

# Child Watch training a success

BY PAUL R. PACE  
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More than 80 residents appeared for a volunteer Child Watch training session Tuesday. Farmington Hills Police Officer Bonnie Unruh said she was not expecting such a large number of residents willing to offer their homes as a safe haven for children walking on the street.

"They were from all over," she said of attendees at the session held at Hillside Elementary, "the city of Farmington and West Bloomfield."

Farmington Hills Police are partners with the Michigan Community Child Watch program that helps kids learn how to be safe and where to go for help.

Residents willing to volunteer put signs in their windows so kids know police deem the home a safe haven if they are ever in a frightening situation. Children in the district and in nearby communities learn in school that the blue sign with a big eye is where to find a safe place.

After the training sessions, the department does background

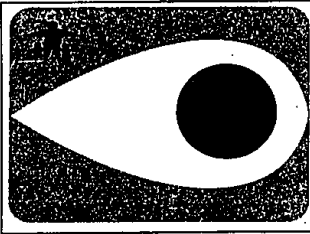
screening of volunteers, including all members of the home age 17 and older. Police reserve the right to take away the signs if they feel the situation at the home has changed.

Resident and Hillside PTA member Sylvia Fossen was instrumental in getting the word out about the recent training session, said Unruh.

Fossen said she is the coordinator of her subdivision's Neighborhood Watch program. She contacted other Neighborhood Watch coordinators in nearby subdivisions to get the word about the training session last week.

The Child Watch program has come more into the spotlight since late January and early February, when Farmington Hills police received reports about young girls being abducted. One incident occurred in Livonia and the next happened the following day in Farmington Hills.

Fossen said only about 220 homes in the city of Farmington Hills - which has a population around 84,000 - currently offer the signs for the child safety program.



Crime watch: Kids should look for this sticker in the window, to know where to find safe havens if they're in trouble.

"That is not enough to serve justice to our children," she said. Unruh said thanks to Fossen's efforts, people went door-to-door to drum up interest in the last training session.

Fossen said she's not giving up on getting more people involved.

"We have a lot of retired people that could help," she said. "People think this is not for them, but it doesn't matter if you have children or not. It doesn't matter if you work or not. The situation could happen over the weekend."

She said the more people who are educated about the program the more people will likely volunteer.

"The more awareness we have, the safer we will feel, but it has to be a community effort," she said.

The next training session will be at 6 p.m. Tuesday, April 9, at William Grace Elementary, 29040 Shawwasco St.

Unruh said people who live outside Farmington Hills will have their own police agencies handle the child watch background checks and distribution of signs.

To learn more about being a volunteer, call Officer Unruh at (248) 473-9632.

# Neighbors object to dental office plans

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Dr. David Clark, a longtime Farmington Hills dentist, hopes to build a new dental office on current residential property located at 29330 Twelve Mile Road, on the north side of Twelve Mile, east of Middlebelt.

Clark's request to rezone the property was approved by the Farmington Hills Planning Commission Thursday and will be forwarded to City Council members for final approval.

Jack Hennes, a member of the Woodcreek subdivision, spoke to the commission during the public hearing on the request. He said he was speaking on behalf of the subdivision association, whose members oppose the office use on the property.

He was concerned that if the office is allowed, more will follow along the abutting residential lots.

He said a previous master plan study suggested the property remain residential, and he would pursue finding that ruling in old records.

"I would suggest to maintain

the residential use," he said.

City officials said the site is proposed to be zoned for office use in the city's master plan.

Another resident who recently built a home off Middlebelt said he opposed the dental office for fear it would devalue his and his neighbor's property values.

Commissioner David Haron said putting in an dental office creates a typical buffer between residential and business.

"I think this is consistent with the property to the west," he said. "I think we would be hard pressed to deny this."

Commissioner Robert Bruckner said he would not support the zoning change, however.

"I don't feel we need to enlarge this business area," he said. "We have vacant businesses (nearby)."

The planning commission voted 7-1 to recommend approval of the rezoning request to the city council. Bruckner voted against and commissioner Sharon Garms was absent.

The request will go before the city council at one of its April meetings.

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