

## 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.

## Longacre House needs community support

One of the most important elements of our two communities, the bond that ties them most closely, is that of shared history. No fewer than five community groups are dedicated to the preservation of history in Farmington and Farmington Hills. Books have been written, archives created in our local libraries. Our largest community festival is named for this area's founders and celebrates their enduring legacy.

But if people stop us up to the plate and soon, we're going to risk losing a vital piece of that history. The Longacre House, a worn but stalwart community center identified most by the long stone wall that runs along the Farmington Road property, is in critical need of financial and volunteer support, at a time when both are in short supply all over.

Since September 11, donations have fallen off everywhere as funds have been funneled into relief efforts and more people enter the jobless market. Companies hit hard by recession and the terrorist attacks aren't digging deeper into their pockets, they're reallocating charitable contributions. Because it is a small non-profit, one

charged with caring for a house that is like any other - in constant need of repair and attention, the need for help has reached critical levels.

Board members are counting on the success of "Some Enchanting Evening" this coming Sunday night to provide a much-needed boost. Unless it is a smashing success, the House's independent governance would move into the hands of the Farmington Community Library or the City of Farmington Hills. And that would be a shame, because this historic treasure was gifted to the community with the intent that it also be cared for by the community.

This year is one of transition for the Longacre House. New leaders want most of all to make the center even more accessible than ever before, but they first have to face the monumental task of getting back on track financially.

We urge anyone who hasn't already to pledge support. If you can't make the "Some Enchanting Evening" fund-raiser, find your own special way to support the Longacre House with a call to (248) 474-8404.

## Keep the process public

We've got one last chance before Monday night's Farmington City Council meeting to urge council members to do the right thing when it comes to appointing a replacement for former council man Bill Hartsook.

So we're going to take it. Mayor Jim Mitchell has said the process of selecting someone for this public position will be kept out of the public eye. Those interested in the post have asked to contact each council member individually; city officials have said they won't release applicants' names before their discussion - and, apparently, decision - Monday night. Under the state's open meetings act, council members are prohibited from calling each other to discuss this matter or any other official business. Certainly, it's not illegal, and should not be illegal, for citizens to contact all council members individually for any reason.

But what's legal and what's right are sometimes two different things. City officials may be acting within the letter of the law, but we do not believe they are acting within the spirit of open government when they keep the public out of what should rightfully be a public process.

We hope at the very least, council members hold off on their decision until citizens can have the chance to meet those who aspire to represent them. What we fear is that officials are going to walk into their Chambers and do little more than announce a decision they've already made.

We hope you will urge city officials to consider changing the course of this closely-held process.

And once again we encourage them to consider reviewing their charter in the direction of more open, public-friendly government.

## Public education needs funds, support not bashing

Bashing public education has become a popular sport in recent years.

Public schools have been accused of turning out ill-prepared graduates unfit to do college-level work or train for a skilled job. They have been blamed for a general decline in morals and social decorum. They have been accused of abandoning the basics in favor of "feel good" subjects.

Many of those who launch these criticisms have their own agendas; they want public money diverted to private and religious schools. They suggest that public schools are a miserable failure and parents should be allowed to take public money to pay for private education.

Tom Watkins, state superintendent of public instruction, says it's time to stand up for public education and the good work that our public schools are doing in preparing students to work in ever more technically challenging positions and to become good citizens and well-rounded human beings. He says the bashing has to stop because it demoralizes teachers and students alike.

We agree. We certainly laud the good work that is done at the many private and parochial schools in our communities. They provide a valuable alternative for those parents and students looking for a different kind of education.

But public schools are open to all the children of the community and offer a unifying educational experience that is valuable for the students and is also the glue that holds our communities together.

On Sunday, The Observer Newspapers presented a group of stories reporting on curriculum in our public schools. What we found were dedicated administrators and teachers who are constantly working to improve the learning experience of children. The Michigan State Board of Education and the Department of Education do not mandate a state curriculum, but they do set standards in the core courses. These standards have been designed by educators from throughout the state and are matched against standards in other states. The standards were last revised in the early '90s and are in the process of being revised again to, in Watkins' words, "create a cur-

riculum for the 21st century."

Our local school systems have been working hard to meet the state standards. The state tests students at different grade levels in core subjects to find out whether schools are meeting the benchmarks through the Michigan Educational Assessment Program.

