

THE WEEK AHEAD

MONDAY

Farmington City Council: Officials meet at 8 p.m. on Monday at City Hall, 23600 Liberty Street. On their agenda, a presentation by the Mayor's Youth Council and RRRASOC's annual report, as well as the Downtown Development Authority's Quarterly Report.

Hills City Council: Officials will meet Monday at 7:30 p.m. in Council chambers, with the pledge of allegiance led by 3rd grade students from Gill Elementary to start off the meeting. Their agenda includes hearings on a plan to use community development block grant funds, the renaming of Clairview Drive, easement vacations in Glen Acres and an amendment to a brownfield plan governing property in the Grand River/Waldrone area. The meeting is televised on cable Channel 8.

TUESDAY

COHA: Tuesday, March 19 at the Farmington Hills Fire Station No. 4 on Drake between 12 and 13 Mile Roads. Social Hour 7, meeting at 7:30 p.m. Guest speaker is Joe Derek, city naturalist, to talk about fertilizers. Election meeting.

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HAIR VENTILATOR
wanted in house for hair
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It can be a challenge for Richard McMullan to grab the attention of students in his French classes at Birmingham Groves High School.

This is not a problem, however, for audiences of McMullan's celtic band, Blackthorn, a quartet that has a growing following throughout metro Detroit with traditional Irish tunes they perform at area pubs, college campuses, community events and concert halls.

"The best thing about it all is looking out into the audience and seeing people sing along," said McMullan, a Belfast native who started the band in 1984. "Then you realize they would've never known those songs if it wasn't for Blackthorn."

The band's repertoire ranges from pub sing-alongs like *When the Boys Come Rolling Home*, to mellow ballads like *The Parting Glass*. Occasionally, they'll add a classic rock and bluesgrass tune.

Gripping audiences the most, band members said, is their lively interaction with crowds. Their camaraderie and close friendships are visible in the way they tease each other on stage, which is no different from the way the foursome

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Afternoon class: Darcy King, Henri Medwed, Susan Doong and Mia McGill work on their art.

Home-based business

'Enchanted Evening' helps Longacre

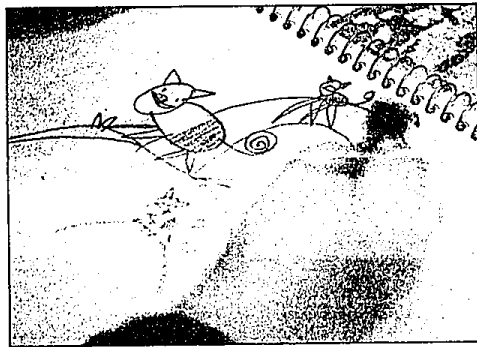
BY PAUL R. PACE
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What exactly is the Longacre House of Farmington Hills? Organizers say for many people its role is often confusing. The historic landmark, built in 1869, stays alive only due to a unique business challenge bestowed to the people that help run it.

Because the historic mansion is not financially supported by the city, a private nonprofit runs the home like a business. Jeff Ferreri is Longacre's program director. He said the house is not your typical nonprofit.

"For some it's 'Save the Whales,'" Ferreri said. "For some it's 'Save the Whales,'" Ferreri said. "For some it's 'Save the Whales,'" Ferreri said.

Please see LONGACRE, A5



Animal art: Darcy King puts the finishing touches on her barnyard with pigs.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BUESER

Mother, daughters charged

■ Authorities have charged a Troy woman and her daughters with embezzlement charges brought against them by a Farmington Hills engineering firm are simply a ploy by the company to further a civil case, filed last year.

BY JONI HUBRED
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Attorneys representing a Troy mother and her daughters say embezzlement charges brought against them by a Farmington Hills engineering firm are simply a ploy by the company to further a civil case, filed last year.

The women, all dressed in black, were arraigned Friday afternoon on charges of having taken about \$1 million from Ruby & Associates. Judge Thomas W. McDonnell presided over the hearings, held at 47th District Court in Farmington Hills. Each was ordered to post \$50,000 personal bond; a preliminary examination is set April 8, 8:30 a.m.

James Burdick, who represents 56-year-old Diane Datka, told reporters after the hearing, "When the facts are known, you will see a far different story. We're not going to try this case in the media."

All three women were presented by their attorneys as life-long residents of the area. None has a previous criminal record, either in juvenile or adult court.

Burdick told Judge McDonnell that Datka "has a stable home life and family" and is a property owner. In setting

Please see CHARGED, A2

District seeks comments on budget

BY SUE BUCK
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Whether you have questions or just want to make a point about where the Farmington Public School District's budget priorities should lie, plan to attend a special budget information meeting Thursday, March 21.

The public forum will be held at 7 p.m. in Room 1 of the Farmington Training Center. The FTC is located at 33000 Thomas Street, one block north

of Grand River. Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield and Cheryl Cannon, assistant superintendent for business, operations and finances, will give presentations and answer questions.

"We will focus on the unique circumstances of this year, and why it is more of a concern this year than in the past," Maxfield said. "We will talk about the budget process we've followed so far and how the district has involved people. We have a representative commit-

tee. We've developed a lot of scenarios. We invited more input from staff."

A Financial Strategies Committee, created to help with the 1997 bond issue, will meet again March 20, Cannon said. It reviewed a draft budget a month ago. The 16-member committee has staff and community representation.

Copies of the proposed budget and cuts will be available to those who attend, Cannon said.

"Hopefully, it will leave people better

informed and with a better understanding," Maxfield said.

Although Farmington Public School officials were pleased when Gov. John Engler announced Feb. 6 his intent to support an increase in the per pupil funding amount to schools by \$200 for fiscal year 2002-2003, the added revenues won't solve the budget crunch.

The legislature had originally agreed on the increase in 1999 but all indications were that the state would be

Please see BUDGET, A2

Ordinary guys make extraordinary music

BY DAN WEST
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The band's repertoire ranges from pub sing-alongs like *When the Boys Come Rolling Home*, to mellow ballads like *The Parting Glass*. Occasionally, they'll add a classic rock and bluesgrass tune.

Gripping audiences the most, band members said, is their lively interaction with crowds. Their camaraderie and close friendships are visible in the way they tease each other on stage, which is no different from the way the foursome

jokes on the golf course.

"People tell us they enjoy the fun we have on stage," said Fred Klein, who plays keyboard and accordion. "Also, Richard does a great job telling stories about the songs that gives background so people understand."

Adult crowds regularly fill Cowley's Old Village Inn in downtown Farmington for Blackthorn's weekend performances, which occur every other month.

With St. Patrick's Day celebrations, Blackthorn is in the midst of many community shows, such as their performances Wednesday at the Farmington Civic Theater and Friday at Detroit's Fisher Building for radio station WJR-AM (760). The shows draw audiences that include grandmothers and young children.

"What's neat is people in their 60s and 60s come and see us, then bring their children, and they come and see us regularly," Klein said. "And it's vice versa. Younger people will bring their parents, then they start seeing us regularly."

Blackthorn's song selection is rooted in Ireland's rich heritage. Growing up in Belfast,



Sounds of Ireland: The band consists of (from left) Dennis Green, Richard McMullan, Gary McMullen and Fred Klein. Blackthorn performed its Celtic sounds Friday at the Fisher Building for a St. Patrick's Day program on WJR radio. They can be seen all over Oakland County.

STAFF PHOTO BY JERRY ZIMMER

Please see MUSIC, A5