

editorial opinion

Human rescue service needs fighting chance

The Farmington Hills Ambulance Company should be given a chance.

In the last week a lot of back has been raised over action taken by the Hills city council in hiring the private firm to provide human rescue service. A concerned group of residents would like to see the city institute its own full-time rescue unit.

What should be kept in mind is that some kind of service has to be provided and in no way is the city about to fork over the needed funds to outfit a public rescue unit in the next four months. The contract will cost the city \$2,000 a month. After it expires in June, the city council will reevaluate the service to see if it has lived up to the expectations promised by company owner Barney Slobin.

City residents have nothing to lose and much to gain in giving the Hills ambulance company a try. The company's men are well-trained. The equipment provided in their mobile rig is the best of its kind.

The city just couldn't provide this kind of service before June, if ever.

Most importantly, the council's action isn't an insult to the city's fine volunteer fire department personnel. These men have served the city loyally, putting in many hours of their time to aid persons in distress.

The volunteers also should be credited with for-

king out their own backs to become better trained.

But they do have some disadvantages staring them in the face, they are unauthorized to transport persons to hospitals. Neither do they have the equipment necessary to provide advanced emergency medical care on the scene.

The Hills ambulance company does.

Since the controversy started, many stories have floated around about incidents involving the Hills ambulance company. Most are unsubstantiated.

Residents and volunteer firemen should keep a cool head about the situation. To be fair to the entire community, an unbiased appraisal should be made of the contracted service.

Slobin has expressed a willingness to work with the volunteer firemen. He admits that many times the volunteers have been valuable in working with his personnel at the scene of accidents.

Concerned residents should keep informed of the situation. When the contract comes up for renewal, they should make it their business to see how the Hills ambulance company's performance stacked up. Then they should decide whether they want to spend the additional taxes for a public human rescue service.

STEVE BARNABY



Cash register technology will favor the customers

Ever go to a movie where the story line was presented through the eyes of three or four different people, and by the time it was over you could not tell what really happened because the versions were so different?

Well, the debate over computer pricing at grocery stores is just like the movie. The basic idea is to pre-print each grocery item with a computer-scannable code. When you go through the check-out counter, the clerk passes the item over a scanner which automatically reads the item into a computer and prints out an itemized and priced bill on your check-out tape.

If such a procedure were adopted—and it has been in a few local stores on a test basis, including the Farmer Jack store at Winchester Mall in Avon Township—it would mean that individual items at the supermarket would not have the price marked directly on the can or the package. Instead, the price of the goods would be marked on the store's shelf.

The grocery industry, which is backing the experiment, says it is intended to use the technology of automation as a means of cutting costs. Where do the savings come from? In part because the labor of marking prices on individual items is saved, since the scannable codes on the packages are pre-printed. In addition, further cost savings come from increased speed at the check-out counters together with much faster and more accurate inventory control.

TO HEAR some people talk about the idea, however, you'd think it was nothing other than a vast plot to mulct the unwary consumer.

The worry expressed by opponents of the automated check-out system is that, with individual prices no longer marked on individual items, comparison shopping is no longer possible. Further, fears are expressed about the accuracy of the computer that translates the product price codes into prices at the cash register.

Concern about the system has gone so far as to result in a bill, presently under consideration by the Michigan State Senate, that would require all grocery stores to mark individual prices on each item in the store, automated check-out system or not.

Frankly, I don't think that any grocery store manager could survive much more than a day or two in this area's competitive grocery market if word got out that he was rigging his price computer. So let's lay that item to rest.

A traveler's head swells

Travelers are funny animals.

You take a meek, mild mannered person with a fairly inconsequential job, give him a briefcase and put him on a train or plane and you'd never know him.

It is an escape from the hum-drum world of reality. By some mystic process, if he is an assistant sales manager, he becomes sales manager, and if he's a vice-president he becomes president of his company.

Apparently, when one is surrounded by strangers he never intends to see again, the need to be important blossoms.

AND WHEN this traveler arrives at his destination, whether it be motel or hotel, you would think he came directly from a palace with a full staff.

He stands around waiting to be waited on. When he gets to his room he overtops the bellhop, hoping in his imaginative world that the word will get around that he must be someone special because he is a big tipper (with company funds).

Once he's alone he fills his suitcase with everything in the room that isn't nailed down: the postcards in the drawer, stationery, those little pads by the side of the phone and, of course, the individually wrapped soap for the kiddies.

IF THE TRAVELER doesn't have a fresh wrapped bar of soap every day the housekeeping department he should be. Yet he has to be probably use the same old silver of soap for weeks.

And bath towels, too. At home he probably uses

Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER



WHICH leaves the bulk of the argument revolving around the trade-off between comparison shopping with a can in the hand and reduced costs to the grocery stores.

