

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.

Council appointment process proves silly

First, we wish to offer the most hearty congratulations to Farmington's newest city councilman, Michael Harrison.

He's a former downtown Farmington business owner, someone who has been a contributing member to this community for many, many years and his experience with the Historical Commission and in marketing will prove especially helpful as the city continues in its quest to do everything possible to promote and expand the downtown area.

We'd like to applaud the council for a healthy and vigorous debate of the candidates' qualifications, for accepting public comment before making their decision - but neither of those things happened. Three of the four council members, after reciting their top two or three choices in no particular order, quickly declared their preference for Harrison.

The vote to appoint was 3-1, with councilwoman JoAnne McShane wanting someone with a business background to better fill the gap that financial consultant Bill Hartsock left when he moved to Farmington Hills. When Mayor Jim Mitchell called for additional discussion after Harrison's name surfaced as the heavy favorite, McShane said, "I don't think there's anything more to discuss."

How very sad and disappointing that a sitting, elected city official would feel so outnumbered by a majority opinion that there was nothing left to say.

How unfortunate for city residents that they literally had no voice - not even a single opportunity to comment - on the candidates who wanted to serve their needs for the next 18 months. This may be just a "fill in" term, but during this time, city officials will tackle a number of important issues, including budget decisions, that affect all 19,000 Farmington residents.

We're not saying city officials made a bad decision. In point of fact, Harrison appears to be a wonderfully qualified candidate.

But it's the way he was appointed that leaves us with lingering doubt and the sense that city officials believe they can insulate themselves from the public whenever they wish. This time, they did it by putting nothing down on paper and

separating council members from the council as a body, and from City Hall altogether.

What will they do next time? When we asked why officials wanted to keep names private, Mitchell told us he wanted to protect the candidates. He reiterated this position in a pre-deliberation statement, saying people who applied might not want their neighbors or business peers to know they didn't

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make the cut.

First of all, we can't imagine why council members would want someone to serve with them who couldn't stand up to public scrutiny, which is part and parcel of the job description.

But in a move that simply defies logic, Mitchell asked council members Monday night to list two or three names of those they interviewed for discussion, making public five of the seven (by our count) who contacted all council members and made it through the interview process.

Can you see why we're having trouble with this line of reasoning?

We have no quarrel with this council's leadership overall. This is a lovely, well-managed community and we're proud to be located on Grand River in historic, downtown Farmington.

But in this decision, we maintain council members did a grave disservice to residents by shutting them out of what should have been a very public process - for a reason that has proven to be just plain silly.

Mr. Harrison, we wish you all the luck in the world.

And if you're up to a challenge this early in the game, could you take a really close look at how you got to where you are today? We're among a small but noisy group of folks who'd like to see that process changed.

Libraries shine through when times get tough

It's really no surprise when you think about it: As the economy dips, library use rises.

A study released Monday by the American Library Association shows the correlation between the current economic downturn and library circulation. The ALA-commissioned study - released in conjunction with this year's celebration of National Library Week April 14-20 - confirmed observations most local librarians have experienced first-hand.

The study was conducted by the University of Illinois Library Research Center and looked at library use over the last five years at the 25 U.S. libraries serving populations of a million or more. It found that circulation has increased significantly since March 2001, the beginning of the current recession according to the National Bureau of Economic Research. The trend spiked after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

Although the study didn't track small libraries, local library directors can point to similar numbers. The Farmington Community Library, for example, will experience more than 1 million items passing through its two check-out desks this year.

The reasons libraries flourish in tough times are simple. "Libraries are America's great information equalizers - the only place people of all ages and backgrounds can find and freely use such a diversity of resources, along with the expert guidance of librarians," said ALA President John W. Berry. Whether it's researching employment opportunities on-line or borrowing brand new books that can cost a small fortune, libraries serve as a comfortable and trusted port for individuals and the community weathering the economic storm.

A second ALA-commissioned study shows just how all-encompassing library

use is in most communities. Among its findings, the survey reported:

■ Sixty-two percent of adult Americans say they have a library card. (The figure for parents is 73 percent.)

■ On average, users visit the library 13 times a year. Of adult visiting libraries, three age 25-34 visit the most often - 24 times per year.

■ The library is used most often for educational purposes (46 percent) followed by entertainment (41 percent).

