

September's wet song: the bounty of summer

SEPTEMBER IS a month which tends to be overlooked in folklore and poetry.

In southern Michigan it's a wet month, often wetter than April, which is famed for its showers.

September doesn't get credit for its remaining warmth because July and August were so much hotter in comparison. Yet officially the days are still longer than the nights.

The crops of summer are still coming in. The first tart apples of the season will be showing up on the fruit stands, although the sweetest apples are still a month off.

Except for a few scattered and exposed trees, the fall color change doesn't really start in September. You will have to travel to the northern climes to see color now.

Even for the birds, it's a month of betwixt and between. The baby birds and ducklings are as big as their parents now, but the fall migration hasn't quite started.

TO THE KIDS, September is fall because their centers of learning have begun to operate. And for their friends in the vacation industry, fall starts the Tuesday after Labor Day.

Yet it's not a true fall for there are no ghosts. In pagan, Christian and American Indian folklore, there is a time for ghosts, and it arrives late in October, right about when the first frosts snap out the green.

Except for some rain, September is one of southern Michigan's pleasantest months. If you can get outdoors. No longer do maniacal speedboaters carve up the lakes. The waters settle, and the fish end their dog-days lethargy, stocking up on food for the winter. Many anglers call September the best month of all.

In the woods, the bugs are less active, and the humidity is down. Michigan's woods are as pleasant in September as they are in June, and a whole lot more enjoyable than in May. Except for a bit of a squirrel season, there is little in the way of shotgunning going on.

The winds of Shawandasee from the south and Mudjeteewis from the west are sometimes shouldered aside by the winds of Hiawatha from the northwest. Yet there is no real "snap" to the air.

IN OUR CITIES, life becomes more sociable and social, for better or worse.

With the start of school, there is the rejuvenation of school clubs and of parents' clubs which support the school. Everyone has to "get organized."

For the sports enthusiast, September may be the highlight of the year. The baseball season is roaring to the climax, and everyone wonders if the Tigers will hang on or hobble it once again.

Real football, not the preseason shakedown games, is with us, both in the Silverdome and on the campuses. Whatever gloom the rains may bring is instantly dispelled when Bob Ufer waxes loudly and eloquently on the glory that is Schembechler and the grandeur that was Yost at Me-e-e-ehigan. Watch how people always smile when they listen to Ufer.

No longer a nation of spectators, Americans also start their bowling leagues in September. And if summer vacations and August's humidity have slowed down the joggers, September will bring them out again.

The new television shows arrive in September. Most are steadily more dreadful than the ghastly junk of last year, but at least they are fresh, new programs, and maybe one or two classics will be among them.

September — an overlooked and underrated month.



Will the supermarket newspaper survive?

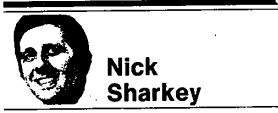
A group of mostly white, middle-aged and male newspaper executives met in Phoenix, Ariz. last week to discuss the future of their business.

What they learned tells us not only much about newspapers, but about all forms of communication in the years ahead. That's why I will share some of those ideas in this column.

"History tells us that no business has been able to change until it was too late," newspaper consultant Steve Star told the executives. "Businesses become out-of-date and are near destruction before they begin to adjust. The hope is that newspapers can make changes while they are still prospering."

Star recited the often-mentioned list of new competition for the local newspaper: cable television, home computers, in-depth specialty magazines, shoppers and small weeklies.

NOT ONLY are the methods of communication changing rapidly, but so is the audience. Or as Star put it, "Will the 25-year-old in 10



years act as the 35-year-old today?" Newspapers traditionally have low readership among young adults. They count on these young adults to grow up, begin their own families and then become newspaper readers.

It may not be so, Star warns. Newspaper reading may not be a function of age, but of lifestyle. If the 25-year-old is living perfectly well without the newspaper now, who is to say that won't continue when he's 35 years old?

To the discomfort of the newspaper executives, Star talked of the changing needs of retail mer-

chants — the backbone of support for local newspapers.

These retailers are now reaching for a regional, state and even national audience. Will they continue to be served in the years ahead by a local newspaper which reaches a more limited audience than they desire?

Also, newspapers for decades have been a cafeteria of information for their readers. They have offered much information in many categories (called sections) and permitted the reader to pick-and-choose what he or she desires to read. In effect, by selecting a few bits of information from the great amount delivered in every newspaper, the reader has been able to edit his own newspaper.

But how long, asks Star, can that continue? With dramatic rises in the cost of newsprint (paper), energy and distribution, can newspapers continue to deliver as much general information as they currently do?

NOT ALL of Star's pitch to the newspaper executives was pessimistic. In the firmest way possible, he was trying to warn them that they must stay in tune with the quickly changing needs of their readers and the new means of communication.

Newspapers must tailor their products to the needs of the reader in the future, not to the reader of the past. They must alter their presentation to take a place in a vast new array of communications methods.

In the future, groceries may be ordered through a home computer. Stock market quotations may be viewed on a cable television station. Magazine reading may be confined to keeping up with your favorite hobby.

Local newspapers such as the one you are reading today will contain different information, what that will be, no one can say for sure right now.

But all of these changes will alter your means of receiving information. It should be interesting.