There is no doubt that not having the price on each individual item in the store is an aggravation. You can't walk around with a can of soup in your hand, comparing its price with other brands.

However, nearly all grocery stores arrange their goods on the shelves by type of product. Soups are near soups, cereals next to other cereals, and so on. So as long as—and this is a critical step in the discussion—the prices of each item are clearly marked on the shelf, comparison shopping is still easily possible.

Food industry sources swear that they intend to make certain this happens. Competition, I suspect, will act as a spur, since not many shoppers are going to patronize a store which fails to post the prices of food clearly on the shelves.

Further, if you are bothered—as I am—by the un-itemized checkout tapes you get at the supermarket, with just a list of prices and no enumeration of the items, you'll be happy at a by-product of the new system. It will be a check-out tape with the name of each item and the price entered right next to it.

On balance, I think the argument is in favor of technology. Let's not tie the hands of the food people who can save something on their costs which ultimately may be passed on to their customers.

The bill to require prices on each item of food is an unreasonable hindrance to progress. If abuses develop in the food industry as a result of the automated system, they can be rectified when they happen.

But the industry deserves a chance to try to save some money and help all of us beat the high cost of living.



Eccentricities

by HANA HOGAN

the same towel for a week but in a hotel, if the towel is used once, it is dirty.

If he takes two showers in one day and there is only one bath towel, naturally he calls the housekeeping department for more towels and is quite irate about it.

When he goes out to dinner, whether with a customer or not, he eats the finest foods complemented by fine wines, yet he complains to his wife about the high cost of the food she serves the kids while he's away—which in many cases is plain hamburger.

WHEN THE TRAVELER is about to head home, he takes time to charge his bill on a credit card that takes at least 60 days for the bill to get to his home so he can collect from his company immediately and have the use of the money for a while.

The first morning back at the office, while preparing his expense account, he tries to figure out how to justify the large tips. Chances are they end up appearing as cab fares.

Yes, travelers are funny animals.

Unbelievable!

Mayor Young's headlines

Reading the political news these days is like seeing that Japanese movie "Rashomon," where the same story is told from the points of view of the outraged husband, the wronged wife and the bandits.

First comes the Hon. Coleman A. Young, mayor of Detroit delivering his state of the city address: "The cost of city government this year will be about \$10 million. That's almost \$50 million more than we will receive in revenues. Not because our spending got out of control, by the way. It's because state and federal revenue sharing fell \$12 million short (and) because new tax programs were never enacted in the state legislature."

Got that? Detroit's revenues are "\$12 million short" because of federal and state revenue sharing shortfalls.

Now we consult the Hon. William G. Milliken, governor, revealing the state of the state. After

proposing a share the wealth property tax sharing plan for southeastern Michigan, Milliken added:

"I want to emphasize that nothing could be further from the truth than suggestions that I, this year, will be turning a deaf ear on Detroit. First of all, Detroit clearly would be the major beneficiary of my tax-base sharing plan. . . . Detroit in the next year would be getting an increase of \$10 million dollars in state revenue sharing, and that's an increase of 15 per cent. Furthermore, my budget will contain some special provisions for Detroit. Detroit also would be a major beneficiary of the transportation program I referred to. . . . So I would say, 'Don't be misled by the headlines.'"

And so a \$12 million revenue-sharing shortage in Young's calculations (shortage from what? Lactone turns out to be a \$10 million, 15 per cent increase.

Headlines, shmeadlines! It's Coleman A. Young whom you can't believe.

Tim Richard writes

ity). The companies have put their investments in more automation, into other states and into other countries.

The American consumer didn't throw rocks through auto showrooms or tar and feather UAW pickets. Rather, the consumer shifted 20 per cent of his auto purchases to foreign-made cars, costing the UAW hundreds of thousands of jobs.

And the pitiful response of Leonard Woodcock is to call for import quotas.

THE MICHIGAN Department of Agriculture announced last week it is "updating its listing of pick-your-own farms and farm markets for 1976 publication."

Growers who wish to be listed are asked to send information by Feb. 10 to the Information Division, Michigan Department of Agriculture, Lewis Cass Building, Lansing, Mich. 48913.

They'll publish names of farms, addresses, directions, products and dates open.

What's happening is that farmers either cannot afford to hire migrant fruit and vegetable pickers or want to avoid the hassle of dealing with state inspectors.

Whatever the reason, the plain fact is that state laws with lofty intentions have cost pickers many jobs.

The farmers didn't picket the Capitol or declare their farms to be free and independent states. They just quit hiring.

And now the pickers, instead of living in miserable farm shacks, are living in miserable city slums. Some reform.

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