

Hills bares mark of shame in house burning

Ignorance reared its ugly head in Farmington Hills early Monday.

Weeks before five mentally retarded adults were scheduled to move into a \$100,000 home near 14 Mile and Farmington roads, a very sick human being, taking great care to make sure every room was filled with a trail of gasoline, set the house on fire.

Neighborhood paranoia over an "uncontrollable unit" moving in erupted in smoke along with the dreams of the five adults who would have lived there with supervision from the state.

The fate of those five persons is uncertain. They probably will continue to live in institutions because there is no other place for them.

The responsibility and consequences of one sick person will reflect on the whole community. The city of Troy had the distinction of shooting windows out of an adult foster care home ready for occupancy last year. Farmington Hills will join Troy as a city of shattered hopes for a segment of the population.

A college student phoned the Observer Tuesday to talk about the incident.

"I don't even want to admit I'm from Farmington Hills any more," she said.

It's hard to comprehend that a prosperous community of supposedly enlightened, educated residents also could be the scene of such barbaric action.

THE ACTION of the arsonist is uglier than racial prejudice. Blacks can fight a cross burning with reason and intelligence. Mentally retarded persons aren't equipped with the same devices of self defense. They are totally dependent on society for compassion and understanding.

Mental retardation often becomes jumbled in some minds with mental illness. Residents conjure images of psychopathic maniacs rampaging through their neighborhoods. This image couldn't be further from the truth.

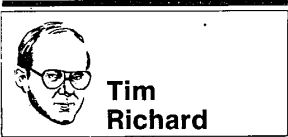
Living in a neighborhood that includes a group home for six retarded adults, a neighborhood vibrant with healthy young children, I have watched the interaction.

Some of those retarded residents are the friendliest strangers I have ever met, greeting neighbors

with outstretched hands and warm smiles. The children aren't stifled or threatened by their presence. Ignorance is the only stifling factor. People must learn to overcome an age-old fear of being frightened of what they don't understand.

In the current popular movie "Elephant Man," John Merrick (the elephant man) suffers from a physical disease, but the analogy still applies. Beneath his grotesque exterior is a sensitive, intelligent human being. Based on a true story, Merrick spent most of his life in a carnival freak show before he was liberated by a London physician in turn-of-the-century England.

Tragically, that attitude hasn't changed much in 100 years. Human dignity still proves to be a rarely acquired privilege for those who are different. That was proved this week in Farmington Hills.



Tim Richard

Gov. aims to preserve downtowns

Just before the election, I received a lengthy missive from U.S. Rep. John Wyndler, R-N.Y., to the effect that the Carter Administration was anti-suburbs.

As evidence, Wyndler cited a Carter policy that federal offices be moved out of suburban locations and into central cities.

That was ironic because on Oct. 10, with virtually no fanfare, Gov. William G. Milliken, a Republican, issued an executive directive which said:

"Henceforth, in selecting sites for state offices, priority in each case shall, consistent with law, be given to locating in the downtown or central business districts of cities and villages."

So where do the Republicans stand?

THE PROBLEM was brought to my attention a year or more ago by U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell, a Republican from Plymouth. Pursell is a former president of the chamber of commerce there, and Plymouth is struggling mightily to preserve its downtown.

Pursell complained that the Secretary of State moved his branch office out of downtown Plymouth and up to Northville. But not to downtown Northville. Rather, to a new shopping center in Northville Township, more than a mile from downtown Northville.

Northville, too, is working awfully hard to preserve its downtown.

Luckily, the state has big ears. Lt. Gov. James H. Brickley was assigned by Milliken to head up a Community Development Cabinet. Brickley's group recommended the downtown office policy which Milliken made official.

THIS POLICY had been in the works some time. At the August Republican State Convention, I bumped into Craig Ruff, a Brickley staffer who handles CDC work. Ruff explained:

"To the extent state government contributes to urban sprawl and unplanned development, it ought to stop. It ought to be a leader in preserving downtown patterns."

I saved the notes.

The policy isn't unthinking. A fish hatchery and a highway service garage needn't be in a downtown. And if a department head can prove services would be far better delivered outside a downtown, then a state office may be located where needed.

But those reasons had better be good, the governor said.

MILLIKEN TOLD department heads to look for existing space in state buildings, to consolidate state offices into single downtown areas and to think of rehabilitating historically significant downtown structures.

"Because state facilities often employ many workers, serve many clients and represent a substantial amount of investment in an area," the governor said, "the location of state offices and buildings can have a profound effect on investment and development patterns, employment levels, traffic flow, service and infrastructure needs, and ancillary state or local government expenditures."

"Poorly located state buildings can contribute to:

- "Costly and unsettling shifts in employment, population and investment.
- "The needless conversion of farm and other resource lands.
- "Wasteful duplication of public services and expenditures.
- "Inefficient and conflicting land use patterns.
- "Debilitating imbalance between local governmental responsibilities and their fiscal capacities."

DEPARTMENTS most likely to be affected, Ruff tells me, are the Secretary of State, Social Services, Labor (including the Employment Security Commission) and Health.

