

## editorial opinion

# In search of an ethnic Christmas celebration

While researching a series on ethnic Christmas customs, I was confronted with identical responses from members of the community that made me wonder where all the traditions went.

After calling Italians with surnames as Italian as the Tower of Pisa, Greeks with names as Greek as ozo and Latinos with names as Latin as the rumba, I was sorry I did.

They said they didn't celebrate Christmas according to their ethnic cultural traditions because they believe that "if you're different, people are going to treat you different," or that "when in America, do as the Americans," and that "we left our old traditions in the old country."

Hearing that is like finding out Aurelio Rodriguez is Hungarian and goulash is Mexican.

**THERE IS A NOTION** that for years has been entrenched in the minds of Americans that America is supposed to be the greatest melting pot of societies.

In fact, many history and sociology texts take pride in this characteristic of America—where everyone assimilates into the pot of foreign mixtures, creating a pure American recipe.

I feel that a melting pot society is like mixing the three primary colors together and coming out with mud—no distinct color, no distinct identity.

Losing the identity of your homeland may have been in vogue at the turn of the century when first generation Americans could only secure a job if they shed their foreign accents and names, but this is no longer the case.

People should be proud of their ethnic heritage and capitalize on it, not neutralize it.

**A CULTURALLY PLURALISTIC** society—where each ethnic group respects the cultural traditions and customs of the other, working and living in harmony—is one to strive for.

America was built by "foreigners" and the greatest contributions to this country have been made by first and second generation Americans.

Much attention has been devoted to the subject of the breakdown of American families. Could the crumbling of family ties be a direct manifestation of the deterioration of family traditions, customs and ethnic pride? Whatever happened to those glorious stories about the old country? Have we become too progressive to remember?

**ETHNIC-HERITAGE** studies are making their way into public schools. State law (Public Act 242) requires that bilingual-bicultural education be provided for children whose native tongue is not English.

Imagine. The federal government is subsidizing knowledge that many students could absorb at home, if there were an incentive to do so.

The ethnic-heritage studies programs have excellent and rewarding intentions, but it is saddening that schools must assume the duties of parents.

Christmas can be a time to instill a sense of ethnic-American pride in yourself and your loved ones. I assure those that are lucky enough to celebrate Christmas "the ethnic way." To those that are having "just plain turkey" an old Arab proverb says "Sheep may roam away, but they always come back to join the flock."

JAVAN GHANNAM



## Christmas should be day to begin season's spirit

Recently a clergyman suggested that Christmas be postponed for two weeks. He explained his suggestion by saying that the way Americans celebrate Christmas, it is really a materialistic holiday rather than a spiritual one.

His thought was that the spiritual holiday should come two weeks later allowing everyone to get the things relating to Santa Claus and cocktail parties out of the way, thereby assuring a less rushed time for the actual celebration of Christ's birth.

Since historians tell us that Dec. 25 is actually not his birthday, but sort of the average date between the Festival of Lights and the Feast of the Epiphany, the change would not be dishonoring the Christ child's birth.

**TO A LOT OF PEOPLE** his suggestion seems not too bad an idea. The events leading up to Christmas can make one physically very tired. When you are physically tired it is hard to be happy and joyful. As a matter of fact, most people have the grumpies.

But Christmas should not be judged by how one feels two days before. Christmas should be judged after the tree is trimmed and the fire is glowing and the packages are wrapped, when the carolers can be heard singing, and the calm of the season has descended.

Christmas is a time when the family is together and the children are happy and a large part of the world is thinking about its fellow men in terms of peace and kindness.

The Christmas spirit is not the buying, but the giving.

## Eccentricities

by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.



It is not the parties, but the fellowship. It is not how well off one is, but what can be done for others.

**IF CHRISTMAS WERE** postponed for two weeks, we would only be extending the exhausting preparation period, and it is this preparation, not the actual celebration of Christmas, that wears us out and makes us question whether or not we are doing the right thing.

Let's continue to celebrate Christmas on its traditional day, but now that most of the preparations are completed for this year, let's try to make that traditional day a more significant one.

