



DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL SERVICES
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Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 1, 2010

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"Farmington: A Community Remembers" To Recall Rural Childhood

Farmington Hills— More and more children are growing up today with little or no opportunity for unstructured play, especially outdoors. Farmington Historical Society Commissioners, John Willyard, Sherrie Stewart, Ann Stolberg and Brian Golden are working this summer to gather community recollections of growing up in Farmington. This will culminate in a fascinating event to take place September 24 and 25, in the charming historical buildings and surroundings of Farmington Hills' Heritage Park, called, "Farmington: A Community Remembers". The Commission members are urging the public to contact the committee in advance with memories and stories that relate to Heritage Park and other historic preserves. To share your childhood memories, contact Brian Golden at (248) 701-8112, or Elizabeth Goodenough at lizgoode@umich.edu.

The two-day art and flower show followed by a park "playfest" will highlight what were, and still are, our most precious resources: children and nature. The historical meaning of the word "ecology" takes root in the Greek word for "home." In this celebration of Farmington's physical landscapes, a community will explore what it means to create a rich and deliberately knowing relationship with living things in the countryside we call home.

This elegant autumn social event, co-sponsored by the Porch Party, offers opportunities to Farmington residents--regardless of where they grew up--to reminisce over refreshments. The event begins on Friday, 4-10 pm, with an exhibition of Farmington Garden Clubs' flower arrangements, oil paintings by Eleanor Goodenough Spicer, old photographs, movies from the past, and on site interviews of residents about their play histories.

On Saturday, from 10 am to 4 pm, the focus will be on how children and their families have worked and played in an agricultural community of the past. With volunteers on hand to demonstrate old fashioned games like jacks, mumblety-peg, jump rope rhymes, and historic bicycling, this event will bring together folks of all ages for a free day of fun. Young and old will be invited to share games, chores, and recreational pastimes at Heritage Park, from hayrides and dollmaking to

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whittling and kite flying. Farming implements and related exhibits will be displayed at the Heritage Historical Museum on site.

The idea for the event originated with a March 2010 screening of *Where Do the Children Play?*, organized by David Boyer and Bryan Farmer of the City of Farmington Hills' Special Services Department. After viewing the Emmy Award-winning documentary, the audience discussed the importance of remembered playscapes. *Where Do the Children Play?* grew out of Elizabeth N. Goodenough's work on "secret spaces of childhood" at the University of Michigan. "Children need free time every day to discover their own abilities, desires, and limitations," says Goodenough, a descendant of the original inhabitants of historic Longacre House in Heritage Park. Goodenough also edited the film's two companion volumes, *A Study Guide* and *A Place for Play*. "Open-ended exploration and play in woods, fields, vacant lots, or other semi-wild spaces enhances curiosity and confidence throughout life."

A marked decline in children's spontaneous and creative play is a key factor in their increasing mental and physical health problems, according to a recent statement from an international group of educators and children's advocates. They called for "a wide-ranging and informed public dialogue about the intrinsic nature and value of play in children's healthy development." Caring for the health of our rivers, towns, planet, other species and ourselves requires that we understand our relationship to the physical landscapes in which we live. This September weekend aims to rekindle a spirit of childlike curiosity in the rural traditions and natural rhythms that belong to the Farmington we remember and enjoy.

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