

editorial opinion

A shrinking Clarenceville

Small school districts share the same money problems as their larger neighbors.

That was the message given at a service club luncheon meeting by David McDowell, Clarenceville School District superintendent.

He discussed declining enrollments, shrinking state school aid, staff and administrative cutbacks, mandated costs and programs from the state legislature, among other items.

Clarenceville, which takes in parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township, has gone from a peak enrollment of nearly 4,000 in the late 1960s to a current 2,850 and expects to drop to 1,670 in five years.

The 1,570 for kindergartners through 12th graders is about the same of a medium size suburban high school.

But it is also about the same size as nearly half the school districts in Michigan.

McDowell said that the district faces rising payroll costs although there are fewer employees. This is due to contractual salary increments for remaining teachers and employees and substantially higher utility costs.

McDowell said that in the past seven years, the district's heating bill has tripled even though one of six Clarenceville buildings has been closed.

Electrical bills have about doubled in that same period.

Like his counterparts in larger districts with the same problems, McDowell made a plea for more state financial help—and State Sen. Robert Geake (R-Northville) was in the audience.

But smallness doesn't necessarily mean that everything is bad and the future gloomy, the superintendent said.

McDowell, a Clarenceville High School principal for five years and head of the district for the past 12 years, pointed out a number of positive things that can be accomplished in a small district.

High school principals can know each student by name. Pupils can try out and usually make varsity athletic teams. Or they can take part in other school groups, such as plays and musicals.

Programs and accomplishments are usually completed more quickly with a small district because there isn't a middle-layer of administration to go through.

This is McDowell's subtle way of saying Clarenceville doesn't want to be consolidated with any of the larger neighboring districts of Livonia, Farmington, or Redford Union.

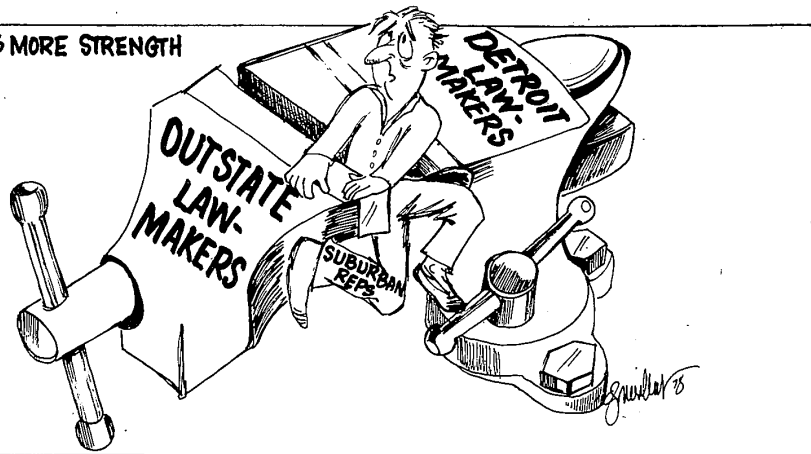
Ultimately, the parents and taxpayers in the Clarenceville district will have to decide the future of the school institution.

While there are a number of educational and social advantages to have a small district, those advantages carry a price.

The people paying the price will have to tell the school board in the next year or two whether Clarenceville has a future.

LEONARD POGER

HE NEEDS MORE STRENGTH



Oakland negotiating for an ally

Politically, the southeastern Michigan suburbs are weak and divided.

At no time was this more apparent than in last month's vote in the state house of representatives on the \$16 million "urban grant program." The legislature had already passed a revenue sharing package with plenty of help for Detroit, so the extra dividend—of which Detroit got 75 per cent—was a pure money grab.

The bill got two more than the required 56 votes precisely because Detroit lawmakers made deals with outstate lawmakers. Suburban representatives voted in vain against it. But they were outmaneuvered, caught between a rock and a hard place.

There are probably dozens of other examples floating around the law books and legislative hoppers.

IN WASHINGTON, Michigan's congressional delegation made a practice of having breakfast together at least once a month.

