

# OU offers 'How to Lobby' course

BY JOE MARTUCCI

Whether your pet peeve is street paving or strategic arms limitation, Ed Williams can help you get your point across.

Williams, a dapper and smooth talking local government relations executive with Chrysler Corp., is teaching a unique course entitled "The Way To Lobby."

The non-credit course, sponsored by Oakland University's Division of Continuing Education, will be offered on five consecutive Thursdays beginning Sept. 21.



Ed Williams says legislators can no longer be bought for the price of lunch.

The Chrysler executive intends to tailor the course to the needs and interests of those who enroll. He hopes subdivision association presidents, community organizers, board captains and citizens inspired by the workings of government can benefit from his 22 years of experience.

Williams quickly dismisses a couple of popular myths about lobbyists as arm twisters who ply their trade in smoke filled rooms. Gone are the days, he says, when a legislator or local official's vote could be bought for the price of a lunch.

"Today, these people are paid well enough and many of them have expense accounts. You can't get their attention by buying them lunch. You've got to have information," he explains.

The most effective lobbyists, he says, are those with all of the facts relating to a particular issue at their fingertips.

At the local level, common mistakes include complaining about a problem without suggesting a solution and waiting until a situation reaches the crisis point, according to Williams.

Another is directing concerns to the wrong official, he said.

"There's a tendency to go to the man at the top, the city manager or mayor, on something that can easily be taken up with a department head," he says.

"Let's say you're trying to get your street paved. You should first see the city engineer or DPW chief and find out all the facts. Otherwise, you might walk in in April and find out it's too late for that construction season.

ANOTHER COMMON error, he says, is waiting too long on a problem and then trying to get quick action by writing a letter to the local governing body.

"If there's a traffic problem in a particular subdivision, the letter will get into the agenda. But when the mayor asks the police chief what it's all about, he'll say, 'It's the first I've heard of it.' Right away, you've alienated the guy and he's going to drag his feet."

If a department head appears less than responsive, Williams suggests "writing a letter to the next guy up documenting your understanding of the situation. Usually, by this time you'll have grabbed somebody's attention."

Citizen groups can obtain results more quickly by appointing a single representative to speak on their behalf, Williams advises.

"Have one person go down and explain the problem in a low-key manner. Find out how the machinery works. You may be surprised to learn that the project is already in the works, but it's a low priority."

Williams stresses the benefits of the low-key approach and adds that perseverance is far more effective than berating an official for moving too slowly.

"Anything you do that involves change, you've got to go about it very carefully," he advises. "People don't appreciate how government works and the safeguards that are built in for them. Some of these safeguards cause delays, but they're designed to protect the public."

Above all, Williams says, never assume that all government officials are corrupt and that it's impossible for the average citizen to accomplish anything. Most officials, he says, are dedicated and hard working and are willing to help.

When first establishing contact with a legislator, do it in writing, Williams suggests. As you develop rapport, phone calls will suffice. Letters should be succinct—no more than a few paragraphs. Groups pushing legislation should avoid form letters.

"Anything that smacks of uniformity is bound to draw less attention," he said.

"If you're interested in community improvement," Williams says, "join a homeowners group, civic organization or chamber of commerce. Keep track of your local officials, find out who your state representative and state senator are and follow them in the paper for a while.

"Go see him before you have a problem. It's much nicer to meet someone under these circumstances and he'll remember your name.

"I call this preventative medicine." When dealing with local officials, learn something about the person's job. It may be a particularly busy time of year, for example, and if you can empathize with this it may have a disarming effect, Williams says.

"They don't mind this. Usually they know when it's happening," he adds.

## European trip welds friendships

When Mary Lou and Bill Fisk reminisce about their summer trip to the Netherlands, Germany, Denmark, Sweden and Norway, they won't be alone. Thirty-nine other people, including ten from the Rochester area, will be remembering the same sights and experiences.

When the Fisks left on a three-week Scandinavian Holiday tour this summer, they expected to see things they would never forget. They didn't expect to develop a deeper friendship with people they already knew.

"One positive result of this experience was a deeper friendship with people we knew before we went on the tour," said Fisk. "This group of 41 individuals, plus an excellent tour guide and her driver-husband, became a family."

Sharing such things as

a visit to Norway's Frogner Park, which has over 300 stone sculptures of humans and animals depicting different stages of life, were Gladys and Russ Corbin, Alice and Phil Trimble, Jean and Jim McClain, Bess and Bill Towers, and Ethel and Jim Ludwick, former Rochester residents who now live in Metamora.

The neighbors even had a frightening experience together.

While on a tour bus, traveling the paved but narrow winding mountain roads in Norway, another tour bus came around the corner towards them.

"There was no place to turn around," Fisk described. "Neither bus could back up because of a string of small European cars that were following close behind. On one side there was a sheer cliff, on the other a

500-foot drop straight down."

The result of this "encounter" was that the buses did pass each other but only with one bus scraping the sides of the mountain and the other rubbing the narrow curb near the edge with its wheels.

THE 3,000 MILES of travel find out the foreign countries was a "photographer's paradise," Fisk said, and

They went shopping in

added up to lots of neighborly advice on how to shoot certain scenes.

They had plenty of sights to shoot.

The tour included ferryboat rides between countries, driving through 15 tunnels carved out of rock in Norway, and taking an overnight cruise from Oslo to Aarhus, Denmark.

Members of the Southern Michigan Youth Cho-

flower and fruit markets in Bremen, Germany, and saw an 800-year-old church with marble and alabaster tombs of 37 kings and queens in Denmark.

In Sweden, they went to Upsala University, which was founded in 1477. A visit to a diamond factory was part of the Netherlands tour.

Members of the Southern Michigan Youth Cho-

rale, directed by Frank Irish, music director at both Rochester and Adams high schools, were on the same charter flight to Amsterdam from Detroit. The two groups met again in Amsterdam for the return trip to Detroit.

The experience was more than a "trip to remember" for the Fisks. They ended the tour with "friends to remember."

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