Let's not let Christmas end when the packages are unwrapped. Let's make it a day of resolve that the peace and tranquility that is felt on that morn is something we will encourage the whole year round. Let's use Christmas to become a people of good will, and let that spirit prevail the whole year long. If everybody did this, what the angels said on that first Christmas morn would come true. "Peace on Earth."

## Schoolcraft merits attention

Remember Schoolcraft College? That's the thing that comes after your local K-12 school district on the June ballot. That's the thing many voters ignore. That's the thing people vote against after they have voted in favor of their local district's millage request.

Next April it will be hard for voters in the Clarencove, Garden City, Livonia, Northville and Plymouth districts to relegate Schoolcraft to second place in their community thinking. The college will ask for a property tax increase of about a half-mill in a special election.

It's essentially the same proposal that was defeated last June. Where there was no local mil-

lage on the ballot, voters favored the Schoolcraft College request. But where the local K-12 district was asking for more, voters generally approved it but stomped on the Schoolcraft request.

The special election will cost money, to be sure, but consider the alternative: constant defeat; constant taking of second place in the voters' attention; constant belt-tightening.

In a special election, the Schoolcraft millage request will get the voters' undivided attention. The issues and problems can be debated more thoroughly. And maybe people will start to realize what a valuable educational institution, community asset and cultural resource they have.

## How to punish drivers who park in the fire lane

They are worse than the Grinch who stole Christmas, the pre-reformed Scrooge. They belong no higher than the seventh ring of Dante's Inferno.

They are the drivers who park in the fire lanes of shopping centers. They are numerous and wicked any season of the year, but they are at their most evil and numerous during winter.

The fire lane has two purposes. In normal times, it carries traffic; in an emergency, it affords a fire truck or rescue vehicle a place to stop on a lifesaving mission.

But to the slobs too lazy to park their cars in the lot and walk 50 feet to the store, the fire lane is just a handy place to park.

**THE FIRE LANE** parkers are like a religious group in the sense that they come in both sexes and most ages.

Just when you think bald men are the biggest offenders, a housewife or a teenage girl—or both—will park in the fire lane, obstructing traffic, turning what used to be three driving lanes into one.

Oddly, the 16- to 30-year-old males, the drivers with the most speeding tickets and drunk driving arrests, are rarely to be found parked in fire lanes.

A favorite trick of the older male is to drop off the lady of the house at curbside and then sit there with the engine idling. He thinks he is presenting a picture of someone just "standing." But if you clock him, you'll find he's really parking—and burning up precious fossil fuel to indulge his laziness.

**SOME TOWNS** have ordinances on the topic, but they can't expect enforcement.

Suburban parking lots are private property, and the gendarmes are in no rush to police them. So at the present rate of enforcement, a person who parks in a fire lane can expect to get away with it roughly forever. Police have dope pushers to catch, burglars to track down, youthful speeders to apprehend; they can't be bothered with cleaning the crud out of shopping center fire lanes.

**WHAT CAN HONEST** laypersons do about these offenders?

One thing that doesn't work is to attract the driver's attention and point to the "no parking—



Tim Richard

fire lane" sign. If it's a woman, she won't look. If it's a man, he will smile broadly and wave to you.

I read once, probably in Reader's Digest, of a four-door sedan which came to a stop in the crosswalk of a busy New York street. An annoyed pedestrian got into one door, slid across the seat, exited by the other door—and left both doors flapping in the breeze.

Another possibility, if you have good traction on your shoes, is to walk across the hood of the offender's car. Usually, the people who park in fire lanes have fairly nice, shiny vehicles, so this tactic is liable to make them take notice. You could even twist on the balls of your feet so that the grit in your shoes grinds into the car's finish.

Carrying a can of spray paint is a third possibility, but it smacks of vandalism. In the same way that judges jail reporters who expose governmental secrecy and not the officials who practice it, you can expect that you'd be punished for spray-painting a bad guy's car, but the bad guy would never be punished for parking in a fire lane.

Or you could let the air out of the guy's tire. There is no real vandalism involved, and the owner of the car would probably get the message.

**JOINING THE ARMY** of those who park in fire lanes are the sound of limb who park in the spaces reserved for the handicapped.

