

OUR VIEWS

Winds of change swept through '02

As the clock winds down on 2002, we look back on the year as a time of enormous change, much of it good news for area residents.

With that in mind, we'd like to recap our favorite "good news" stories from the past year.

5) San Marino golf course expansion finally got under way in the City of Farmington Hills. After four years of wrangling, city officials settled on a plan that made very few people truly happy — which is a sure sign of a successful compromise.

4) Farmington Community Library promoted and participated in the "Pay It Forward" program, which encouraged people to recognize favors done without the expectation of paying it back. This program was so well-received, that the Commission for Children, Youth and Families embraced it. We hope its spirit continues, even though the "Everybody's Reading" program has ended.

3) The Cowley family began the transformation of their Old Village Inn to an upscale, two-story pub on Grand River. It takes guts to expand a business in this kind of economy; we applaud their investment and confidence in their community.

2) Though it's sad to see longtime city staff and officials leave in Farmington, the community can look forward to the breath of fresh air that blows with the winds of change. And since it's also an election year, who knows what more will come by the end of 2003?

1) By far, the most exciting news of the year came with the awarding of a Main Street grant to the Farmington Downtown Development Authority. With cooperation from the City, the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber and a revitalized merchants group, this process holds the promise of an even more vibrant and successful downtown business district.

Left-turn signals should be a priority

Is it time to look at adding more left-turn signals?

Those green arrows turn to yellow as they allow left turns, while other drivers at the intersection are stopped for red lights. According to Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss, they've made a huge difference in reducing accident rates at three of the community's major intersections.

It's tough to argue with additional strong evidence that shows that these left-turn signals alone have a huge effect on improving safety.

One on-going AAA study shows that adding only those left-turn signals can cut total crashes (property and injury) by 30 percent, and they cut injury crashes by more than half. Most important, the signals slash the number of head-on, left-turn collisions by a whopping 69 percent. And these are the accidents that usually end in the most serious injuries or deaths.

The study also shows that left-turn signals disproportionately help out two groups of drivers: Those very young drivers — people with good reflexes but little experience, who often make poor driving judgments, and those older drivers — people who have plenty of experience but slower reflexes, according to AAA officials.

Of course, drivers today aren't what they used to be. In the "good old days," a yellow light really meant something, and people making left turns actually got a chance to make their turn without being endangered. In those days, left-turn arrows were a rarity.

Today, we're all in a huge hurry, distracted by CD players and cell phones, and it seems those left-turn arrows have become more than a convenience. Many of us have gotten used to those left-turn signals that are already installed at many of our busiest intersections. Heck, they make us feel safer, don't they?

In August, a 14-year-old boy was killed when the car he was riding in was broadsided by a truck at the intersection of Six Mile and Inkster — a crossroads without such a left-turn signal. The truck driver pleaded no contest to a charge of negligent homicide and awaits sentencing, while the boy's grandmother, who was driving him, was determined by police to be not at fault. Saying that a left-turn signal at that corner could have saved a life may be overstating it; accidents happen all the time.

One person who lives near that corner claims that many of these intersections also need better police presence, especially at rush hour; finding a better way to deter drivers from running red lights is probably in order. Still, when it comes to safety, we're convinced that many more corners need left-turn signals — in the interest of safety.



Decoys for the Farmington Hills Police Department approached a restaurant last week, as part of the department's annual "sting" operation. This time around, only four restaurants were cited for selling to minors.

LETTERS

Insurance fairness

Do you have complete health care coverage, dental coverage and life insurance through your employer? Many are not so fortunate.

Often, the insurance company substantially reduces the billing because the provider participates with the insurance company. The health care provider accepts what is deemed to be "customary and ordinary" charges. That can be substantially less than the billing. That reduces the deductible and co-pay, if applicable.

Your employer who provides the insurance coverage is generally allowed to deduct the cost as a tax deduction and thus receives a tax saving.

Let's contrast the above with an individual without any insurance coverage. The health care provider expects payment in full for the amount billed. Thus, the uninsured is expected to pay more for the same treatment than the insured.

Now, let's look at the differences in tax treatment. The individual itemizes deductions for Federal income tax purposes, the cost of medical expenses is deductible, but subject to a reduction equal to 7.5 percent of Adjusted Gross Income. In other words, if income is \$15,000, the first \$1,125 of expenses is not deductible.

