one believed her story, she was prepared to end her life.

Dealing with someone who has given up on life is tough enough. But when an incident like this goes on for any amount of time, the media is never far behind.

Contrary to popular belief, Dwyer doesn't have to make a phone call to get press coverage. We journalists have our own methods of gathering information.

What scanners won't tell you, curious passers-by will.

When television stations got wind of this, Dwyer asked for a vital, no-so-simple consideration, that the story be kept off the air until the situation was resolved.

Not-so-simple, because stations were headed into "sweeps" month—a time when they push harder than ever to gain viewership.

## Internet growth spawns oversight role for state

Picture this: It's a frigid January night (OK, not this January) and the furnace goes out. You call in a repair service. They tell you there's a problem with the supply lines in the neighborhood. The gas company's emergency phone line remains busy for days and when you finally do reach someone, they can't do a thing. The person on the other end of the phone line is rude to boot. Worse yet, you'll have to pay your monthly service charge in full, even though you had no service.

You'd file a complaint—if there were an impartial, third party that would take it. But that's not an option.

We admit it's an unlikely scenario, at least in part because utilities that do business in Michigan are regulated by the state, through the Michigan Public Service Commission.

But thousands of southeastern Michigan residents who have experienced similar problems with home Internet service during the last few months have encountered that situation. They were left with no viable options when their Internet access was cut off, or when they received an outrageous telephone bill for Internet connections to a supposedly "local" phone number.

While the Observer doesn't see increased government regulation on business as a panacea, the time is right for the Michigan Legislature to step in and establish an oversight role for Internet Service Providers. That includes, but shouldn't be limited to, approval of Gov. John Engler's so-called Broadband Initiative.

We can't make the argument that high-speed Internet access is as crucial as heat for your home. But remember, the Internet is still in its infancy. The envisioned today's booming telecommunications industry more than a century ago, when Alexander Graham Bell said: "Watson, come here. I want you."

We can see the day (and maybe it's still years or even decades off) when a computer is your only option for banking, or some educational opportunities, or even reading your newspaper. If you doubt it, just ask yourself which delivery system for those services is cheaper—and therefore provides the most potential for profit. Then ask yourself when was the last time you talked to a real, live bank teller.

Vital, because the woman said she'd kill herself if she saw the incident on television.

The ordeal began at around 9:30 a.m. and ended, peacefully, late in the afternoon. Television and print media crews were kept back from the scene; everyone respected the lines police were drawing.

And in all that time, not a word about the incident made the airwaves. In our downtown Farmington office, we turned on the television and flipped through the major news channels.

No "LIVE from Farmington Hills," as "Let's go now to our reporter on the scene of this tragedy." Evening newscasts led with stories about inclement weather, which was certainly a much more vital public service.

Dwyer is the first to admit he has an extraordinarily open relationship with the media, one that has occasionally caused him a little trouble.

It's a give and take, a sense of mutual respect, a full understanding of the power created by an informed public that makes this all work.

But the most important element, the one that ties it all together, is simple: honesty. If we ask a question, we know it will be answered, even if the answer is, "I can't tell you right now."

In this complex and on-going relationship, we have to respect information that must be kept confidential. We must exercise good judgment in our reporting and ensure suspects and victims alike are treated fairly and with sensitivity.

Sometimes we blow it. But the chief wouldn't do business any other way, and neither would we.

In this latest instance, Hollywood Bill was very quick to credit the officers involved with bringing a positive resolution to a very sad incident.

We think it's time to pay tribute to the history of trust and openness that laid the foundation for their success.

It's true that Internet Service Providers aren't public utilities. While some are giant, publicly-owned conglomerates like AOL-Time Warner, others—particularly those offering dial-up service—are smaller, medium-sized, private companies (including the company that owns this newspaper). But when it comes to increasingly desirable high-speed Internet connections, local residents are limited to their telephone and cable companies, which for the most part still function as municipal monopolies. Mergers among those providers eliminates any semblance of choice and further complicates things, as any Comcast customer in Westland, Plymouth or Canton can tell you.