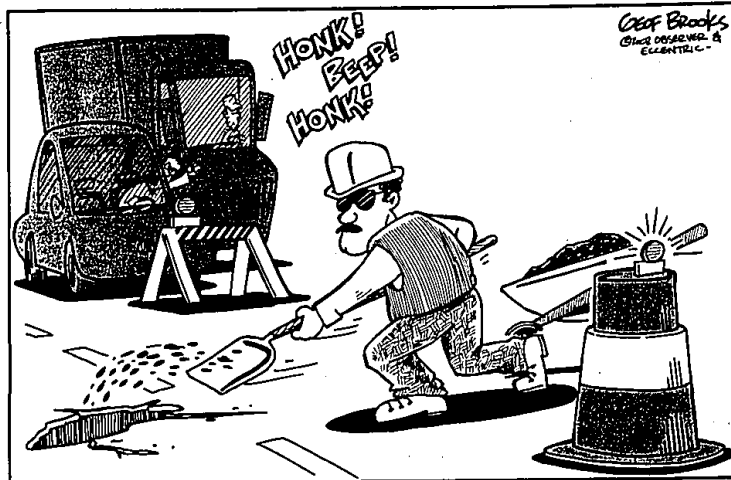
Of course, public libraries and the economy have been connected since the beginning. The library as we know it today got its start when 19th century industrialist Andrew Carnegie set up endowments for a number of libraries providing municipalities and their taxpayers share the load. The wave of library building that began in major cities eventually spread to the suburbs after World War II.

In some ways, the library has replaced the town square in our communities. Its bookshelves, periodical racks and computer stations are filled with information and ideas. Its meeting rooms are booked for events ranging from local crafters to political groups representing the entire spectrum.

This year's Library Week theme is "Your library," a continuation of the idea the ALA has been pushing since 1997 that public libraries have expanded far beyond their book collections. (Which, by the way, those of us still in the printing business figure are reason enough to make the trip.)

For residents who make the library a regular part of their routine, we say "Bravo" for not letting a treasured public asset go unused. For anyone who hasn't visited in a while, we say stop in and see what you're missing.

It's worth the trip.



AMID THE FLASH OF LIGHTS AND THE ROAR OF THE CROWD, BERNIE WILSON MAKES THE FIRST PITCH OF THE ROAD WORK SEASON.

LETTERS

■ Shared time

This letter is in regard to the Shared Time Proposal between Farmington Public Schools and Our Lady of Sorrows School and the ensuing communication problems that have led to unwanted publicity.

Many educated professionals in the OLS Parish community have very eloquently and respectfully chosen to dissent with the administration's decision to pursue Shared Time Officials at OLS provided little or no information regarding details about the proposed plan and unfortunately dismissed specific concerns and questions, while at the same time "asking for a degree of trust" from parents.

While the administration has since admitted "things were not handled properly," no remedies were sought to include parental input as an informed decision regarding our children's education could be made.

People who opposed Shared Time were continuously told it was not their decision to make and those who are unhappy are free to leave. Leaving is not an option for most of us. We deeply love our school and parish and have contributed generously over the years with our time and money.

It is disturbing that there was never a group or task force established, outside of the OLS school committee, that included fair representation of the parents.

Although our school committee was indeed aware of Shared Time Proposal as early as October, they were told not to share information with parents. The reasons for this deliberate lack of communication are still unclear.

It is for these reasons a group of dedicated parents decided to form their own committee in an endeavor to research the benefits or drawbacks Shared Time would have on our children's education and disseminate those facts to the parents.

The newly formed "Concerned Parents Group" respectfully requested an open forum from our administration but was flatly refused. They suggested a debate and welcomed anyone to attend informative meetings, but this too was dismissed.

It is perplexing to me that OLS would so emphatically deny a forum that would build the very public trust they are asking for, as well as help form a consensus regarding this issue. Shouldn't ideas and opinions be subject to the discipline of competition? We are all aware that the Church is not a democracy, however, parents need the freedom to decide what is in the best interest of their own children's education and sadly many competent educated families feel removed from the decision making process here.

Our school administration has been steadfast in maintaining that opposition to Shared Time is a "small vocal minority," but a current postcard campaign, sponsored by Concerned Parents, is revealing more than 250 families strongly opposed.

It has also been suggested that opponents are "resistant to change." This too is inaccurate. We applaud change - for the better. After exhaustive research the facts simply do not show that Shared Time will be an "enhancement" to our curriculum.

