

## William Grace teacher wins inclusion award

BY SUE BUCK  
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It was the best kept secret imaginable, and Vitas Underys still doesn't know who nominated him for the 2002 ARC of Oakland County DOVE award for inclusion leadership.

"That's part of the mystery," Underys said. "I was told that the award was for leadership and facilitating inclusion."

As a teacher in a program for special needs children based in William Grace Elementary School in Farmington Hills, Underys believes inclusion means integration.

"I try to get my kids integrated into the whole school," Underys said. "Not just the students but the staff. It's the whole school concept. We work with our kids and at times we work with general ed kids in conjunction. It's not just working with special ed kids, it's who's available to do the job and who can do the job. It's no longer my kids/your kids. It's our kids."

Children range from severely multiply impaired to physically and otherwise health-impaired. The term handicapped is no longer used, he said. The preference is a refer to children with special needs.

"Some are severely physically impaired but they aren't cogni-

tively severely impaired," Underys explained. "They may not be verbal, they may not do fine motor work with their hands. But they can understand everything that is being said. They just don't have communication skills or performance on tests to prove it."

Eight special education children, ages six through 10, are assigned to Underys at William Grace, a satellite of Cloverdale School in Farmington, a special education center on Freedom Road. Cloverdale serves children from about 10 different school districts.

"It goes by the child's needs," Underys said. "If a child needs a less restrictive environment they will move from Cloverdale to a more stimulating environment. The best place is a general ed classroom."

Inclusion is accepted by general education parents. "A parent came to me about three or four years ago who said, 'I wasn't sure about this, but when I saw it, I think it's great.'"

### Benefits of inclusion

The inclusion concept was put into action 10 years ago. "It's become part of how we do business," said Underys who's been with the school 12 years.

The benefits of day-to-day student interaction shows up in var-



**Special visit:** Tom Watkins, Michigan's State Superintendent, meets William Grace third-grader Alexis Canady, and Vitas Underys (right) a special needs teacher. Alexis is a student in Denise White's class.

ious ways. A second grade girl in the general education program who celebrated her birthday May 16 chose an American Girl doll in a wheelchair as a present.

"She came into the hall with it," he said. "She really likes working with the kids."

Time to adapt things, time to adapt general ed curriculum to his children, is his greatest challenge, Underys said. "Everyone's day is so busy. Literally, I walk into the room I tell them. Just give me three words about what you are doing, and I will figure it out."

It's a matter of acceptance and

understanding. "The interactions are coming from people — children — who aren't paid to be with them," Underys said. "There's a different reaction coming from a peer who is just genuinely interested."

He's breaking stereotypes. "Just because he can't talk doesn't mean he doesn't understand," Underys tell students.

Underys' goal is to get the general education children to not treat special needs children as special. "Treat them as your friends," he advises. "Not greater than, less than, but equal."

## Nissan seeks tax abatement

BY PAUL R. PACE  
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A Nissan official said he is optimistic the Michigan Economic Growth Authority board will approve plans to give the company's North American Technical Center in Farmington Hills a \$23 million tax incentive to expand its office for up to 350 new jobs.

The Farmington Hills City Council did its part Monday, making the deal a reality by granting the company a tax break for six years on a more than 100,000 square-foot expansion to the building.

Company officials said the corporate office is planning an aggressive increase in its engineering department and so far can do it cheaper in Japan.

To compete for those jobs, the MEGA is offering a 100-percent employee tax credit over 17 years, which would equate to roughly \$23 million in savings to the company.

The city must also offer the company a tax incentive in order to qualify for the state deal, said Hills City Manager Steve Brock. The plan is to build a \$36 million expansion on the west side

of the company's Farmington Hills facility. The company did not ask for an abatement of the state school tax of 6 mills.

The company will save about \$810,000 in local taxes, but still pay about \$1 million in taxes for the expansion, said Teri Arbenzowski, assistant city manager.

Resident Mary Johnston told the council Monday she was against any tax break for big businesses.

But council members said securing jobs that will help spur the local economy while still getting some new taxes from the expansion was the overall benefit.

John Calandro, director of human resources and administration for Nissan Technical Center North America, said the company will bring in 350 new workers to the area in five years time with the expansion. The company currently has about 432 employees and 120 contract workers, he said.

He said the MEGA board will meet in June.

"We're confident we'll get this," he said of competing for the jobs with the company's other engineering office in Japan.

## Homeowner workshop set

BY PAUL R. PACE  
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Would you like to know how to replace your water heater?

What about taking care of your roof or your lawn?

The city of Farmington Hills is offering a free workshop for homeowners from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Wednesday, May 29, at the Costick Activities Center on 11 Mile between Middlebelt and Inkster.

The workshop will feature experts in various areas of home maintenance and improvement.

City staff will also be available to answer questions about local planning and zoning ordinances that affect homeowners, obtaining permits, yard waste recycling and more.

The first-ever event is free of charge and no registration is necessary.

Beverly Church, public information specialist for the city, said the program was the idea of Hills Mayor Nancy Bates.

"She thought it would help homeowners address a lot of questions that come to city hall,"

Church said.

The setting will be informal; people can watch speakers on the topic that interests them while also having information booths set up, Church said.

She added there will be hands-on demonstrations to help homeowners.

### Program:

6:30 p.m. Welcome by Mayor Nancy Bates and City Manager Steve Brock.

6:40 p.m. "Keeping Water Out and Away from Your House" by Skip Ottwell, city engineer.

7 p.m. "Your Home Your Castle" What you need to know about roof, ventilation, gutters, trim, working with contractors and more by Tom Williams, building official.

7:20 p.m. "Replacing Your Water Heater or Furnace" by Bill Paquette, mechanical inspector.

7:40 p.m. "Tips for a Healthy Septic Systems and Wells" by Gary Frick, Oakland County Health Department.

8 p.m. "The Best Fertilizers for your lawn" by Megan Wiawesser,

Michigan Groundwater Stewardship program.

8:20 p.m. Q&A by city staff.

There will also be exhibitors with information booths staffed by experts who will provide information on the following:

■ Public services: Yard drainage, downspouts, gutters, gutter extensions, sump pumps, routine maintenance.

■ Planning and Community Development: Working with contractors' permits necessary for home improvement projects (windows, roofs, etc.)/ ordinances/ Miss Dig brochure/ Housing Rehabilitation program.

■ Oakland County Health Department: Septic systems and wells.

■ Michigan State Extension Service: Healthy lawn care

■ RRRASOC: Recycling yard waste/composting

■ Police Department: Home safety.

■ Fire Department: Propane tanks, open burning, addressing home fire safety.

## Holiday delays trash collection

Garbage collection will not be collected as scheduled on Monday, May 27, due to the Memorial Day holiday.

Since Memorial Day falls on a Monday, all garbage and recycling pickups will be delayed by one day during that week. Monday's route will be picked up on Tuesday, Tuesday's route will be picked up on Wednesday, and so on with Friday's collection made on Saturday.

For future reference, there are six holidays during the year when garbage and recycling collection is not scheduled. New Year's Day, Memorial Day, Fourth of July, Labor Day, Thanksgiving Day and Christmas Day.

For questions about garbage and recycling call the Department of Public Works at (248) 553-8550.

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