

## Monday's Commentary

# The guys and the gang due for a shootout

I sense some bad times ahead between the gang up at the corner of Orchard Lake and 11 Mile and the guys down at Farmington City Hall.

Before it's over, there's a good chance that all hell will break loose.

The relationship between the two city legislative bodies in the 36-square-mile area never has been what a person would call cordial.

The skirmish-to-be will come when the two councils square off over the roll of the Farmington Area Commission on the Aging.

Last week, the Farmington Hills Council sponsored a tribunal to rake the dual-city commission over the coals. It was a study of government by tyranny.

Feeling its oats, the newly elected council took its ire out on the commission, the primary author of the controversial proposal to build senior citizen and low-income housing at Freedom and Drake roads.

The ill-fated plan suffered a gruesome death during last November's election under a barrage of propaganda, much of which was distributed by freshman council members Jack Burwell, William Lange and Donn Wolf.

To counter, the Commission on Aging, under orders of the previous council, distributed a fact sheet explaining the Freedom/Drake plan.

BUT NOW the Commission has been caught in the political ring.

In what can only be described as the most shameful performance ever by a city council, the Farmington Hills Council publicly shamed the commissioners, suggesting they resign if refusing to fall into line with the new council philosophy.

At one point during last Tuesday's study session, it was suggested by at least one councilman that the commission could be altogether disbanded if it didn't tow the line.

The meeting was brought to a hasty conclusion when the council voted to meet with the Farmington city fathers to redefine the commission's goals.

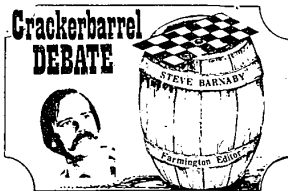
Commissioners were told they could hand in their written suggestions for new goals. As Councilman Joe Alkateeb put it, he doesn't think "subordinates" should be telling the boss what is their job.

Apparently, Alkateeb forgets that this is a democracy and that volunteers who dedicate their time to city government are free and equal.

It's also interesting to note the arrogance with which the Farmington Hills Council has decided to unilaterally determine that the commission's goals would be to the detriment of the city. The Farmington Hills Council is a co-equal member in this endeavor.

BUT PERHAPS the Hills politicians believe that Farmington Council members are "subordinates" also who will be bullied into rubber stamping its decision to emasculate the commission.

Boy, are they going to be surprised.



This is the second time in recent years that the Hills Council has put the Farmington Council into an uncomfortable and embarrassing position over senior citizen housing.

The last time was during the Freedom/Drake battle. The Farmington Council was deluged by city residents who protested the housing plan which would have bordered their subdivision.

The Farmington legislators finally sent out a letter protesting the proposed project's height. But, in truth not all council members agreed with the letter's content.

The incident left a bad taste in the mouth of downtown city officials.

This newest twist will do nothing toward improving relations between the two governmental bodies.

The Farmington Council has enjoyed a healthy relationship with the Commission on Aging. Unlike the novice Hills Council, it understands that commissioners are needed to be much more than a rubber stamp agency, instituted to fulfill political whims.

While Farmington Hills has yet to build a senior citizen housing project, Farmington is moving rapidly toward completion of its project at the old Farmington Junior High site.

The contrast of progress is directly parallel to the competence rating of the two city councils.

Farmington's Council is a mature, politically sophisticated body, with a very capable city manager who has been allowed to demonstrate great expertise in administering the city.

The Hills Council is immature, unsure of its power and grasps for security by ridiculing commission members, some of whom aren't even Farmington Hills residents.

Some of the commission members with the most expertise in senior citizen problems are Farmington residents. The Hills Council just didn't have any business being so rude.

Administratively, the Farmington Hills city manager has been put in an insufferable bind. A man with impeccable credentials, he so far has been unable to demonstrate his abilities because of an authoritarian-based majority.

The confrontation should be interesting.



Craig Piechura

## Product of educational system strikes back

Thomas Wolfe let everybody know "You Can't Go Home Again" to right some wrongs. But the author was silent on whether a person can return to high school to settle the score.

To fill the void comes another author, Mitchell S. Ross, 26-year-old social commentator for Doubleday Books and 1971 graduate of Southfield-Lathrup High School.

In his latest book, "An Invitation to Our Times," is a caustic chapter called "Memories of Public Education." Many of Mitchell's former teachers don't fare well on the printed page.

It is Ross' contention that good teachers are born, not made, and that any "in-service" teacher training seminar or new course in educational technique just enhances the ideal of pedagogy. For people without an unabridged dictionary, pedagogy is a snooty word for the art or science of education.

For reasons of libel, Doubleday didn't let Ross lambast his old teachers by name. Instead, they are noted by their nicknames. About one, Ross writes:

"He was a man known (although never to his face) as Big Ed. Although a native of the United States, Ed's command of the language was unsteady. Most startling was his addiction to the phrase 'off of it' in the place where other people employ 'y'know.'"

ROSS' high school English teacher, Robert Longe, isn't mentioned by name either but he gets similar treatment.

Longe has the dubious distinction of being identified as "an amiable fellow with 20 years of classroom dust in his nostrils."

In Ross' book, Longe is portrayed as a Hush Puppy-wearing teacher with good intentions who lulled his students into a deep sleep by telling them there's some debate about whether William Shakespeare really wrote all his plays.

Longe isn't sure about the dust in his nose but he recalls some discussion about the authorship of Shakespeare's plays.

