

OUR VIEWS

## Local volunteers make a difference

They say you can't change the world, but a number of local folks demonstrated in recent weeks it's very possible to make life better in our little corner of it.

The Cowley family opened their doors Wednesday evening for a gala to raise funds for MI-COPS, an organization that helps the families and friends of slain police officers, and the pavilion slated for construction in the Downtown Farmington Business Center parking lot.

John Cowley & Sons have also given downtown Farmington a boost with their six-figure investment in an authentic Irish pub. While there are significant parking issues to be addressed, the project hopefully will provide some high-octane fuel to drive the downtown development engine.

On Friday night, the Exchange Club and Farmington Hills Special Services Department launched their first "Reverse Raffle" fund-raiser at Farmington Hills Manor. Around 200 people attended, bought raffle tickets and bid on live auction items to raise funds for the After-School Youth program.

This event provides people who don't attend the more formal Cornucopia Ball with a way to lend their support to local youth programs. The very affordable and more casual evening included a little dancing and a lot of excitement as a pile of raffle ticket numbers dwindled and bidders competed for a wealth of interesting prizes — including a Harley-Davidson Sportster motorcycle, the evening's high ticket item, snapped up by Farmington Hills Fire Chief Rich Marinucci.

The week's biggest surprise, however, came from the tiny offices of Sweet Dreamzzz in downtown Farmington. Their years of hard work and dedicated efforts led to their first-ever fund-raising gala, held at the Detroit Science Center. They netted an amazing \$110,000 to provide sleep kits for needy kids in Detroit Public Schools. Moreover, Sweet Dreamzzz's efforts have brought very positive attention to the metropolitan area, which now serves as the nation's 2003 Healthy Sleep Capital.

All of these events were driven by people who care about their community, and they deserve tremendous credit for the resources, time and energy they invest.

Instead of remaining indifferent to a world full of need, they're truly making a difference.

## Resources can ease nursing home choice

It's a decision that can be among the most difficult, most overwhelming for any spouse, child or grandchild: putting a loved one into a nursing home.

Once that need is established, though, the next step is finding the right place.

There are no easy answers and no guarantees that you'll be making the right decision. However, it's important to have the right resources and information to take some of the guesswork out of the many choices out there.

A recent story in our *Observer* Life section focused on a Consumer Guide to Michigan Nursing Homes that does some of the leg-work for people shopping for a quality home for mom or grandpa. Residents would be well-served to use the guide or its Web site ([www.cheam.org](http://www.cheam.org)), in addition to their own on-site visits and some other common-sense suggestions to help make the decision.

Many people are afraid of choosing the wrong site and for good reason.

Just last month, a Livonia nursing home resident died of hyperthermia a few steps outside the door of Middlebelt Healthcare Center after wandering outside on an evening when the temperature dipped below zero.

The woman, 86, suffered from dementia and had a record of walking away from the facility. State investigators later found that a malfunctioning alarm and a failure to follow policies — including calling police — may have contributed to the death. The home was issued two citations and fined \$10,000 for failing to supervise the woman, who was one of 10 identified as a risk for elopement at the facility.

Using the guide, though, is just the first step. Experts urge people investigating nursing homes to use word-of-mouth advice and read promotional literature.

"But nothing is more valuable than the insight you gain from making personal visits to the home you are considering," the guide suggests. One nursing home administrator urges decision-makers to pay careful attention during their visit: checking for how clean the facility looks, how well-groomed the patients look, how appropriate the activities seem, how the facility smells, how staff treats patients, etc.

This Consumer Guide needs to be almost a necessary first step for people going through these all-important decisions.



Guests, including city council members, civic leaders, family and friends, raised their glasses in a toast at last week's John Cowley & Sons fund-raiser, one of several events held to benefit worthy causes.

### Say 'nay' to Jacobs

I was recently advised of an action taken by our State Senate which should meet with all of our approval. The Senate passed Senate Resolution No. 37, which states support for our armed forces during the present military conflict.

However, not all the news is good. Our State Senator, Gilda Jacobs, did not vote in favor of this resolution. When it came time to show support for our troops, Gilda voted "Nay." When it was time to support those families of service personnel overseas, Gilda voted "Nay." When called on to support the Commander-in-Chief of these armed forces, she said "Nay."

We should never forget this. Unity is necessary in the face of adversity.

When Gilda comes back to the Farmington area seeking reelection in 2006, we should all tell her "Nay!"

Christopher M. Cummins  
Farmington Hills

### Band booster

I'm currently an eighth-grader and I attend Power Middle School in the Farmington School District. I play in the eighth-grade concert orchestra.

I think that the orchestra and band program is a great learning experience for the kids. It teaches them responsibility, dedication and how to master an art that is very beautiful. Studies prove that kids who play in an orchestra are more likely to do better in academic activities.

In fifth and sixth grade (cadet orchestra) the students learn how to handle their instruments as well as the first basic notes. The seventh-graders at Power (varsity orchestra) begin to learn more advanced techniques such as shifting and vibrato.