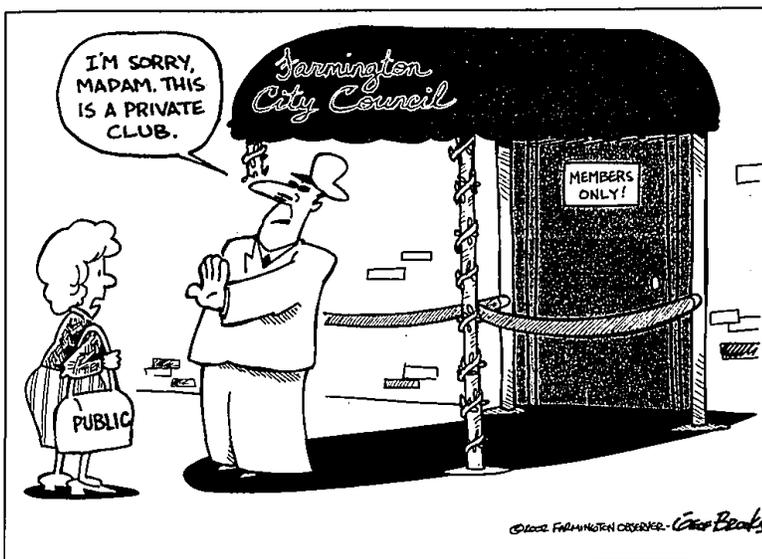
The MEAPs have been a source of controversy. Educators agree that students should be prepared to meet the highest standards and that the MEAP is helpful in defining what those standards are. But some educators say that sometimes the test questions are ahead of the standards and that school systems do not have enough time to adjust their curriculum to prepare students for the test. This has been especially true in recent social studies tests, which have involved essay answers as well as multiple choice.

This is a legitimate complaint. It is also unfair, as Watkins points out, to evaluate a school system entirely on the results on a single test. But many educators don't apologize for "teaching to the test," admitting that they need to teach what students need to know and when they need to know it.

The real problem for many districts is a lack of proper funding to keep our schools competitive. School buildings, textbooks, computers and computer software, lab equipment and exceptional teachers cost money. If the state sets standards it must provide the means for school systems to meet those standards.

Some districts are also plagued by problems that are outside the purview of the school system but have a major impact on the quality of education. It is hard for a student to get good grades and meet high standards in a community with high unemployment, high crime, drug abuse, broken families and deteriorating surroundings.

Rather than diverting public money to private schools it would be better to dedicate that money toward improving the already excellent public schools we have and toward improving the educational and social conditions in those communities that are struggling to survive.



## LETTERS

### Questions for Gesund

It was nice to read the article on Ryan Gesund's campaign for County Commissioner.

I have two questions that I would like to hear Ryan address. First, he said he would introduce five resolutions. I think we should all be told specifically what these are.

Second, with regard to moving vacations to the city - how much would this cost and where would the money come from? I would like to have seen the writer, Paul Pace, address this.

I believe that we need to ask candidates for this office some very direct questions. We obviously need a County Commissioner who understands our transportation infrastructure issues. I am curious as to what this candidate knows about roads and where he stands on the latest mass transit proposal.

This position is too important to vote for someone based merely on their partisan affiliation.

*Christopher M. Cummins  
Farmington Hills*

### Bipartisan effort needed

I take issue with the response to Mr. Aldo Vagnozzi's article "State campaign seeks quality nursing home care," by Dennis J. Atkins of the Lourdes Campus in Waterford.

Mr. Vagnozzi is a politician but that does not automatically make any organization he belongs to a stepping stone to further his career. Although after two years of working with Mr. Atkins Vagnozzi I would vote for him in any political campaign regardless of his political party. He gives politics a good name.

I am also a member of the Michigan Campaign for Quality Care and Mr. Vagnozzi has been a member of our organization since leaving the office of Mayor of Farmington Hills. We have all been actively trying to better the care of nursing home residents. The attitude of nursing home administrators against our organization is typical. They seem to think no one but nursing home people understand the problems of the nursing home industry.

Most of our members belong to this organization because of poor or bad personal experiences in dealing with nursing homes. Why does Mr. Atkins think this organization was formed? Instead of hitting heads, maybe we should work together for a common goal.

According to many recent studies and reports, staffing is the major reform needed in nursing homes. Mr. Atkins responds with a typical "we need more money from Medicaid." We could support more money from Medicaid if we could be sure that any increase in funding would be spent on residents and not to increase the bottom line.

Our campaign does not understand how or where politics belong or fit into the nursing home issues. Which political party does not want our senior citizens cared for properly? Both parties want votes and they are playing with human lives and misery to get them.