Of course, some without company-provided insurance pay for their own coverage. But here again, other than for self-employed individuals, the cost of such coverage is subject to the 7.5 percent floor. Self-employed individuals can deduct 70 percent of the cost of health care coverage in 2002, with the remaining 30 percent subject to the 7.5 percent floor.

Where is the equity? I fail to see any.

It's time to bring some fairness to the system. Health care providers must explain why it costs so much more to provide coverage to those without insurance than those with. The tax code must be changed to offer similar tax advantages to those with and without insurance coverage. If a company can deduct the full cost of insurance coverage then an individual should be able to deduct an equal amount based on the amount paid for treatment.

In a time when we see more and more layoffs and outright terminations, it is more important than ever to do something to correct these inequities.

Tom DeWard
Farmington Hills

Burning issues

So the Supreme Court is trying to decide whether cross-burning is a constitutional right or just an angry demonstration of pure unreasonable hate? Wow, now that is a toughie!

Let's say, for the sake of argument, that

wearing a bed sheet and torching a cross in someone's yard is A-OK, Bill of Rights wise. Doesn't this give rise to a couple of other problems?

For example: Would I have to get a permit if I wanted to burn a cross in my neighbor's yard? (I can't burn leaves without getting a ticket of some sort!) To what city department would I apply for my cross-burning permit? How much would it cost, and could the money be used to help the flagging school districts in their attempt to teach our children about the Bill of Rights?

Once I have my permit and matches, can I be arrested for trespassing if I now head for the neighbors? Or does my permit give me free access to his property? (I certainly don't want this mess in my yard!) So if the permit won't let me onto this offending person's property and I don't want it in my own, I guess I would have to have my cross burning party on public property.

Let me see — Shawasssee Park? In the front of Gill Elementary (so the students there can see free speech in action)? The intersection of Grand River and Farmington Road? The possibilities are endless!

Please tell me that the hubbub of common sense is going to finally rise to the surface of this "What, let me shut up so you can tell me what I think" attitude.

Sue Waters
Farmington Hills

Community divided

As a parent of four children enrolled at Our Lady of Sorrows School I wanted to share my experiences with the readers and editors of the Observer after reading the many articles on the subject this past Sunday.

During the (Nov. 7 final grade level) meeting I had the opportunity to ask the following three questions of school principal James Watson and Monsignor Walter Hurley:

1. How will the content of art, music and physical education classes change if shared time is implemented?
Mr. Watson responded that he has reviewed the curriculum and the document is "about this thick" (holding his thumb and finger to indicate a few inches). He offered to provide an executive summary that could be published in a future school newsletter. To date, no summary has been provided.

2. The Farmington School District Board members stated that they needed to see a strong level of support from the requesting community in order to move forward with the shared time program. How does the OLS administration plan to demonstrate this support?

Msgr. Hurley replied that a meeting would be scheduled with Dr. Maxfield. At that meeting, Mr. Watson will inform Dr.

Maxfield that OLS intends to move forward with the shared time program.

3. At the suggestion of the Farmington School District Board I volunteered to be a part of any committee that is formed at OLS to discuss shared time. Will those meetings be held?

Monsignor Hurley replied that no focus group meetings would be held and no votes on the issue would be taken. He further said that these grade level meetings were being substituted for any committees that may have been referenced in the past. He told the group in attendance that he elected not to invite any representation from the Farmington School District.

Later in November, Mr. Watson wrote the following to parents in his newsletter:

"Of the 177 parents attending, about 40 people expressed sentiments against shared time, and I respect their opinions and right to disagree. Of those opposed, about 30-33 people were able to discuss some legitimate questions in a thoughtful, appropriate manner."

How he came about these numbers, I cannot say. I wonder where he counted me? I attempted to phrase my questions in a neutral manner.

My wife and I oppose shared time. Mostly, we would like more information about the curriculum and how it might be implemented at OLS.

I do not condone the actions of people who have over reacted, but yet I understand them. They are frustrated. Many of us are frustrated. We are not being allowed to participate in decisions affecting our children's education. We seek information but are denied. Our community continues to be divided.

Msgr. Hurley was quoted in Sunday's paper as saying "The issue here is about serving children not only today, but into the future." Speaking for myself, all I ask is the chance to participate in my children's future.

Jim Wagner
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.

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QUOTABLE

"Financially, it will be a rough year — but that's reflective of the community."

— Farmington Schools Superintendent Bob Maxfield

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