

## editorial opinion

# It's uphill all the way for the folks at 56

The folks at Channel 56 call it a last-ditch appeal. While the public television staff is talking about money, it really means much more than that.

The appeal is being made because the station is facing a record deficit of more than \$100,000 for this fiscal year, according to development director Agnes Scott.

Every year the station struggles along, begging for funds in between programs and during the popular auction each year.

Meanwhile, the station crawls along, scrounging in its attempts to air a meaty agenda of programs. But the station is caught in a vicious circle.

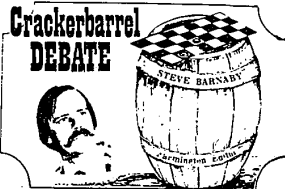
TO ATTRACT viewers who will contribute, it must air appealing programs. Lacking a hefty budget, it is forced to present a less than desirable offering.

In short, commercial television has it all over public television in this area because the private media has the bucks and the network connections.

Sure, everybody has favorites on public television, but honestly, who sits down to watch an entire evening of Channel 56 programming?

But persons who really believe in the concept of a public non-commercial television station have to look beyond what is being aired presently. Rather, viewers must concentrate on what public television can and should be.

In other words, the more money Channel 56 has to work with, the better the station will become. Instead of being a viewing stepchild, it will be a pleasant alternative to the endless hours of situation comedies and cop shows offered by commercial television.



CHANNEL 56 will face its biggest test of public faith in the coming months. Channel 20 has announced it is changing over to a paid subscription format.

The trial run will be made in Oakland County where viewers will pay to watch feature movies and sporting events minus commercials. If successful in Oakland County, Channel 20 will expand subscriptions throughout the area.

The real challenge rests with the new Channel 56 station manager Jack Caldwell. Hailing from Springfield, Mass., Caldwell built a credible image at WGBY by demonstrating that public television can compete with the private market.

It would behoove those who believe in public television to give Caldwell a chance to show us what he and the Channel 56 staff can do to give us a viable viewing alternative.

Donations can be made any time, day or night, by phoning pledges to 648-5321.

## The Stroller:

### Gas rationing revisited

If the purveyors of doom and gloom are to be taken seriously, we are headed for a real fuel crisis that will lead to gasoline rationing. And if that happens, we will be faced with a combination of anxiety, suspense, and a few laughs.

Rationing of gasoline is nothing new in this country. Automobile owners have traveled down that road once before, and the memories still linger. It was one of the oddest times we had, and it all happened during World War II.

When the rationing program went in, it set up a new social ladder in the country, for the ration cards became status symbols. If you were lucky enough to get the top priority, it meant more to your social life than the coin of the realm. In fact, the rationing became so unusual that, in many cases, the ration cards were used for money.

Not only that, but the rationing of gasoline brought about a black market, and it was mindful of the "blind pig" days of the Hoover administration when you gained entrance to the after-hour places only if you knew the right person. In many cases, the good ration cards were at a premium, but if you knew the right guy, you had no trouble.

SURE, THERE were car pools in which friends took turns driving to their jobs each day, and folks kept their cars in garages for at least one day a week. And the slogan of the country was: "Is this trip necessary?"

In those days, the rationing of gasoline wasn't too much of a problem because the passenger trains still ran, especially on the C&O to Grand Rapids and Lansing, and the Grand Trunk from Birmingham to Detroit. It was considered a treat to take the train to Lansing in the morning and enjoy dinner on the train on the return trip.

Things are different now. Most passenger trains have been taken off the tracks and replaced by super freeways. More than that since the last rationing period, there has been a rush from the inner city to the suburbs.

In fact, the entire scene has changed.

AT THE TIME of Pearl Harbor, Dec. 7, 1941, 27 million motor vehicles were on the road. At the end of 1978 there were 117 million cars and nearly 32 million trucks. In 1941 gasoline sold for 19.2 cents a gallon and went up to only 20.5 cents a gallon by the end of the war and the rationing period.

As The Stroller read these figures, he is reminded that when we traveled the rationing road for the first time, there were skeptics who claimed there was no shortage of gasoline.

He also is reminded that we are in better shape today because we no longer have the fear of a tire shortage. In the first trip down the rationing road, the Japanese had cut more than 90 percent of the rubber supply to Uncle Sam and we wore tires down to the rim.

Now The Stroller and his brothers and sisters behind the wheel are driving on synthetic tires.

AND HE WONDERS why the government, in its many rulings on emission control and gasoline consumption, doesn't order the manufacturers to build autos that can't travel above the speed limit.

