

OUR VIEWS

Lauhoff's talents will be missed

When a city loses one veteran employee, someone who has contributed vast amounts of time and energy toward public service, it's a shame.

What's happening to the City of Farmington might well be called a disaster. The retirement of Downtown Development Authority Director Judy Downey, former city councilman Bill Hartsock's move to Farmington Hills and the untimely death of city attorney John Donohue were tough enough. Now Frank Lauhoff is ending his 28½-year tenure, a decade of which has been spent as city manager.

Lauhoff deserves a tremendous amount of credit for work that has gone on largely behind the scenes, work he has done even while suffering physical pain.

A city manager bears the responsibility of coordinating city departments, handling citizen complaints, developing budgets and providing invaluable support and counsel for elected officials.

More than that, Lauhoff has been a vocal advocate for the city, a real booster. His love of Farmington shows in everything he's done, and his institutional knowledge will be sorely missed.

We understand and respect his decision to leave, and we wish him well as he pursues a future that will be as different for him as it will for the city.

We'd also like to urge city officials to keep the process of finding Lauhoff's replacement as open as possible.

Honestly, we're not holding out much hope. For some reason, they seem to feel more comfortable playing this kind of thing close to the vest.

This position, more than any other, involves a great deal of interaction with citizens, citizens who deserve to have a voice in the hiring process.

The City of Farmington is at a unique crossroads, with opportunities created by fresh energy and ideas. Elected officials have a chance to make some significant changes in the way they've been doing business when it comes to the hiring process.

We hope they take that chance.

Take time now for what's important

If the doctor said you had only six months to live, what would you do?

Tell your family members how much you love them? Mend a broken relationship? Get right with God? Travel the world? Take time to smell the flowers?

The real question is, why aren't you doing those things now? As the anniversary of Sept. 11 approaches, it's important to remember that life is to be taken daily.

Though we plan to live to old age — saving for retirement, exercising and eating right — we never really know how much time we have left. An accident or illness can prematurely end our lives, no matter our age.

Last month, the Clarkston community grieved over the unexpected death of Clarkston State Bank founder David Harrison and his wife, Wanda, both 59, who were killed in a motorcycle accident on their way back from a motorcycle rally in Sturgis, S.D. With their children raised and one grandchild born, they were just entering their golden years.

We all know of people who have died prematurely from accidents or illness — children and teenagers, parents with children yet to be raised, adults at the peak of their careers, seniors who only recently retired.

Then, of course, there are the victims of the terrorist attacks, whose memories we will honor in services across the country and Oakland County next week.

As we attend these services — many of which are listed below — or watch them on television, remember how precious life is. Tell your family members you love them, mend that broken relationship ... Treat every day as if it is your last. Because one day you will be right.

Sept. 11 services:
■ Memorial service with moment of silence, 8:30 a.m., Jewish Community Center, West Bloomfield. Includes presentation to the West Bloomfield fire and police departments.

■ Memorial service, 9:45 a.m., Adams Fire Station, 572 S. Adams, Birmingham. Called for by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, the service will be held simultaneously at fire departments across America.

■ Solemn ceremony honoring all Americans who died Sept. 11 sponsored by the Troy Veterans Committee, noon, Veterans Plaza in front of Troy City Hall, 500 W. Big Beaver Road, Troy.
■ Memorial ceremony honoring rescue workers, sponsored by American Legion Post No. 233, 5:45 p.m., Friendship Park, Orion Township.

■ Prayer and singing service, 6:30 p.m., Divine Grace Lutheran Church, 3000 S. Lapeer Road, Orion Township.

■ Combined memorial service, held by First Baptist Church of Clarkston and Maranatha Baptist Church, 6:30 p.m., Depot Park, Clarkston.

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.



Staffers Rosa Berger, Kathie Brown, Tina Theeke, Dedee Swan and Silumula Sandhya learned the layout of the circulation desk at the newly expanded Farmington Community Library Hills branch last week. The hard work put in by staffers and volunteers kept the library running smoothly during this past summer, when the Hills branch was closed.

LETTERS

If the mud flies

Valerie Knol's last minute mailings and phone calls to voters falsely trashing Terry Sever for his supposed tax delinquency achieved a new low in political mudslinging in this area.

It's bad enough that her information was wrong, that she did not take the simple steps to verify it, and that she acted so rashly based on such false information — all rather lethal qualities for a state legislator.

It's worse that she timed her attack so that Mr. Sever would have no opportunity to set the record straight before the election.

But most shameful of all is that Ms. Knol deliberately set out to make destructive, personal attacks on a political competitor in the first place. Despite her utter lack of governing experience, she has very quickly learned how to be a "politician" in the worst sense of the word.

It appears Knol will say or do anything to gain elective office. Listen to her dance when asked whether she favors school vouchers. She does, but you'd never know it from her double-talk "political speak."

Aldo Vagnozzi, like Terry Sever, is a decent and honest man of unquestioned integrity. He is a public servant, not a politician, who (unlike Ms. Knol) has devoted his entire adult life to making our community better.

His campaigns have always been upbeat, issue-oriented and positive, even when personally attacked by his opponent.