"There's nothing so bad, so terrible, in interpreting 'King Lear' to discuss its authorship," Longe says. "If he'd kept his head up after all that talk about whether Shakespeare wrote the plays, he would've heard me say that the whole debate is totally irrelevant. What the hell difference does it make? The work is there for everyone to enjoy. I just find things like that interesting, and if he'd looked around, he'd have found most of the class was fascinated, too."

Longe also is an author. But he says he "doesn't exactly advertise" that fact around school. That could be because his book, published by Ashley, is titled "Files of a Counterfeit Sex Therapist," a comedy spoofing sex help columns.

If he were still grading Ross' writing, it sounds as if Longe would give him a B-minus at best.

Longe said he doesn't resent the thinly disguised characterization of him in the book and wishes Ross well.

"The one flaw I found with his writing is that he always had a tendency toward circumlocution (a round-about way of saying things) and polysyllables (big words)," Longe said, hoisting Ross by his own petard. "He'd bring things he'd written back to me in school after he graduated, and I'd harp on that. I found it bad."

"But apparently he's doing quite well with it."

AFTER ALL, says Longe, he wishes his own book were doing as well as Ross' two — the other being "The Literary Politicians," a book about the political influence wielded by writers such as William F. Buckley, John Kenneth Galbraith and Henry Kissinger. (It was Buckley who convinced Doubleday to publish Ross' work.)

"How's (my book) doing?" said Longe. "Very bad. With the last royalty check, my wife and I were able to have a nice Chinese dinner."

Ross takes great pains to explain he didn't want his latest book to appear to be mean-spirited or cynical.

"I think I'm iconoclastic," Ross says. "But I think cynicism implies world-weariness, which I don't feel."

Nonetheless, he isn't about to take back some of the sharp criticism he thinks some of his old teachers justly deserve.

Ross doesn't expect things to change because it is his firm belief that a good teacher simply is "someone with a passion for a subject and the innate talent for communicating it."

Ross is now writing drafts for his first novel, with the working title "The English Teacher," where I'll expand on some of this."

In his latest book the young author explains:

"The educators themselves do not pretend to be laboring on behalf of an elite; as they readily and even enthusiastically point out, the purpose of mass education is to benefit the masses, and so it is hardly surprising that this adds up to little more than the provision of an anodyne for the mediocre."

Again, for those of you caught with your Webster's down, an anodyne is a soothing drug.

Education for the masses is viewed as woefully inadequate by Ross, who calls himself a "democratic elitist," whatever that is.

A democratic elitist must be someone with the politics of a suburban dad but the social graces of someone profiled in the pages of the New Yorker.

At least that's the image Ross tends to project with his position on the Equal Rights Amendment (unnecessary), the Vietnam War era ("a grand affair while it lasted: Everyone imagined that the morality of the Republic was at stake and so everyone's life became a morality play"), or the Rev. Martin Luther King ("His heyday had passed when he was assassinated.")

The elitism aspect may be evident in the fact that Mr. Ross served croissants, French bread, and Camembert and Blue cheeses, with mold intact, during an interview in his Palmer Park apartment.

Of course, I always suspect snobbish affectation is at work when the cheese served with branch doesn't come wrapped in individual serving slices.



Mitchell Ross went to Southfield-Lathrup High School. Now he's written about his experiences, proving that while you can never go home, you can certainly tell everybody else about it. Here, Ross pauses at his typewriter in his Detroit apartment. (Staff photo by Mindy Saunders)

from our readers

## Advisor debates rights proposal

Editor:

As a resident of Farmington Hills and the chairperson of the legislative subcommittee of the Governor's Advisory Committee on Juvenile Justice, I am compelled to answer the concerns expressed by state Rep. Sandy Brotherton in Louise Okrusky's excellent article on juvenile code reform.

The Governor's Advisory Committee, a 33-member body appointed by Governor William Milliken with the consent of the Michigan Senate, has supported state Rep. Mark Clendinning's H.R. 4774 and its tie-barred legislation because it is an intricately worked out piece of legislation that finally attempts to extend due process and equal protection to young people who have no voice of their own and must be so protected.

These bills have the most potential for correcting inequities and improving the juvenile justice system in Michigan. Cost factors have been calculated by the Office of Management and Budget to be well within reason. It is estimated

that the diversion of cases from the juvenile courts to community services would reduce the caseload of those courts to "concentrate attention on more serious cases."

If the state spends monies it is our opinion that it is better that they be spent attempting to provide status of offenders and their families with the help they need.

Substitute HB 4774 provides for uniform court procedure in the 79 juvenile courts throughout the state, includes a process to waive a juvenile to the adult court if that is the appropriate action, contains carefully defined limits for removal of children who have been abused and neglected from their homes and also insures that detention will be used only when absolutely necessary.

The present possibilities of detention for a young person not an offender are destructive. The tie-barred bills will mandate much needed services for runaway youth and provide a good mechanism

for returning revenues to counties to pay for those services.

Five years of analysis of the juvenile code issue are adequate. HB 4774 has already received the support of a broad based coalition of service providers, law enforcement representatives, probate and family court judges and youth and family advocates.

Much of what the bills mandate is required to keep Michigan within the guidelines for funding by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration of the Justice Department.

Children don't ask to be born, neither do they have an option to select the environment in which they will be reared. Let us see to it that their dependence on parents and social and governmental agencies is validated by the fair and rational treatment HB 4774 attempts to provide.

CLAUDIA GOLD,  
Farmington Hills

## Census '80

The 1980 census will probably be the first census since the Civil War to record that blacks moving to the South outnumber those leaving.

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