Ideologically, the delegation spans the spectrum from liberal urban Democrats like John Conyers to conservative Republicans like Elford Cederberg of Midland. But when an issue such as the health of the auto industry, affecting the whole state, comes along, they manage to stand together.

U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell (R-Plymouth) is involved in organizing a suburban coalition, too, on Capitol Hill.



Tim Richard

Suburban legislators ought not to think selfishly of gouging the state treasury. But they would be doing their constituents a service if they could gang up with enough strength to prevent the outlying regions of this metropolis from being caught in the Detroit-outstate vise time after time.

THESE THOUGHTS took form in my skull as I contemplated the prospect of a series of meetings between the two biggest guys in our region—Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young and Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy.

Young wants to protect the Detroit Zoo. Murphy wants to see construction of I-696, which is slated to go past the zoo. One of their agenda items in working out a safe solution. That's good.

The M-275 project in western Oakland County is dead. While the environmentalists claim credit, some of us suspect that the mayor's fine hand was involved because M-275 would have constituted a freeway bypass of Detroit. Nevertheless, western Oakland folks have a real road problem. Perhaps

Murphy can work out something with Young to neutralize Detroit on getting a state trunkline out there.

Young wants a subway. Murphy wants a truly regional public transportation system. Less than \$1 billion in federal money is available. We can't have both a lengthy subway and a regional transit system for that kind of money. Perhaps they can negotiate a compromise.

"YOU'LL SEE the mayor do everything he can to stop out-migration from Detroit," said Pat Nowak, Murphy's right-hand man in these delicate matters.

"The mayor lives in a theory world that says if you stop building roads and sewers, you'll stop out-migration. We think the opposite: people will want to move; our building permits show that."

"Detroit is economically important to the region and the state. We feel Oakland should not be competing for major industry against Detroit," Nowak said. Nevertheless, the executive's position is that Oakland's normal growth needs to be accommodated.

Detroit has dealt with outstate legislators, with whom it has nothing in common, to win things both wanted. It would make even more sense if suburbia's political forces could get their act together and make some deals themselves, preferably with their neighbors in Detroit. Otherwise with the out-state troops.

Michigan is missing a good investment

Michigan has a cyclical economy.

Our main industry, automobiles, is on a three-year cycle. Automakers revamp their models every three years and, in the past, people have financed their cars over three years.

We might end up with a four-year cycle if the current four-year auto financing trend continues.

The longer financing will keep the payments level, even though the price of cars has increased.

Because of the cycle, when the economy of Detroit is up, it is really up—and our unemployment rate is below national average. But when cars are not being sold, our economy is really down.

Experts have been struggling with this problem for years. Michigan went to an income tax as the main source of its revenues in the early 1960s because sales tax collections were as up and down as auto sales and hence unpredictable.

THE QUESTION has been: How can we attract to the area an industry that has its "ups" at a time when the auto industry has its "downs"?

To date, no one has come up with an answer. In Michigan, the No. 2 industry is tourism.

It is the No. 1 industry in more than 30 states in the nation. Tourism is a smokeless industry that creates economic activity, provides many low-level unskilled jobs, and produces sales tax revenue from people who will never use the services the sales tax revenue finances—schools, welfare, mental health and police protection.

Michigan has some of the finest tourist facilities. There is no place prettier than upper Michigan in the summer.

There are more ski lifts in Michigan than in any other state.

We have a four-season state with beautiful colors in fall and tulip festivals in spring.

BUT TO REALLY be in the tourist business, there must be more promotion and more facilities attracting more people.

Look what happened to little Orlando, Fla., after Disney World moved in. It didn't have the beaches



by HANK HOLMAN

of Miami, it was inland, and its winter weather was not as warm as southern Florida. Yet that is where the growth is now.

The economic growth in the United States is now in the sun belt. If we don't reverse this trend, we

can only look for more and more problems for our state.

Even though tourism is the No. 2 industry, we are not spending a lot of public money to expand it. Other states are.

