

Tough years ahead for public television

The next five years are going to be tough ones for public television in metro Detroit.

The disinterest is creeping in as viewers turn their backs on "alternative" viewing.

The obvious sign was the result of last week's Channel 56 annual auction. The folks down on Second Ave. are smiling hard and trying to put the best face on the situation.

But it doesn't look good.

While raising \$3,000 more than it did last year, the station came up \$70,000 short of its \$750,000 goal. The three grand is peanuts when inflation is considered.

STATION OFFICIALS admit that small businesses weren't donating higher priced items as in previous years. The station says businesses "weren't able" to donate higher priced items because of the uncertain economy.

But what business really was saying was that it "wasn't willing" to donate higher priced items. There's a big difference between "able" and "willing."

When business loses faith in an advertising outlet, which Channel 56 is during the auction, the outlet's financial situation turns sour.

Only one good reason for that exists — business doesn't believe viewers are watching. It's the rating game all over again.

THE AUCTION results are only a symptom of public television's real problem — cable and pay television.

Already viewers are turning to pay television for their "alternative." Throughout the metro area, pay

and cable television companies are swooping down, gulping up viewer interest and money.

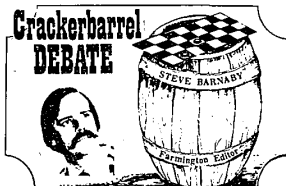
And pay television is offering what the general public wants to see — sports, first-run movies — especially the "B" rated — and concert performances by big name stars.

Even network television is shivering at this fast-paced alternative. A cable group nearly outbid NBC for the Moscow Olympics.

Political concerns aside, the real possibility existed that millions of Americans could have ended up paying directly to watch the international games.

Television soothsayers predict that in a decade or so, we all will be paying to watch the old boob tube, and we'll get the commercials anyway.

Obviously, public television is unable to compete with what pay TV has to offer. It's just too expensive. But as long as everybody is going to end up



paying to watch, 56 must reconsider its alternatives — alternatives for which viewers are willing to fork over the bucks to pay and watch.

Word at the station is that new president and

general manager Jack Caldwell wants to "jazz up" the 56 image, as one staff member put it.

Caldwell, who has something of a reputation as a public television wonder boy, could do the job.

A SOUND ALTERNATIVE is to develop what local television does best — present good local programs, including the news.

Away with British soap operas and nature specials. Get out on the street and see what's happening in metro Detroit. News has been the bread and butter for years at local stations. There's no reason that Channel 56 should be any different.

There are a lot of different ways of covering the news. Three of the local stations show us one way. Channel 56 can show us another.

Expensive? Sure. But now is the time to try it. Or public television in Detroit could be just a memory.

eccentricities

Henry Hogan

Cut spending by limiting time in office

Every time a public official does something not necessarily in the long-run best interest of the country, we hear the excuse that it's election year.

Our country is facing the worst inflation it has faced in modern history. But on Capitol Hill people are talking about tax cuts when, realistically, they should be talking about tax increases to soak up some of the excess money that is causing inflation.

President Carter is suggesting spending cuts to balance the budget and reduce the amount of money the government will have to borrow in the future. Government money is inflationary because government notes create money.

BUT IT'S ELECTION year, and the president will have a long, hard fight because some special interest group won't get as much federal money as it would like and will threaten officeholders with retaliation at the polls.

All this boils down to our process of government by the people.

Our officials are elected by the people, so each tries to make the most number of people happy by extending the largess of government.

The more elections we have, the more it costs taxpayers.

There are two ways we can slow down this process.

The first is not to have elections as often as we do. The second is to limit the number of terms a person can serve the public in any one capacity.

For example, if the president were to serve a single six-year term, he could afford to be a statesman and not worry about trying to please everyone.

If congressmen were limited to two terms, we would get back to government by citizens rather than government by people who always have to have their eyes on those groups that represent big voting blocs.

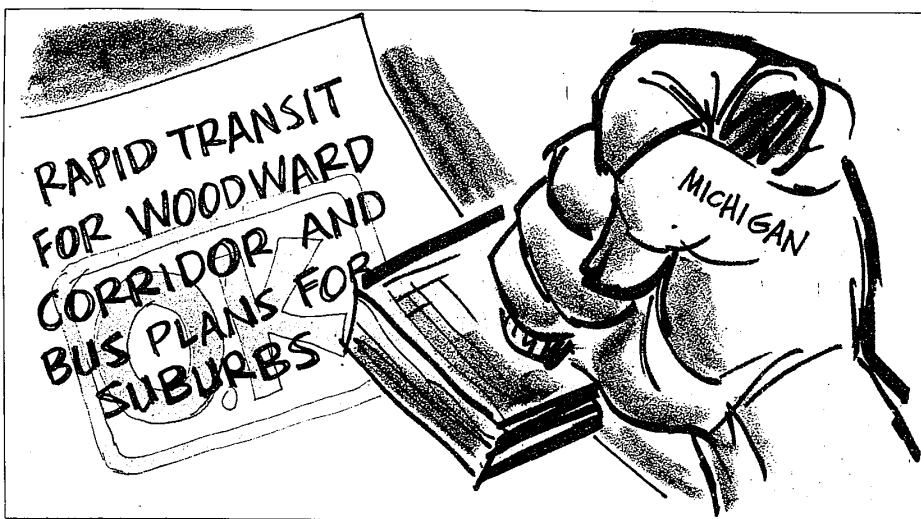
THE LONGER a person stays in office, the less idealistic he becomes, and the more important it is for him to be re-elected, because government has become his full-time job.

Fresh, new ideas rarely come from old war horses.