How is removing dedicated, beloved teachers from programs we already have in place (p.e. and music) to gain a mere few hours of art in a single arts "enhancement"?

This is painfully underscored when one considers the concessions OLS will

be forced to make and inevitable relinquish of control. Are we compromising our children's Catholic education in order to save money?

In closing I would like to thank Farmington School Board members for giving us time in an open forum at the last school board meeting. Your high level of professionalism was evident that night.

Mary Beth Carey
Our Lady of Sorrows Parish member

■ One-sided

This correspondence is sent to express my dismay with the Farmington Observer's one-sided coverage of the Mideast conflict. There were articles in the April 14 and April 11 editions of your newspaper giving a decidedly pro Palestinian slant to the conflict.

Both articles stated the positions and allegations of the Palestinians as if they were uncontested facts and without question or comment on the veracity of its sources. Yet, there has been a complete lack of coverage concerning local events and positions in support of Israel (other than one sentence in each of the referenced articles).

Your bias in support of these terrorists is unbecoming to a newspaper of the Farmington Observer's caliber. I certainly expect that this problem will be corrected.

Saree Hantler
Farmington Hills

■ Changing start times

I find the debate and process with respect to changing high school start times interesting. While not being passionate one way or the other, curiosity had me do my own research, and attend the town hall meeting where the superintendent and task force were to solicit input in a democratic manner.

On the process side, I found it astonishing that the task force was established not to determine the pros and cons of whether this was the right action for Farmington to do at this time, but rather, where others doing and what it meant to implement early start times in the district.

The task force readily admits that whether we could afford it or if it should be a top priority in these times of fiscal constraints was not their responsibility or charge. It was also admitted that there were no committed dissenters on the task force (that they couldn't convince), and they couldn't find any dissenters, yet 95 percent of the 100-plus parents, teachers and students who attended the town hall meeting were emphatically against the change.

The superintendent states that the task force was developed because of the vast number of people he spoke to who felt it was a "no brainer" and "the right thing to do."

On the debate side, it's amazing that the district-supplied web site only shows the proponents' side of the issue, mainly from Edina, Minn. and little or nothing on the fact that all districts in Minnesota have not seen a positive overall effect. No one claims to prove that late start has or ever will improve academic performance.

It became apparent at the town hall meeting that no one wanted to talk about the facts, such as, "Do we have an attendance problem?" "What are the solutions to the adverse effects of this proposal?" And more importantly, "Is this the right thing for the Farmington district to spend its money on?"

So it will be time for our elected school board to make some "tough decisions" as from all appearances the task force and the superintendent are very clear that this decision is a "no brainer."

One hopes our school board uses their collective brains when deciding whether a "change" such as this is needed at the expense of fewer teachers, larger class sizes, and reduced support activities for our schools, so some can "feel good."

William Boskey
Farmington Hills

■ Players say thanks

On behalf of the entire membership of the Farmington Players Community Theater group, we would like to first thank you for the support and coverage your network has provided over the years. As a community group run totally by volunteers and with a limited marketing budget, your coverage of our shows - through both preview articles and reviews - has provided a definite "spike" in terms of ticket sales.

In addition, over the past several years we have embarked on an ambitious campaign to build a brand new, state-of-the-art theater to replace the 60-year old dairy barn where we've been housed since 1959. That campaign culminated recently with an official groundbreaking ceremony at our long-time location on 12 Mile Road in Farmington Hills. Again, your newspaper's coverage of this \$1.5 million campaign has undoubtedly helped our cause, especially since we are currently housed at a temporary facility until our new barn theater is completed.

As your organization examines its role in the community and continues to define its editorial scope, we ask that you consider our group's identity as a local resource and the importance of the arts in your paper's mission. Beyond the value that a group like ours provides, we think that coverage of our product is what sets your newspaper apart and helps reflect your unique niche.

Readers can go to the larger dailies and other sources for movie and book reviews - they can only go to the Observer & Eccentric to see what's on stage locally at a theater like ours.

The local arts scene is dynamic, engaging and, ultimately, all about community. Which, we think, is exactly what your newspapers are all about, as well. Together, we're a good match and we look forward to your continued coverage in the years ahead.

The Farmington Players
2001-2002 Board of Directors

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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Letters to the Editor

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