



Stay on the same side as the hose

It's car wash season. I know this, because I spent Saturday washing cars. The event was arranged by The Longacre House's intrepid catering manager Neal Bostic, who says he'd like to hold one such fund-raising event every month. He might have been kidding about that.

We'll need more volunteers, so anyone who enjoys washing cars - or might like to do so as a way to help out Farmington/Farmington Hills' community house - should call him at (248) 477-8404.

Please call. Frankly, my knees aren't what they used to be, so we need a new "wheel girl."

But back to the car wash. My point here is to share the wealth of information and vast experience that came with working the car wash. It's a relatively easy fund-raising event to organize and expenses (labor notwithstanding) aren't exorbitant.

The Longacre House, you see, is self-supporting. Except for catering weddings and other events, the House relies solely on the community for financial support, through donations and memberships. It doesn't receive any funding from either the City of Farmington or the City of Farmington Hills.

I've learned the impact of this all over the past few months, as I serve on The Longacre House board of directors, which could also use a few more kind-hearted people willing to help keep the House moving forward into financial security and a much higher profile in the community.

But back to the car wash. We gathered on an absolutely gorgeous spring Saturday, a hearty group of souls rinsing, soaping and towel-drying. Some started at 8 a.m., but there weren't many cars until closer to 9. By the time I arrived at 9:15, we had a backup, thanks largely to a couple of cheerleaders who waved signs, whooped and hollered on Farmington Road.

My Best Friend, bless his heart, showed up minutes after I called for help, decked out in his driving hat and aviator sunglasses, grabbed a couple of towels and started drying. He had planned to be there anyway, but it's nice to have someone around who responds that quickly.

The first lesson I learned was also the most important. Anyone asks you to volunteer at a car wash, keep this in mind:

Always stay on the same side as the person with the hose.

It took me a little time to figure this out; as a result, my hair wasn't nearly as neat looking when I left as when I arrived.

The event was called "Car Wash 'n' a Dog," because we offered our patrons the option of having a hot dog, pop and chips while they waited for their cars. This was, I think, my favorite part because people got out of their cars and had the chance to really enjoy the grounds.

However, very few people wanted to have a hot dog or breakfast. So I took the lesson: If you're serving food, stay in the kitchen, make it something close to breakfast.

The Comeback Kid

BY PAUL H. PACE
STAFF WRITER

Looking at Melissa Garr today, one can hardly believe her parents faced the unthinkable prospect of making her funeral arrangements after she suffered critical injuries from a freak accident in 1997.

She was just 16 at the time. On a respirator and in a coma for months, Melissa faced nearly unbeatable odds. At least, that's what doctors told her parents.

In 1997, the Farmington community rallied to support the family of the Farmington High School student, who was injured after a large tree branch unexplainably fell 40 feet onto her head on July 23, 1997. At the time, she was baby-sitting children at the Farmington Glen Aquatic Center.

Doctors told her parents, Susan and Mike, the extensive injuries to their daughter's brain would likely leave her a "vegetable."

"My dad knew my stubbornness," Melissa said with a smile. "He said, 'She'll pull through this.'"

Still, recovery was a long, slow process. As hope seemed to run out, one day Melissa did something to turn the tide. She took a breath on her own.

Years of physical and mental therapy followed. Melissa was determined to graduate with the Class of 1999, which she accomplished despite losing a year of school and countless hours in therapy.

She followed that up by attending community college and receiving excellent grades. Each day, she strives to do more and be something better.

Now the 22-year-old is writing an autobiography about the amazing experience and the importance of never giving up hope.

"I'm writing this to help families in similar situations help themselves," she said, pointing out brain injury acci-



Melissa Garr listens to a critique of her writing by her former English teacher, Kurt Campbell.

dents are not as uncommon as some may believe.

She's also vehement that people who suffer from such conditions deserve to be treated

as equals.

The pending title of her book is *The Day the Sky Fell*. The story, in three parts, focuses on her high school

years before the accident, the painful rehabilitation and her life today.

She noted the Farmington Observer wrote more than 70

Farmington High graduate pens story of miracle recovery

'Miracles do happen. People have to believe at times there is light at the end of the tunnel.'

Melissa Garr recovered from critical injuries

stories about her ordeal, her comeback and involvement in the community, including successful blood drives in her name.

"I've proven doctors and hospitals wrong," she said proudly.

Melissa is a nanny today and also looks after children as head mistress at her church, St. Colette in Livonia. "I love children," she said. "I baby-sit all the time."