Tourism could help us overcome our three-year cycle. But money must be raised for promotion, and developers must be sought out for outstanding facilities.

THE MONEY could be raised if we imposed a state tax on hotel rooms. The hotels wouldn't object if the money were earmarked for promotion.

It would also have to be allocated by county to assure an equal spread in a statewide effort.

Then some state money should be spent to find developers for tourist-type activities, whether it be an amusement park or a gambling casino.

Then legislation should be passed, allowing the issuance of economic development bonds to help raise funds for the new facilities. Most economic development organizations are geared to bringing in factories, and present legislation probably isn't appropriate for the scale that is necessary to make our state a major tourist facility.

None of this is wish dreaming. It is all possible. All it needs is a leader and a lot of support.

(The writer is chairman of the Oakland County Tourist and Convention Bureau.)



By R. W. EUGAR

The Stroller

A happy homecoming

Homecomings always have held a strange fascination for The Stroller.

As a young chap back in the hills of Pennsylvania, he always was keenly interested in welcoming the young men back from World War I. He well remembers rushing across the bridge to the railroad station to greet one of the town heroes who was returning minus his left arm. He lost it in the service of his country.

And he never can forget the greeting from his mother on his first trip back home after strolling along the journalistic trail on The Detroit Free Press.

HE HAD BEEN gone from home for eight months, and he knew she would be glad to see him.

As the neighbor's automobile approached the old home, The Stroller pictured his mother standing in the doorway, then wrapping her arms around him to welcome him home. But the greeting was far different.

Instead of her rushing up to him and embracing him, she took one look and said, for all to hear, "Good g-d, he's got a top coat. He always wanted one." That was her way of realizing her only boy was making good—far from home.

And Homecoming Day at the various universities of the land where he travelled to cover the football games in fall always left The Stroller with a lump in his throat. He'd see hundreds of old grads in the stands, thrilled to be back on campus.

When the band played "The Yellow and Blue" in Michigan Stadium, he'd see tears running down the cheeks of tycoons of industry and high civic officials. They were at an emotional peak, reliving their days on campus and others rolling back the years to live again as a member of the Maize and Blue football squads.

There was something about these sights that stamped them as much different from other Saturday afternoons in the stadium. It was Homecoming Day and a day of rekindling memories.

WHILE THESE sights always held a strange fascination, there was a homecoming the other day that dwarfed all the others from an emotional standpoint, and it was a day The Stroller never will forget.

Early in the week, Leona, The Stroller's help-

mate who had been confined to the hospital where she had her arthritic knee replaced in one of the miracles of modern surgery, was told that if she progressed well over the next four days, she could return home. It was the word for which she had been waiting.

"You bet I'll improve over the next four days," she told the doctors. So, with the same courage with which she faced the replacing of her knee, she took to therapy and started walking better than she had in the early stages.

Then, at the end of four days, the call came. "The doctors will be here in about 15 minutes to give me one last examination and then sign my release."

YOU CAN IMAGINE the feeling as The Stroller and his neighbors raced to the hospital and helped her to prepare for a departure. When we arrived, the drawn look seemed to disappear from her face. There was a smile as she passed through the exit to be put aboard the station wagon.

She had won her battle—a battle in which she was close at times to being a casualty. And now she was heading home after seven weeks on the medical fighting front.

"31515 Grove Drive (the home address) will never look better," she said with the low voice of one who had been confined for so long a time.

Finally we turned into the drive. As the station wagon came to a stop as close to the door as possible, she said, "Home!" She didn't have to say any more. The Stroller had a huge lump in his throat as did the others who came to greet her.

Ironically, even the flock of pheasants that had congregated close to the back door all fall, came walking through the snow. So did cardinals and the winter doves and the snowbirds. And not to be outdone, the squirrels were on hand, too.

Leona was home. And what a great welcoming group!

It was homecoming day at The Stroller's residence, and there never will be a happier one.

Leona is back home, and all seems right with the world again.

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