He remembers the Model A Ford, which proudly boasted one of the top rationing cards granted to newspaper fellows, couldn't go faster than 52 mph.

Offering cars like that today would be a laugh, but it would be no more ridiculous than the recent announcement from the Bureau of Engraving that prints the government money.

The bureau announced that, although a sufficient number of rationing cards have been stored in a cave somewhere in Kentucky, it would take six months to print the numbers on them and they are too busy printing money to pay our debts to take care of the ration cards.

## Up, up and away!



## Stability, tradition

### A reunion recharges you

I went to my 25th college reunion last weekend ... and everyone looked older.

This was the first time I've seen most of my classmates since our college days at Dartmouth, and the major changes in them were on top of their heads and around their middles.

Twenty-five years out didn't make us exactly old men, but there was a lot of grey at the temples (if there was hair to be grey), and good living had converted many of the flat-tummy set to the stomach-hanging-out-over-the-belt crowd.

It was fun to see old friends again. About a third of the class showed up, which I guess is good for a college reunion of people from all over the country, but we probably would have learned more from the two-thirds who didn't show.

Who goes to college reunions?

Basically those who can afford it — the cream of the class, the successes come back. Who wants to come back and tell his classmates he is a failure?

THE REUNION was broken down into three periods.

Even if you took a refresher-course look through your old college yearbook before you arrived in order to acquaint yourself with names and faces, you still had to figure out who was who 25 years after those photos were taken. So the early part of the reunion could be called "I'm sorry I didn't recognize you, but 25 years is a long time" period. A

## Will family-size house go way of family farm?

We already know what kind of car the American of the future will be driving. It will be sub-compact, by today's standards, and get 30 or 40 mpg. He will travel more in carpools, perhaps join a company vanpool and possibly even take the SEMTA bus to work.

But what of the single-family, detached dwelling which the real estate industry calls a "home"? In the 1970s it became apparent older couples — "empty nesters," they're called — moved in droves into mobile homes and such attached dwellings as town houses, condominiums and apartments. Single persons set up their own households to an increasing degree.

But what about the American family? What will happen to the dream of a house on a lot with a bit of breathing space and a garden? Will it go the way of the family farm?

WHAT PROMPTS these questions are several news reports.

One is the word that mortgage rates on single-family detached dwellings have risen to 11.25 percent. That's about 2½ times the rate one paid when suburbanization started after World War II and double the rate of the mid-1960s.

That would be bad enough by itself. But the interest rate explosion is compounded by the explosion in housing prices — 15 percent a year recently. So the young buyer faces housing prices rising faster than general inflation and the prospect of working more years than ever to pay it off because of the compound effect on the mortgage.



You can see it from the lender's point of view: if he's charging 11.25 on a loan and consumer price index inflation is biting off 7.7 percent, the lender is making only 3.55 percent on the institution's money.

And you wonder what the price of money and construction will do to the family house.

THE SUPPLY of money is another question.

Our Mike Brudenell, last week reported mortgage money is getting tight. The reasons, according to a savings and loan official who would talk, are "consumer credit at an all-time high and a slackening of new savings inflow."

The lack of savings is something you've read about earlier in this column. Investment takes capital, and the U.S. has one of the lowest rates of capital accumulation of the world's major industrial nations. People just are not salting away money that institutions can lend.

And folks are borrowing more than ever for more purchases than ever. More demand for money means lenders can get away with charging more.

Finally, there is a handout from Chicago Title Insurance Co. that made good filler material in the news columns. "Working wives are continuing to play a key role in fueling the demand for homes," it said.

Of couples buying houses, 53.1 percent of the wives were working in 1977 and 56.2 percent were working in 1978. "It's the income of the working wife that makes it possible for many couples to afford home these days," said a title company official.

THAT'S ONE heck of a commentary on the American economy.

The wife goes to work because of inflation and to help pay the super-inflated price of a house, and finds she is now the culprit in helping to increase the demand for houses and mortgage money.

It must stop somewhere, of course. When the number of working wives gets close to 100 percent, then couples will either have to scale down the size of the house they purchase or go into attached housing for their families. If they go to attached housing, they run into corporate landlords who are tougher on the no-kids rule than the old-fashioned landlord used to be.

Our vicious circle is now complete: More borrowing, more demand for loan funds, inflated interest rates attached to inflated housing prices, a wife going to work to help pay for a house and contributing to the upward pressure on housing prices.

The solution, logically, is for all of us to indulge in the Calvinist virtue of thrift. When you figure out how to do it, let the rest of us know how.

It's almost mid-year. Do you remember the New Year's resolutions you made last Jan. 1? How are you doing on them?

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