Melissa lives with her mother, who is an accompanist with the Farmington Community Chorus.

Melissa's dad is a lieutenant with the Farmington Hills Fire Department.

Melissa works as a nanny for neighbors Cheryl Blau and Michael Varverakis. Their children are Alexander, 4, and Max, 2.

Cheryl said she didn't know about Melissa's battle when they first met a couple of years ago.

Cheryl was astonished to learn the ordeal Melissa overcame. "I said, 'There's this miracle visiting my living room.' We feel lucky to have Melissa in our lives."

Melissa believes publishing her book is just another hurdle she's willing to face, with gusto, of course.

She's still editing the chapters, but she's confident it will be ready within six months.

"Miracles do happen," Melissa said. "People have to believe at times there is light at the end of the tunnel."

pace7@homecom.net | (248) 477-5450

Bridal consultant takes business to the Net

BY JONI HUBRED
STAFF WRITER

Soné Ellis has spent a lot of time helping those close to her make their weddings memorable.

Now, she's taking her gift for arrangements to the next level, having incorporated her business, Love Bells Bridal Services, earlier this year. She has also put together a Web site, pages.illvillage.com/lovebellsbridals/ and is included in theknot.com and other bridal listings.

"I've been doing this for the last five years for family and friends," said Ellis. "When I had my daughter, I started doing it full time."

Most of her business comes right now through recommendations from clients happy with her services. She set up displays at her first two bridal shows this year, the first of which exposed her custom services to more than 700 brides.

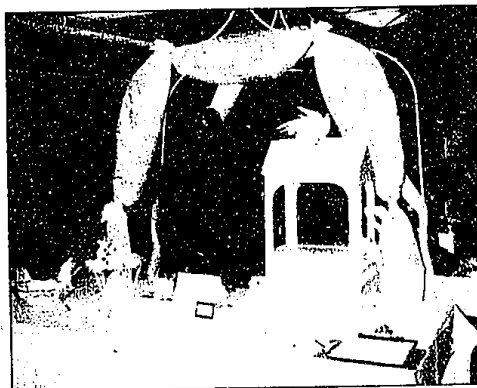
The second was a little smaller, but still highly successful. It's been an exciting ride from the first wedding she organized, which was for a girlfriend, who is now one of several Love Bells assistants.

"I liked doing research and comparing vendors," she said. "So I took a home study course, which included the different cultures and traditions. That's when I knew I wanted to do this, to learn more."

Ellis offers a variety of packages, everything from a soup-to-nuts full service package to a custom-designed menu of services selected by the bride and groom.

"I try to put it all together to make their dreams come true," said Ellis, who is herself engaged to be married.

Plans for her wedding are in progress. The most popular venues are generally booked early in the year.



Soné Ellis attended her first bridal shows this year, displaying the services she has to offer brides.

She's had to break that news to couples who have called her a month in advance to arrange a wedding and recommends a six- to eight-month planning schedule.

In addition to booking limousines, caterers and music, Ellis also offers a custom wedding invitation and program, she works with couples to design a look that's in keeping with the theme of their wedding.

Ellis usually sits down with the couple at first in a place of their choosing - at home or another central location - to learn what their dream wedding wishes are.

That's when she sets about doing the research to obtain samples and information about various vendors for their approval.

She even creates "welcome packages" to give out-of-town guests information about the Detroit metro area and can arrange hotel accommodations.

Her favorite part of the process is pulling all the elements together on the big day.

She especially enjoys the romantic touches, like rose petals on the floor and fancy canapés on elegantly appointed reception tables.

"I love seeing all the decorations at

'I do this because I love it, and it's my job. I wanted to do something where I could stay home with my children (who are 1 1/2 and 3 1/2 years old). They're just as busy as I am.'

Soné Ellis
bridal consultant

the wedding and reception," Ellis said. "That's my favorite part."

She attends every wedding she plans, and reserves the whole day to be available to each client. "I give couples my undivided attention for that day," Ellis said, noting she and her assistants stay in touch using walkie-talkies. For a larger wedding, she might assign two or three assistants to work with her.

"I do this because I love it, and it's my job," Ellis said. "I wanted to do something where I could stay home with my children (who are 1 1/2 and 3 1/2 years old). They're just as busy as I am."

Current wedding trends include SUV limousines, unique flowers like calla lilies, color in wedding gowns and even in veils, and "angel girls" instead of flower girls.

But every couple is special to Ellis. "I like doing unique things for each wedding," she said.

For more information, call (313) 492-1248.

jhubred@homecom.net | (248) 477-5450