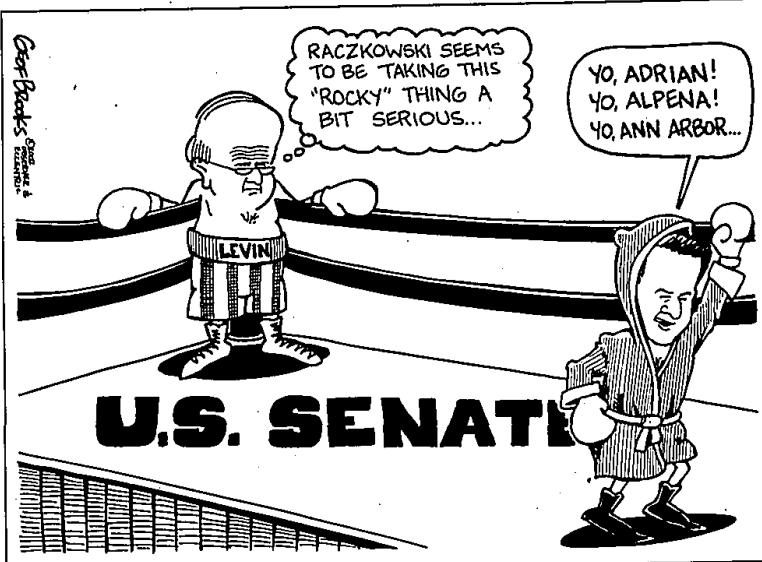
The providers themselves have some legitimate gripes about doing business in Michigan. Under the current setup, laying fiber optic cable is both costly and time-consuming since individual approval is needed from each municipality. Application fees charged by municipalities are all over the map, from \$600 in Dearborn Heights to \$10,000 in Livonia. Tacked on to those charges are complicated annual fees that can differ if cable is laid above ground, or under; on major roads, or local streets.

The Engler proposal, called the MI High-Speed Internet Plan, would create a statewide right-of-way authority to issue permits and charge providers 5 cents per foot of broadband cable installed in a given community. Of that, 4 cents would be returned to the municipality and 1 cent would go to the authority, which would enable it to grant low-interest loans to those providers and users that are new, unlikely recipients of high-speed Internet service.

The governor's office estimates the uniform fee would generate about \$50 million a year in revenue as broadband networks crisscross the state.

The Observer urges the legislature to approve the Engler initiative in short order, before attention spans wane and action season hits high gear.

We also encourage legislators from both sides of the aisle to give serious consideration to a bill placing larger ISPs under the auspices of the PSC, giving consumers somewhere to turn when their computer screens go blank.



## LETTERS

### ■ Patient deaths

Doesn't anybody care? It is very hush hush and doesn't grab headlines. It's way bigger than 9-11. What is it?

According to the Institute of Medicine, as many as 98,000 patients are killed in U.S. hospitals each and every year due to medical mistakes.

Think of it this way: That is equivalent to the entire combined population of Farmington and Farmington Hills disappearing from the face of the earth every year.

And that is just in our hospitals, due to their medical errors. It doesn't count deaths due to medical mistakes in physicians offices or anywhere else, such as misfilled pharmacy prescriptions.

Who is being held accountable? According to IOM no one should be blamed because "to err is human" and people make mistakes.

Are not the lives of these innocent victims as important as the lives of those killed on 9-11? Why isn't this matter getting more attention?

Neither do these statistics count the probable hundreds of thousands of patients injured but not killed by medical mistakes.

Over the past three or four years, I have inadvertently stumbled onto what I believe to be the major cause of these errors, how most could be prevented and why no one is held accountable. It is the biggest and most incredible cover-up in the history of the U.S.

But then, maybe it's all just a figment of my imagination. I'm certainly not the brightest bulb in the city, so why should anyone believe me?

Maybe it's better to let sleeping dogs lie. Maybe I am wrong about thinking anyone else cares.

So why should I?

Kenneth Kemp  
Farmington Hills

### ■ Dim the lights

Only four short years ago, during our economy's glory days, the Farmington School District overrode the vehement protests of surrounding residents and put up lights on the athletic fields of all three high schools.

In our immediate area, they also installed many new, very bright lights in the school parking lot. Our house has faced the lot at Farmington High for many years, so we know it was adequately lighted before.

The new lights produce many times more illumination than actually needed, and a hideous glare day and night.