To me the policy makes sense. I never could understand why some unemployment offices, for example, were located away from public transportation and even from sidewalks.

And I wish Milliken and Brickley would spread the word to some of their fellow Republicans.

'BACK!'



Big issues are right here in community

The question most often asked of me is when am I going to work at some big metropolitan newspaper so I can deal with the "really big issues?"

I usually reply that I already am dealing with the "big" issues.

Last week I got a graphic lesson in why this kind of journalism, community journalism, is important.

I was a panelist for a debate among representatives from each of the three presidential camps.

The question really was quite elementary, I thought.

"How did each candidate feel about federal regulations which require that low-income housing be built along with senior citizen housing?"

The "well-prepared" representatives grimaced. Here was this journalist who had the gall to ask a question never before asked in the presidential forum.

Collectively, they cleared their throats, rustled through their papers and stared at the ceiling.

The John Anderson representative admitted he didn't have the faintest idea of what I was talking about.

The Reagan representative tried to fake it by pulling out a campaign leaflet and reading verbatim Reagan's housing policy.



THE CARTER representative was a little more fortunate. He lived around this area and was somewhat familiar with the senior citizen housing issue.

Afterwards, I got to thinking about presidential campaigns and the accompanying candidates.

For more than a year they, and their representatives, are programmed to answer the same questions over and over again. The nationally televised debates didn't offer any surprises.

We knew what the questions would be and how the candidates would answer.

National journalists have become just as programmed as the candidates.

The fate of senior citizens is one of the most important issues of our times. Yet, during the presidential campaign, only Reagan's stand on social security was examined.

Housing subsidies, medical care, transportation and nutrition for senior citizens were never discussed.

Yet, as we know, the senior housing issue has plagued many of our communities of Farmington Hills is tied up in a federal law suit. Farmington Hills has rejected the federal subsidized concept entirely.

Livonia, Southfield and other communities still are struggling with this national issue, with which these three representatives were unfamiliar.

I WONDER, how would have the three candidates have reacted to the very same question which stumped their local representatives?

Truthfully, they, too, would have fumbled and stumbled because they, too, are out of touch with the "really big issues."

But then, we'll never know because community journalists who are in touch with their communities are never asked to question presidential candidates.

We don't fit into the programming.

Lone Democrat had last laugh on town

Nestled comfortably in his easy chair the other evening waiting for the election returns, The Stroller decided to take a trip down Memory Lane to one of the most humorous finishes of a presidential race he ever has known.

It was back in 1916 when Charles Evans Hughes, the Republican, attempted to gain the White House and prevent Woodrow Wilson, the Princeton professor, from a second term.

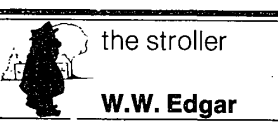
It so happened back in our little town of only 3,600 residents that there was only one Democrat. This lone figure was George B.F. Dilly, a coal dealer who was one of the richest men in town.

For weeks he made the rounds of the meeting places during the campaign and tried to win votes for his champion, Woodrow Wilson, by emphasizing that he kept us out of war. All he got was a smile from the Republicans who were certain that Hughes was the man and that the country's well being would be put back in to the hands the Republicans.

THEN CAME election day, a day that will live forever in the mind of The Stroller.

George B.F. Dilly was the target of criticism all day as the folks gathered at the polls. They were reminding him that he would have to go in hiding when the returns came in. He just smiled.

When the polls closed, George B.F. went home and waited alone, while the rest of the gatherings at



the stroller

W.W. Edgar

the polling places congregated at the volunteer fire hall to await the returns.

In those days there was no radio or television. The only way to get the returns was by phoning the daily newspapers over in the city. Starting about 10 o'clock, the first calls were made and The Stroller, then just entering his early manhood, was doing most of the calling. And the early results were very gratifying. Hughes was leading.

FINALLY, ABOUT midnight, it seemed almost a certainty that Hughes was the winner and it was decided to celebrate. Calls were made to the leader of the home town band and it was decided to play a victory concert on George B. F. Dilly's huge front porch.

Down the main street we went and awakened all the folks along the way with the news that Hughes had won. Once on Dilly's porch, the serenade became a great laugh. Old George pulled aside the

curtain, smiled, then closed the curtain and turned off the light. The Republicans were shouting that they had gained the edge on the town's lone Democrat.

We returned home and went to bed, certain that the Republicans had won and would take over the White House. Well, you recall what happened. During the night the trend switched.

When we awoke the next morning, the news was spread that Woodrow Wilson had won his second term.

AS EVENING came and darkness fell on our little town, there was the sound of music — band music — in the distance. Louder and louder it became until the town band — the same one that serenaded George B. F. Dilly the night before, now was heading a victory march with only one marcher.

Sure enough, it was the town's lone Democrat having the last laugh and he went to his grave years later still laughing about the night he got his revenge on the Republicans.

It was a finish The Stroller never will forget. It was a more memorable finish than the year Harry Truman beat Tom Dewey in the final moments of the count while the Chicago Tribune was on the street proclaimed a Dewey victory.

It was a fine evening for The Stroller as he took the trip down Memory Lane.