To make a congressman run every two years for office means he is continually campaigning for reelection. He hardly has time to think about new, creative, more effective, less expensive ways of doing things.

Election year seems to come so often. And when it comes, politicians rarely make the hard decisions that might affect them negatively with voters.

The solution seems obvious.



How will history view transit vote?

The losers made it sound as if Michigan politics had hit a historic low March 27 when the House of Representatives passed the first funding for a SEMTA light rail system.

The session lasted more than seven hours. Members were locked into the chamber. Representatives were promised no opposition if they voted yes or threatened with big war chests if they voted no. There were promises of judgeships and buildings for local colleges. One member was brought in from the hospital.

Historically, however, it was no big deal.

There was a wilder session in 1962 when the state Senate passed an income tax bill. It's not mentioned in the history books. When the Continental Congress passed the Declaration of Independence, one member, whose face was covered because it was rotting from cancer, got off his deathbed to vote.

If the SEMTA light rail plan is mentioned in the history books, it won't be because of the wheeling-dealing politics of our beloved legislature.

WHAT'S MORE LIKELY to be remembered are some of the other things that accompanied the SEMTA plan.

In the last year, gasoline passed \$1 a gallon, and it won't be long before it hits \$2 a gallon. That fact is far more relevant than the politics in Lansing.

The late 1970s and early '80s will go down in history as the time the bottom dropped out of the suburban housing market. It will be known as the time the paving of orchards slowed down drastically.

It will be known as the time when 85 percent of the population could no longer afford a new house, a time when buyers become renters or owners of more compact housing.

It will be known as a time when school districts lost one-third of their populations, a time when school buildings only five or 10 years old were shut down or converted into community centers.

It will be known as a time when the brakes were applied to urban sprawl.

It will be known as a time when Michigan finished off its freeway system and began building a transit system for a more compact, more civilized population.

WHAT IS SO unbelievable is not that there were arm-twistings and vote trading to pass the transit package.



Tim Richard

The astounding fact is that Michigan is many decades behind other parts of the nation and world in providing a modern transit system for a world-class metropolis.

But Michigan is finally acting, and that will be in the history books. There are many other political hurdles before the first electric train begins run-

ning. But it is inevitable that rapid transit is coming. Our economy and society are ready.

Among those who helped make history are four suburban representatives: Alice Tomboulion of Oakland Township, Joe Forbes of Oak Park, John Bennett of Redford Township and Tom Brown of Westland. They voted yes.

Mrs. Tomboulion, in particular, will take a lot of heat for her vote. Much of her north Oakland district still thinks this is 1955 and dreams that gasoline will drop back to 35 cents a gallon.

Big things are happening — bigger than in the 1820s, the 1880s, the 1910s and a lot of other decades. The late 1970s and early '80s will loom large in the history books.

But not because of the rough politicking one afternoon in Lansing.

U of D forgets Gus Dorais

Sitting with Tom Dorais at the luncheon table the other day brought back many fond memories for The Stroller and called his attention once again to one of the most rank injustices of all time on the sports scene.

Tom, now an official of the Pontiac division of General Motors, is the son of Gus Dorais, the legendary football figure who teamed with Knute Rockne to form the most famous forward passing team of all time on the collegiate football fields.

Gus Dorais took over the coaching duties at the University of Detroit in 1925 when the team practiced on the cinders along the railroad tracks below Jefferson Avenue. And in three years he lifted the team to such prominence that at the end of the 1928 season when it was undefeated, it was considered for the Rose Bowl.

Yet, despite the outstanding coaching job and the prominence it brought to the university, there is nothing on the campus to remember him except a small picture on the wall of Caliban Hall.

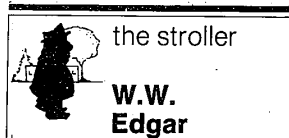
IT IS A SHAME. Not only is the Dorais name just about forgotten on the campus, but the stadium in which his teams won their greatest victories is now just a memory, too.

Along the way Dorais developed two All-American players in Lloyd Brazil, a great halfback, and Vince Banonis, a center whom Grantland Rice once called the best center he ever had seen.

In the fall of 1925, shortly after he had arrived in Detroit to begin his stroll on a metropolitan newspaper as a member of the Free Press sports department, The Stroller was assigned to cover the University of Detroit football team.

At that time, the school was located on East Jefferson, and the football team practiced along the railroad tracks close to the river.

One afternoon, The Stroller was told to report early the next day. The reason: the team was going to drill in the new stadium — officially named Dian Field in honor of its donor — out on Six Mile Road and Livernois.



SLOWLY, AND QUIETLY, Dorais started to build his football machine. In three short years, he developed a squad that was called one of the strongest independents.

In 1928 the team went undefeated. In fact, after losing to both Army and Notre Dame early in 1927, the team ran up a string of 22 consecutive victories. It was the longest string in college football at the time.

This great success left Dorais in a quandary. No other teams wanted to play him. Dorais attended a meeting of the intercollegiate coaches in New York, got on the floor and dared anyone to bring his team to Detroit. There was no response.

So dedicated did Dorais become that he once turned down an offer to take the coaching job at Princeton University where he could have had the benefit of the nation's top press. He said he hadn't finished the job in Detroit that he had signed on to do.

And so great was his hold on people that he set another record. He had the same assistants, the same trainer, and the same newspapermen covering him for 17 seasons. His hold on folks also took him to a seat on the Detroit Common Council where Billy Rogell, veteran of that body, lists Dorais as one of the 10 best he ever has served with at the council table.

This is the man who is the unsung hero at the University of Detroit and it is about time that a marker be erected somewhere on the campus so that he never will be forgotten.

No one is more entitled to it.

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