In eighth grade (concert orchestra), they have a lot more school concerts and attend their first real festival in March. Festival takes a lot of hard work and dedication to your instrument if you wish to receive a good score at festival. I think that this program is a great experience for students who are involved in it.

Farmington Schools are doing a great thing by having this experience for students. A lot of schools don't have an instrumental program for their students, and I think a lot of kids are missing a chance to excel at something they don't even know they're great at.

Eva Sellers  
Power Middle School

### Olé for language

For the past five years, I have been learning the Spanish language. I think that it is very important for young teenagers, like myself, to become fluent with other languages because, in the future, it will become helpful, and it also boosts your chances of getting into a good or better college.

When I read the article about Dunckel Middle School's foreign exchange program, I realized how much of an advantage it is for the students to experience this. Although I don't attend Dunckel, I am still affected by this new program. I would like to thank you for helping sponsor it, to help our community expand its learning abilities.

The foreign exchange program is an extracurricular activity where a student from a school in France comes to stay

with a family who has a child at Dunckel Middle School. The French student will come to Dunckel, but instead of going to an American speaking class, they will meet up with their French teacher, and their classmates, who are also in the foreign language program.

Then after about two weeks of learning how Americans live, and what they might eat, the French student that is visiting Michigan, goes back home, but he or she will bring back the student from Dunckel.

Kristen Cliff  
Power Middle School

### Land use

First off, I would like to commend Governor Granholm for successfully establishing a Michigan Land Use Leadership Council.

Given the significant sprawl within the Oakland County communities, this effort is certainly essential to our continued sustainability. As an Oakland County Commissioner as well as a civil engineer/transportation planner, I am confident the council will prove to be advantageous.

I would especially like to express my support and appreciation for each member of the council. Some very wonderful people have been chosen to participate on the council. Their knowledge and experience will certainly prove to be an invaluable asset.

However, the culmination of such talent is lacking one very essential component, an actual professional planner. Given the primary role of the Michigan Land Use Council, the necessity of a professional planner is essential. Planners deal with land use everyday, and therefore have a full understanding of such matters.

The knowledge, experience, and insight of a professional planner are inherently valuable to the council. I hope this very fundamental element is not overlooked, and that the Michigan Society of Planning plays a key role within the council.

Overall, we should optimize the usefulness of a land use council by including the most appropriate skill sets. However, its establishment and current membership is a step in the right direction.

Mike Rogers  
Oakland County commissioner

### Seeds of help

As residents of the Farmington-Farmington Hills community and also members of the board of directors of Seedlings Braille Books for Children, we would like to publicly thank the Farmington area businesses and groups that supported our 16th Annual Bow-athon for Braille Books.

On March 16, nearly 200 bowlers came out to bowl with WNIC's Chris Edmonds to raise funds to help bring the gift of literacy to blind children in our own community and throughout the United States and Canada. We hope to raise a record \$30,000 this year. Pledges are still coming in!

The generous prize donors and lane sponsors from the Farmington area included: Great Harvest Bread Co. of Downtown Farmington, Grand River & Halsted Shell, Diamond Boutique, Farmington Bakery, Dunleavy's Pub &

Grill, Fresh Approach, Luigi's Trattoria, Big Apple Bagels, Starbucks Coffee Company, West Oaks Civitan Club, Farmington Area Lions, Hercules Coney Island, Jeanne's Hallmark, Marvin's Marvelous Mechanical Museum, Buddy's Restaurant/Pizzeria and 100.3 WNIC.

Mike Beals, Paula Korelitz and Sue Ward  
Farmington Hills

### Not Flanders

As a parent of a student who attends Flanders Elementary School, I am surprised that our school was picked over other schools in the district for the school of choice program.

Flanders is a small school, and Farmington taxes are already through the roof. There are only two classrooms, sometimes even a split grade classroom, per grade level.

What will the solution be when Flanders is too crowded? Add on to the building? Oh, and how will that be paid for? Perhaps another increase in our property taxes?

I know many parents who are so upset by this program being instituted in our school that they are talking about doing their own "school of choice" and going to another elementary school within our district. For every one student coming from outside our district, I can see two existing Flanders students walking away.

I would not recommend Flanders to anyone moving into this area. Why not open up Hillside or Gill Elementary — they have a lot more to offer and a whole lot more room to offer it.

Laura Raymond  
Farmington Hills

### Supports Aldo

You seem to be laboring under the misconception that all of Aldo Vagnozzi's constituents think and feel as you.

To the contrary, I am one of his constituents who feels gratified that at least one of my elected officials shares my beliefs and that I am not patronizingly told that I am "misguided" or "misinformed" by one of my other elected officials when I disagree with his party line.

Robert W. Kirkland  
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

"The success of the downtown area is not only critical to my business, but also important to me personally."

— Dr. Daniel Vargovick, Farmington DDA's newest board member

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