Implore Knol and her cronies to cease and desist from this mudslinging. But if the mud still flies this autumn: (1) be very skeptical of the message, and (2) punish the mudslingers by voting for those who maintain a higher level of civic discourse.

Mark Steckloff
Farmington Hills

Open interviews

There is a dangerous and undemocratic trend emerging in Farmington politics: interviewing candidates for public posts behind closed doors.

We saw it a few months ago with the secretive selection of a new city council member to finish the rest of Bill Hartsock's term and now with filling the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) directors post that will be vacated at the end of this year.

I am glad this paper recognizes this and uses its pages to report on it. In particular, I am referring to your comparative analysis of the selection process for new DDA directors in Farmington and Plymouth.

I found it extremely interesting that despite having to subject themselves to oral interviews in front of both the public and the press, the final eight candidates for the Plymouth DDA director position still pursued the job.

Despite possible public scrutiny, more than 100 applicants wanted a job in Plymouth.

I am therefore puzzled why, being shielded from the questions and comments of the merchant community and a handful of concerned citizens, our fair town has only 26 applicants thus far for the similar position in Farmington.

I will not accept that open meetings and public input alone limits the quantity or quality of professionals seeking positions in community development.

I ask my DDA board, and assistant city manager Bill Richards who is supervising the selection process, to deeply consider the many advantages of maintaining an open dialogue between the merchants and citizens the new director will serve and the officials who will be selecting this person.

It strikes me that the two most high profile and powerful positions to be opened in this city in the last year, a city council position and this DDA Director position, are both being selected by an elite few, behind closed doors and without public input.

I believe this is bad for our community, and I challenge anyone who believes in the efficiency of expediting the process over democracy and openness in community affairs to look at their own stock portfolio and ask themselves who are the political auditors of our town.

Jeff Pavlik
Farmington Bakery

Media's unfair

"Voters deserve better than 11th hour attack" was about as unfair as the media gets under the circumstances.

Your article claims that the mailer on Mr. Sever was "a mish mash of old news."

Really? Please let the readers know when was this information published or written about in your paper?

I would like to look up these articles and read them. I have been in this community as long as Valerie, nearly a decade and I don't recall ever reading any of this in your paper.

I could understand your outrage had you applied it equally to all candidates, such as when Mr. Sever used this exact tactic two years ago in his County Commissioner's race against his opponent Ben Marks.

Finally, as to the pity party we are all having about Mr. Sever's failed business and subsequent tax problems. You need to do your homework.

I make my living in the lending business. Do you have any idea what a creditor has to do to get a garnishment against someone's wages?

I guess not or your attitude would be a lot different.

No one should have to fight for a garnishment to get back a loan made in good faith. I would suggest a long conversation with some of the community bankers.

I hope your coverage of the rest of the election season will be more balanced.

Linda Jolicœur
Farmington Hills

Spending tax dollars

In reading the recent "Update" from our School Board, I did not see any mention of the benevolence of our current school board members in spending the taxpayers' money.

The case in point is the recent "raise" for our School Superintendent. Does the average citizen, many senior citizens just getting by, know that the School Board awarded the superintendent a \$40,000 raise? This is not a misprint, that is \$800 a week.

And that is on top of a six-figure salary already.

How many of our senior citizens try to live on even half this amount?

How many residents the Farmington area earn \$40,000 a year?

Yet, this is the amount that was given to Mr. Maxfield.

And while the School Board was spending our tax dollars, a number of teacher's aides were laid off here in our school district.

What other expenditures are out there that the taxpayers don't know about? Voter remember this next school board election!

Bill Smith
Farmington Hills

Knol critic's incorrect

I am writing in response to Mr. Kapko's letter to the editor concerning candidate Valerie Knol. Mr. Kapko was incorrect when he stated that Valerie Knol just moved here a few years ago. Valerie has lived here approximately 10 years. I should know I am one of her neighbors.

Mr. Kapko was also incorrect when he stated she moved here from Grand Rapids, she actually moved to Farmington from Kalamazoo, where we attended Western Michigan University together.

I can also tell you that in her years here in Farmington/Farmington Hills, Valerie has been more involved in this community than many residents who live here their entire lives.

She has been involved with the Jaycees, the Warner Mansion, Blue Circle, Café on the Porch, and many political groups to name a few.

Mr. Kapko was also incorrect when he stated Valerie Knol bought her election. Valerie didn't buy her election, in fact she spent only half of one of her opponents as stated in the Observer.

Valerie's energy and involvement amaze and impress me.

I was born and raised in Farmington, and I have NEVER seen anyone as committed at doing so many things for this great city I cherish.

I wish we had a few more people like her around. I am proud to have someone like Valerie Knol as my neighbor and know first hand how committed she is to Farmington/Farmington Hills.

Joseph M. Madaffer
Farmington

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.

Mail:
Letters to the editor
Farmington Observer
3341 Grand River
Farmington, MI 48335

Fax:
(248) 477-9722

E-mail:
jhubred@oe.hometowncomm.net

QUOTABLE

He always made things look so easy.

Farmington city secretary Joanne Fournier on departing city manager Frank Lauhoff