Curmudgeons miss point of telethon

Last weekend thousands of area suburbanites joined with the rest of the nation in what has become this country's largest annual reaffirmation of itself.

Persons from all economic strata, religious and ethnic backgrounds gathered in shopping malls, skating rinks, parking lots and back yards. They danced, sang, ate, threw basketballs, did cartwheels, played bingo, went to carnivals, jogged and swam.

You name the activity and somewhere, someone was sponsoring a "thon."

For this one day, labor unions and business union. Politicians entertainers and athletes spoke out in a unified voice.

But this celebration went beyond words and entertainment for entertainment's sake. At day's end, an economically hard-pressed America had looked beyond its own self-interest and built a \$20-million war chest to fight a disease — more than \$2 million of which was contributed by metro-Detroiters.

Of course, I'm talking about the annual Muscular Dystrophy Labor Day Telethon.

In the last 30 years, the telethon has mushroomed from a one-station effort to a nationwide television extravaganza. Many Americans support the effort and put their money where their mouths are.

OTHERS, a surly and cantankerous gaggle to be sure, content themselves with pinpricking the event, backing up their objections with a maximum of hot air and a minimum of cranial matter.

Philosophical objections range from left to right. Some say the telethon undermines the move toward



socialized medicine. Others maintain a concentration on one disease neglects others. Still others say they are tired of business getting the bite put on it from charity.

But the most ludicrous objection to date is "I don't like Jerry Lewis' syndrome. How ridiculous and petty can some persons get?"

The naysayers have gained enough acclaim to have been given national credence with appearances on public television's "MacNeil-Lehrer Report" and "The Phil Donahue Show."

But no matter what the forum, their objections ring hollow when compared to the overwhelming outpouring of charity expressed by the majority of persons in this country.

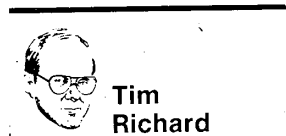
The discomfited miss the point. Certainly those who stand behind the MD telethon realize chances for a cure of the some 40 diseases under the umbrella group is remote.

But the annual contributions have made life easier for a group of persons who just a decade or two ago were a forgotten and neglected minority.

BUT MOST IMPORTANTLY the telethon, despite its carnival atmosphere, is a national symbol of hope — a symbol badly needed in a nation which in recent years has become devoid of purpose.

So right on, Jerry, right on, America. May the telethon continue and may it someday soften the hearts of those who have become hardened to the idea of a nation which one day a year shows compassion.

Jailers find more clients are mentals



pte requiring "mental health intervention" compared to 1979. This year, the average is up 25 percent from 1980.

WHY DO SO many more people at the jail seem to have mental problems? Spreen gave these reasons:

- "The stringent requirements for involuntary hospitalization do, in fact, result in the jailing of persons who might otherwise be housed in mental hospitals." That is, the cop runs into bizarre behavior; the hospital won't admit the bizarre person; the cop must take him to jail.

- "Some situations arise because group homes are unable to provide the necessary care and protection a mentally ill person needs."
- "Additionally, the incidence of untreated mental health problems" places a burden on the police officer as the first line of local defense.

WHAT IT MEANS is that jail personnel need to be trained to handle not only the traditional crop of drunks, first offenders, misdemeanants, aggressive homosexuals and sophisticated criminals awaiting trial. The jailers must also deal with more of the mentally ill.

At this point in his speech, Spreen outlines what Oakland County has done to train staff and add personnel to deal with mental problems. He boasts, probably correctly, that few jails in Michigan have done much with "mentals" except strip and confine them to keep them from hurting themselves.

He calls for a "marriage" between law enforcement and mental health people. It's the kind of deep thinking one rarely hears from a cop. I applaud it.

But Spreen ends his speech with a characteristic Spreenism: a ranting against "politicians (who) simply do not understand or do not want to."

And once again, unfortunately, Spreen blows away his chance to be an effective leader as well as an intelligent and humane cop.

The time has come to say something good about Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen, who has taken his share of knocks, usually for cause.

An intellectually brilliant and humane cop, Spreen has been ineffective as sheriff of the sprawling suburban-rural county of one million. The reason is that he is used to operating in a unitary setup like New York City or Detroit.

Oakland is different. In most metropolitan counties, one city has half the population and dominates the county. But no city in Oakland has as much as 10 percent of the population. If anything is to be accomplished, it must be done through a high degree of self-effacing cooperation.

This is where Spreen as a sheriff falls down. His conversation is peppered with references to his own "40 years of professional experience" while everyone else comes off as "a politician." Spreen's attitude, in a county with 40 independent police units, dooms him to failure. He cannot, he will not, grasp the "Oakland ethic."

BUT THIS column was to be about his intellect and humanitarianism. Recently he addressed the Michigan Psychiatric Society, which in itself is a testimonial to Spreen. He talked about jails, "the intake point for our entire criminal justice system... the catchall."

"A further problem is that more and more mentally ill persons are being brought to our jails. . . . The problem of housing 'mentals' in jails isn't new," he said, citing colonial New England's human warehouses.

But recent decisions by the state regarding mental releases from institutions are creating even more problems for the jails.

The numbers are startling: In 1980, the county jail saw a 46 percent increase in the number of peo-