Now that times are hard, the District may drop driver's education to cut costs (Farmington Observer, 12/20/02).

But if the school board would trim the costs of frills like the outside lighting, that serve no instructional purpose, maybe they could keep programs like Driver Ed that actually educate students and benefit the public at large.

Anne R. Sennish  
Farmington Hills

### ■ Editorial disappointments

A living ecosystem is about to be

destroyed so that an artificial one, namely a golf course, can replace it.

Your editorial cheering on of this so-called improvement was, to say the least, disappointing. Clearly this newspaper would rather cheerlead than investigate.

Your position on the environment is as retrograde as is that of the Farmington Hills City Council.

More than 2,000 trees will fall, taking with them the life-giving oxygen which we depend on for life itself.

Ten identified wetlands, with their capacity to filter out pollutants will go.

The 23-acre landfill with its 300,000 cubic yards of garbage, ten to 30 feet deep, will be covered with 1.5 million dollars worth of dirt paid for out of Parks and Recreation millage funds.

The idea that this is some kind of compromise borders on the incredible.

First, the developer presents a plan so outrageous that it is certain to bring opposition.

The suggested development crowded so much onto the land that the residents rose up in opposition. Then, in a gesture of false compromise, the developer and the city agree on the number they intended all along. Not only that, but this newspaper goes along with this play.

The planning commission meeting was a love-fest between the commissioners and all those with a vested interest in this project.

Anyone who opposed this scheme was held to a strict time-table. City officials, golf course designers etc. etc. lounged comfortably at the microphone, talking all the time they wanted.

I urge Farmington Hills residents to go over to Eleven Pines before it is totally destroyed. The 92 acres of gently rolling forested woodlands are a welcome relief from everything that surrounds it. It is almost as if a tranquil piece of the north country was dropped in the middle of this community.

The fact that city officials see it only as a playground is a devastating and incomprehensible failure to understand the world around us.

Our primary concern for the future must be protection of our natural resources not the wasting of them.

Mary Johnston  
Farmington Hills

### ■ Responds to Kemp

In response to the letter of Mr. Kemp (January 3) I can only say this, "I am glad, Mr. Kemp that you are not a public servant."

Your skewed view of human nature and obtuse perspective of "putting on a uniform" creates often overwhelming temptation to abuse that authority clearly tells me that you have had no exposure to the police and fire personnel in Farmington Hills.

I was born in this city (township) 60 years ago and never have I witnessed any persons in the Farmington Hills Police and Fire Departments who conform to your "definition".

Mr. Kemp, I think that you should "put your money where your mouth is" and attend the next Farmington Hills Benevolent Association Golf Outing.

If your generous bid is high enough, you could spend a day with the Police

or Fire Chief and truly witness dedicated and professional public servants who, I am sure occasionally, encounter people like yourself who cannot and never will be happy with anything.

I maintain that public safety heroes are defined by their daily professional efforts to "do what is right". Unfortunately these stories rarely attract media attention.

It seems most bizarre to me that you would characterize as "brainwashing" the media accounts of the brave actions of police, fire and EMS workers in New York. These individuals, in the face of extreme danger, tried to do just as they had done on a daily basis, "what was right" with hundreds paying the ultimate price.

Sleep soundly tonight Mr. Kemp, the police officers and firefighters of Farmington Hills and many other communities are on duty, ready and waiting to help you.

F.A. Smith  
Farmington Hills

### ■ Survey readers

I would like to see the Observer conduct a poll of its readers re: Changing the high school starting time.

In my opinion it's a classic example of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." Sure, it would be nice to start at 8 or 8:30 a.m., but not if the price tag is half a million dollars.

Currently, because of budget restrictions, if a kindergarten para-pro is ill, he/she will not be replaced with a substitute unless out for at least three days. One kindergarten teacher, no matter how well qualified, is not adequate for the needs of a full class of 22 four- and five-year-olds.

Certainly, putting our money into the classroom is more important than worrying about our teenagers being sleepy in the morning. Let's get our priorities straight.

Linda Kennedy  
Farmington Hill

### Share your opinions

We welcome your letters to the editor. Please include your name, address and phone number for verification. We ask that your letters be 400 words or less. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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