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Ross decries 2-sector business economy

By STEVE BARNABY

State Senator Doug Ross (D-Oak Park) has taken his campaign on behalf of the small businessman to the street.

In the first of a number of planned speeches, Ross spoke before the Farmington Chamber of Commerce last week. He urged small businesses to unite and separate themselves from the causes of corporate giants.

"While the business climate for small businesses deteriorates, it is getting better for large businesses," he said.

"It's getting rougher and tougher for small businesses to stay afloat or even to get started," he warned the gather-

ing at the Farmington Holiday Inn.

The small businesses are being "conned" by economists, said Ross, who represents Farmington, Farmington Hills, Southfield and Oak Park. The freshman state senator said small businesses have traditionally aligned themselves with large corporations. But in reality, he added, there are two business economies.

On the one hand are the 1,000 largest corporations which produce one-half of the country's products. They are capital intensive businesses which are able to avoid price competition. Their big advantage, said Ross, is they are able to pass on price increases to the consumer.

ON THE OTHER HAND are the 12 million small businesses which produce the other half of the country's goods and services. For the most part, these firms are labor intensive and service oriented.

"They must borrow from lending institutions," Ross said. "They are forced to absorb price increases. They can't pass them on to the consumer or they will lose business."

In many cases, he said, large corporations and unions, such as the United Auto Workers and General Motors, have the same interests at heart.

As an example, he pointed to the single business tax (SBT) which, Ross said,

was developed by GM and supported by the UAW.

Many small businessmen in the state have complained about the SBT saying it is taxing them out of business in many cases.

Under the SBT, businesses pay a tax on their payrolls. These are the same businesses which are labor intensive.

Ross also pointed to the "intimate" relationship between such corporations as GM and government agencies, something which smaller businesses lack.

"Such businesses have intimate relationships with the government which yields benefits for those businesses," he said.

"Imagine, the government builds

highways for the automobile industry. That would be like constructing a building for a small business."

He also noted that the government does much of the technological research in this country, the benefit of which is passed on for the benefit of big business.

"What happens in these two economies is that one uses the government for its own benefit and the other can't," Ross said. "But we have failed to make the distinction in the past."

The "con" says the 15th District state senator, is that small businesses are lauded for their independence and competitiveness but, in truth, nobody wants price competition.

Ross urged small businessmen to unite into a small business authority and fight to replace bureaucratic regulation with tax and profit incentives.

"You'll never control the bureaucracy, so you have to be debureaucratized," he said.

Under the Ross philosophy, businesses would be rewarded with a tax break when cutting down on pollution and other factors now regulated by government.

"There is no invisible hand that will lead small businesses down the road," he said. "You had better find the time to do something about the situation or you won't have anything to go back to."

Brick boosters hail products

By MARY GNIEWEK

Michigan's sole manufacturer of brick, Michigan Brick near Flint, is currently tripling its capacity so that it will be able to produce 100 million bricks a year.

Even with the expanding supply, the demand from masonry contractors is not being met. The majority of brick used in new construction is still dependent on out-state suppliers, mainly from Ohio.

This has made the Farmington Hills-based Masonry Institute of Michigan (MIM) a busy organization, since its purpose is to promote the masonry construction industry here. The industry is doing well and MIM tries to keep it that way.

"Detroit historically is a brick home market," said Ron Hurta, MIM spokesman. "Drive through Farmington Hills and you will see an awful lot of brick."

Hurta believes the resurgence of new brick construction is tied into economic and energy reasons.

"It's excellent on energy conservation. An insulated brick building will save the owner considerable money on operating costs. And it can't burn—it's completely fireproofed."

DOLLARWISE, brick has become more competitive on today's market because of load bearings.

Explains Hurta: "Thin brick walls, about 12 or 14 inches, can hold their own weight now. There's no longer need for additional framing that would hike up the cost."

Operating out of an office at 27600 Farmington Rd. with a staff of five, MIM is a non-profit organization that was established 10 years ago. It is supported by Michigan's 400 mason contractors and 8,000 union bricklayers.

One of its main promotion functions is to present quarterly seminars.

"Last fall, we sponsored a seminar for owners and developers to discuss the advantages of masonry in apartment construction," Hurta said. "We're also working with the state building code authority to require fire-resistant materials on apartments."

"Devastating apartment fires happen all too frequently under the present fire code."

ALTERNATIVES to brick construction include steel, concrete, glass or wood. Hurta is quick to point out that bricklaying is "the second oldest profession in the world," citing the ancient pyramids of Egypt and the buildings of early Rome as examples.

MIM also is closely affiliated with the Michigan Society of Architects. Each year, the two groups co-sponsor an awards program citing excellence in masonry design.

This year, historical relevance was a key factor in three of four buildings selected as winners of 1978 awards for excellence.

Awards went to:

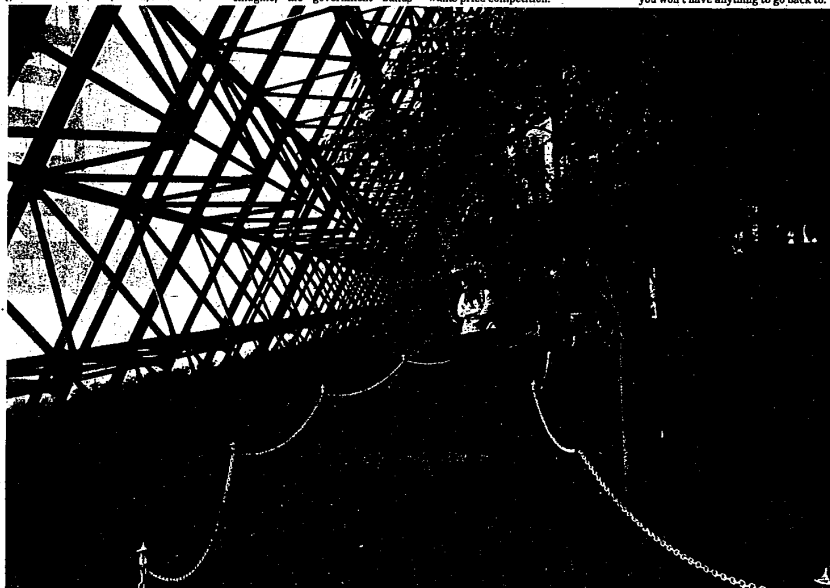
"Cleaners Hanger Co., an office building in Bloomfield Township designed by the Southfield firm Rosset/Neumann.

"Fire Department Headquarters, Ann Arbor, designed by Fry/Peters of Ann Arbor. The building is adjacent to the city's historic fire station.

"Livingston County Courthouse in Howell, a complete restoration of an 1899 structure. By William Kessler & Associates, Detroit.

"McDonald's Restaurant, Ann Arbor, designed by Hobbs & Black to blend with many historically significant buildings in the area.

The winners were chosen from 37 entries submitted by Michigan architectural firms and judged by architects from Minneapolis.



Outside the snow may be swirling and blowing, but it's warm and green inside the Prudential Town Center atrium. Vickie MacDonald, who works for a mortgage company in the office complex, stops to

survey part of the tropical terrain during lunch hour. (Staff photo by Gary Friedman)

Office highrise harbors arbors

By CRAIG PIECHURA

Folksinger Joni Mitchell once sang about budding businessmen who "took all the trees, put 'em in a tree museum and charged the people a dollar-and-a-half just to see 'em."

Well, nobody's charging admission yet, but Southfield has two tree-lined streets that caused one way to comment that the contrast of indoor greenery with outdoor concrete reminds him of a science fiction movie.

He said the movie showed a survivor

of a nuclear blast inside a space station that reproduced the conditions of earth before the holocaust.

"The place is like being inside a space ship, like Skylab, where people say 'Wow, this is the way it used to be,'" said Wayne Winger, a Franklin

student at Birmingham Groves, sitting on a park bench in the Prudential Town Center's "theme garden."

"It reminds me of a nature museum, not a park."

Winger's friend, Jennifer Brewer, of West Bloomfield, also a Groves student, disagreed.

"I like it here," she said. "There's never a lot of people around. It's quiet. And when it's winter outside, it's nice in here."

On the whole, public reaction to the two indoor parks in Southfield—at the Prudential Center and the Bendix Corp.—is very positive. People who work at Prudential often brown-bag-it for lunch and eat inside the garden.

And employees at the Bendix Corp. in Southfield are proud that the company's indoor atrium recently won an "environmental improvement award" from the Associated Landscape Contractors of America. While the Bendix building isn't a commercial center for the public like the Prudential, people there on business take in the flora when they visit.

PERSONS WHO have trouble at home with a droopy spider plant should see the palms the garden maintenance company goes through to keep the indoor atriums thriving through the winter.

Because the plants are tropical greenery grown in Florida, a number

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Capital Tire store destroyed in blaze

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

Fire officials are baffled by the cause of a mid-Friday afternoon blaze at the Capital Tire store in Farmington.

The fire, reported at 2 p.m., started

in the storage section of the structure on Orchard Lake Road, between Grand River and Shiawassee, according to Public Safety Director Dan Byrnes.

Byrnes estimated the loss was in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"By the time we got to the scene, the

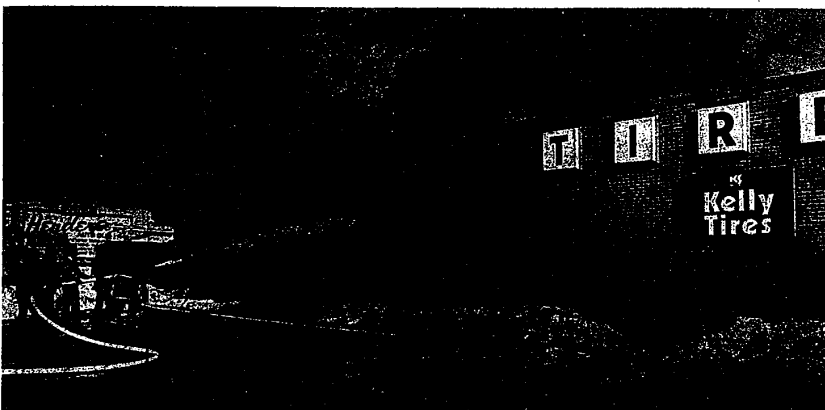
building already was heavily involved in the fire," said Byrnes.

Employees had attempted to douse the blaze on their own with fire extinguishers, according to Byrnes, but it took six fire engines, three from Farmington and three from Farmington

Hills, to put it under control.

Although it took about 45 minutes to bring the fire under control, the firefighters didn't start breaking down their hoses until after 5 p.m.

"We'll be returning for the next couple of days to douse that fire," said Byrnes.



Firefighters from Farmington and Farmington Hills fought a blaze at the Capital Tire store Friday. Although the fire was brought under

control within 45 minutes, the building was gutted. (Photo by Allen Schlessberg)

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CROSS COUNTRY CRAZE

It's the latest — cross country skiing, that is. Our Mary Gniwew took a tour of the Farmington Hills San Marino facility and found out why so many people want to strap on skis and enjoy the winter. For the story, turn to Page 6A.