What is needed is a bipartisan commission that would put politics aside and get real reform for both the nursing home industry and the residents.

*Peter J. Aho  
Farmington Hills*

### Harrison secret is simple

Stop speculation on why coach Herrington is one of the most successful high school coaches in America. The secret is very simple. He teaches and stresses basic fundamentals every day. He improves every single player's ability and never gives up on anyone.

He shows his kids how to overcome size with fundamentals. He inspires players to play beyond their own capability. Coach Herrington has been successful at teaching a 5'10", 175 pound linebacker about intimidating and bringing down a 6'3", 240 pound running back.

Coach Herrington has won the state championships each year that he has had the best team. He has won many years without the best team because he always has the best program.

Myself, my wife and three children graduated from Farmington High School. My daughter played softball and volleyball. My son played football and baseball for a couple of years. I've coached softball or baseball in our community for 15 years and I know for a fact Mr. Herrington's influence is the reason many kids went to college and stayed out of trouble.

John Herrington should be recognized more for his ability to nurture these boys into becoming productive young men. Coach Herrington had impacted the lives of so many people in our community. Many parents have stood on the sideline waiting for their son to make the play of the game.

He is the reason families have come together, at games, cheering for their loved ones on the field. Many of these students, who look up to him, have approached him about concerns they wouldn't dare ask their parents about.

I wish every high school in America could have a coach Herrington. In simple terms, Coach Herrington is a WINNER on and off the field. He has taught many young men in our community to win in life.

Thanks, Coach Herrington, for being such an important part of our community. Thanks for impressing on these young men honesty, integrity and the rewards of hard work.

*Terry Sever  
County Commissioner*

### America the ugly?

For those of you out there who believed the Vietnam War was wrong, but the Afghanistan War is right, I appeal to you to look at the bigger picture. There is no way the U.S. bombing of Afghanistan can compare with the terror of the September 11 attacks.

This might be true if U.S. history had begun on September 11, but U.S. war making did not just end with the 4 million deaths in Indochina during the Vietnam War. It went on to U.S. proxy wars and support for death squads in Central America all through the 1980's; it went on to the killing of 200,000 Iraqis in the Gulf War in 1991, followed by the killing of another million Iraqis by economic sanctions which continue to this day.

It went on to support for genocide in Indonesia; to support for apartheid in South Africa; it went on to the bombing of a pharmaceutical factory in Sudan which provided affordable medicine to a large part of Africa; it went on to the calculated dismemberment of the socialist federation of Yugoslavia and the bombing deaths of 2,000 civilians in Serbia and Kosovo; it went on and goes on with 50 years of lavish support for

### Israeli terror against the Palestinians.

We should sincerely look in the mirror before we judge the violence that others might now be directing against us. We have been raising a generation of adults that are more numb to violence and more indifferent to the suffering of others than at any other point in world history.

We elect our leaders not by way of a grassroots democracy, but from a much smaller group of greedy corporate criminals. But don't look for any convictions soon, our very justice system is now beholden to them.

They have managed through the corporate controlled media to twist the American political process away from that of local grassroots citizenry and into the hands of the global corporate elites. Even now they plot their next media war of conquest against Iraq, using our government and our children's lives as the fodder for their beautiful profit making machines.

So you can stop waving your flags now that America the Beautiful you sing about sold out to America the Ugly Incorporated some time ago now.

*Eric Borregard  
Green Party Candidate for the U.S. Senate*

### Unexpected visit

Answering the article written by Dennis J. Atkins, Lourdes Campus, Waterford:

I am not looking for a political office, but Mr. Atkins, unless you have a loved one in a nursing home, you know nothing of what happens on a daily basis. I spend at least eight hours each week there. I have visited many homes and the problems are the same.

I can't do much for the others, but I am fighting for the one I have - a 42 year-old girl with progressive MS.

You quote an article on adequate staffing. Is that why they read over the loud speaker, "Anyone who wants to work overtime, report to the nursing station?" The residents are verbally abused, even slapped, but those that did the harm are still on staff.

The State (of Michigan) may make its annual visit, but the facility knows when, and things are cleaned, extra staffing, etc. The people who run the facility don't oversee the working end.

I have written State and Federal offices and am still waiting for answers. Why don't you pay a visit to a few homes, an unexpected visit. One can see any and all errors that are being done.

*Mrs. Shirley Utchenik  
Farmington Hills*

### 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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