I watch because three of my handicapped friends have made me pretty sensitive on this point. I have yet to see a handicapped person emerge from a vehicle in a handicapped parking zone.

And at the risk of offending my girlfriends in NOW, I must report that 90 per cent of the persons I see who park illegally in handicapped zones are female.

Regardless of race, sex or creed, these offenders belong in the eighth ring of Dante's "Inferno."

## The sisters make a case

### Madonna serves with quality, independence

Dressed in their plain dark brown habits, the two Sisters perched excitedly on the edge of the couch in my office. They were a little nervous, since they were doing something they had never done before—raising money.

But their enthusiasm carried them through the difficult questions and the skepticism into the high ground of the very real achievements of the institution.

Madonna College was founded in 1937 with a total student body of 10. Originally tucked away on the grounds of its sponsor, the Felician Sisters in Livonia, today it has grown into a four-year coeducational attractive campus, complete with modern laboratories and classrooms, and a dedicated corps of Sisters who make the place hum with activity, scholarship and good humor.

The college's reputation is founded on its commitment to provide help for marginal and minority students and to give entry or re-entry into the process of higher education to older students. The student body is mostly women, but a remarkable 46 per cent are adults from 25 to 40 years old and another 17 per cent are 41 or older. Seventeen per cent of the students are members of minority groups—American Indians, blacks, Orientals, and Spanish Americans.

MADONNA'S program is equally unusual. Part of it is the usual solid basic curriculum that makes up the heart of any four-year college. But its nursing program (in association with nearby St. Mary's Hospital) and its curriculum in criminal justice are outstanding. Recently, the college added special programs, perhaps unique in Michigan, for the deaf (complete with instruction in sign language for teachers who lecture to deaf students) and in gerontology. Specializing in the problems and opportunities of the elderly, the gerontology program is an outstanding example of the ability of a small, private college to provide services in a new and flexible way to meet the needs of the elderly in our society. The college has trained nearly 500 as volunteer probation officers and volunteers to assist the aging.

**IN THE 40 YEARS** since its foundation, Madonna College has remained a private school. Unlike nearby Schoolcraft College, it receives no property tax millage from local citizens. And unlike Oakland University, it receives no direct appropriations from the state legislature.

Except for specific government grants for new programs, the college receives no governmental appropriations at all.

So where does the money come from? Two-thirds of the \$3 million annual budget comes from tuition and fees. But nearly \$700,000 comes from gifts, mostly from the Felician Sisters themselves.

## Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER



More to the point, the college has run itself so effectively that its budget is in balance.

**BUT MADONNA**, like all private colleges in the country, is caught in a vice grip of economics.

It wants to remain private and free of the entangling web of dependency on government handouts. At the same time, costs continue to rise. Madonna wants to continue to keep providing financial support to the 70 per cent of its students who now receive it. Which means that to continue to raise tuition fees is in conflict with its commitment to serve middle- and lower-income students.

The choice facing the college was clear: Either hike up some programs and go to the government for a set of handouts, or launch a private fundraising program. The answer was clear. "Madonna College carries on the tradition of free enterprise in American education—the freedom to experiment, to challenge and innovate, and to initiate a diversity of approaches to educational methods."

**THE SISTERS** who run Madonna College have just launched a continuing effort to involve ordinary people in the private sector in the continued progress of their institution.

They are visiting people throughout the suburbs who have a child or relative or friend who has received a fine education from Madonna. They are going to suburban businesses and friends who have seen their communities become better places through Madonna's work in training probation officers and sheriff's deputies. They are talking with people who have seen the horizons of the deaf or elderly immeasurably expanded through the work of the college.

They may be inexperienced in the field, but the Sisters are doing a good job at their fund raising. They do not do it with a fancy brochure and high-pressure pitches. They do it in a low key, with a vast amount of dedication and concern, and they have a real record of achievement in meeting needs and providing community service to talk about.

This isn't a pitch for giving money to Madonna College, but if a friendly Sister or a supporter of Madonna comes to see you about raising money, please don't tell them "no" without giving them a chance to make their case. It's a good one.

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