



Goodbye construction barriers. So long to congested, two-lane traffic. It'll be smooth sailing from now on all the way from I-696 in Farmington Hills to Maple Road in West Bloomfield.

Miracles do happen

Motorists take off your hats and salute that off-ridiculed Oakland County Road Commission for completing the Orchard Lake road widening project one month ahead of time.

Times are few when the road commission is open for public plaudits. But this week thousands of motorists are driving to and from work more quickly and more safely because of commission efforts in widening Orchard Lake between 12 Mile and Maple.

For years, an ever-increasing number of motorists have struggled up and down the narrow corridor, mumbering and grumbling and generally ruining their day.

We're sure that these on-time commuters even are finding dinner a more pleasant experience. Warm food and cool tempers make for improved table manners.

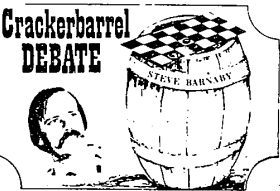
Unfortunately, some backward-looking suburban residents insist on living in a dream world of the rural countryside. They continue to fight the completion of the widening project south of 12 Mile.

No longer are Farmington Hills and West Bloomfield simply bedroom community havens for the harried blue and white collar worker.

Thirty years ago urbanites moved to the suburbs to escape city traffic congestion. Today, the congestion is in the suburbs.

Not only is the Orchard Lake corridor essential for the suburban commuter, it also is the key to continued economic expansion.

The political battle may continue. But for today we thank the road commission and look forward to even more projects completed on time.



We elect a dictionary of names

So you think the ballot was a tad long this year. Of course in the computer age, we no longer call it a bedsheet ballot. Today's ballot is more like Webster's Unabridged Dictionary.

Now, I'm all for participatory democracy, but even the most avid participant's patience was poked when faced with the compendium of persons seeking public office.

Among the weighty selections we had to make Nov. 4 were members of three university boards, state Board of Education trustees, Michigan Supreme Court justices, District Court judges, Court of Appeals judges, Probate Court judges, Circuit Court judges and assorted clerks and treasurers.

The list varies depending on where you live. But one fact rings clear: Voting becomes a farce when the electorate is forced to cast ballots on positions of which they have little knowledge and for persons of whom they can know nothing.

Let's be honest, folks. Few, if any, of us really know our county probate judges, let alone what they do all day.

And how about that bastion of higher learning, the state Board of Education? Give you a nickel if you can name all the members off the top of your head. A two-penny bonus follows if you can tell me what the devil they do.

THE REAL DANGER is the proverbial election by name association.

You know how it works. If the name's familiar, punch the hole, pull the lever, do anything, just get it over with.

As a kid, I remember my newspaper circulation manager's brother was some sort of judge. I swore to God, this guy was re-elected time after time because all the paper boys hounded their parents to vote for Mr. Schemanske's brother.

To this day I'm unsure of whether it was Schemanske of Recorder's Court or Szymanski of Common Pleas. No matter: probably both of them benefited.

Things change little over the years. This election season, some guy named L. Patterson ran for the 17th Congressional District seat. For a time the press corps had a difficult time arranging an interview with this mystery man. Seems he was spending some time in Northville Regional Psychiatric Hospital.

The guy received more than 40,000 votes. Now released, he has a certificate which says he's sane. Can't say the same for those who voted for him.

THROUGH the years, offices have been filled with familiar names. In this area, having the right Irish, Jewish or Polish name really helps. O'Brien is safe. The Michigan Manual lists 17 of them. Other sure winners are O'Hara, O'Neil (a second I is optional) and O'Connor.

Kennedy used to be a sure bet. But Camelot has lost its luster and could be a handicap today. Levin and Kowalski seem to work most of the time, as does Lincoln (a little history, you know).

It's time we faced reality. We shouldn't be voting for all these faceless names. Let the governor and the Legislature put their reputations on the line. They should appoint and confirm these public nonentities.

It would leave us more time in the voting booth to concentrate on the persons we love to hate.



More suits, less service from county

There was a grim comment on American society in action taken last week by the Wayne County Board of Commissioners.

Keep in mind that the county legislators had already ordered layoffs at the jail, youth home, morgue and General Hospital.

Keep in mind, too, that only five years ago the Sheriff's Department had 1,200 employees, that it currently has 850 and that the board intends to cut that by another 250 or so.

And keep in mind that parts of Hines Park that were once grassy hills are now overgrown with weeds because there's too little money for maintenance.

IN THE MIDDLE of this budget crunch, the commissioners decided they had to add — add, mind you — nine lawyers in the civil counsel's office.

The reason is the increasing number of damage claims against the county generally and at the hospital in particular.

What it tells us is that people are lawsuit-happy. In slang, it's known as the "sue the bastards" mentality.

No longer do Americans seek their fortunes by panning for gold in California or Alaska. No longer do they seek instant fortune in the stock market, at the gaming tables or even the lottery.

Instead, they look for any reason to file suit.

This occurs at a time when Wayne County is losing population. It occurs at a time when the medical industry is ordering tests, tests, tests on patients for everything imaginable, just to avoid lawsuits.

After a fellow has traveled along the journalistic trail for a number of years, he finds that he becomes a target for questions of all sorts.

The Stroller, who has been involved the world of journalism for more than a few years, found this out the other evening when, in the midst of a discussion of the recent election, he was asked:

"Who was the most unusual character you have met in your travels along the river of printer's ink?"

Figuring this was a trick question to get him involved in a debate, The Stroller asked in return, "Have you ever heard of anyone who made a success of failure?"

This caught his questioners off guard. They looked with wide open eyes and shook their heads to think that anything like that could be possible.

BUT THE Stroller was serious. He actually met a fellow who made a success of failure, so he told them the story of K.O. Christmas, an old-time fighter who billed himself as the Akron Rubber Man.



Tim Richard

MY NOTION of government, gleaned from textbooks and experience, is that a legislative body must make final budget decisions. We then live with those decisions, at least until the next election when we have the opportunity to throw the bums out.

The other county officeholders, and even the judges, have a different idea. They have a "sue the bastards" mentality, too.

Sheriff William Lucas last week said he would file suit to stop the cuts in his department. Lucas said he would hire a lawyer from "personal" funds, which may mean we are paying him too much.

A year ago, the county was going through this same budget crunch, and it led Commissioner Kay Beard, D-Inkster, to write:

"The courts are hurting us in many ways. Last year (1978), the Board of Commissioners asked all elected officials and department heads to voluntarily cut back their operations by 15 percent — whether through cuts in staff or programs was left up to them.

"The courts, the only ones in the county to have lump sum budgets, did not do so and knew that they would run out of money before the end of the current (1979) budget year.

"**THE OTHER** elected officials, except the Board of Auditors, sued us to regain their full appropriations . . .

"The court allowed them to spend at the full amount — which meant that they would also run out of funds — until such time as the suits would be settled.

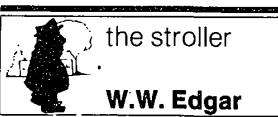
"A recent (court) decision held that only the prosecutor and register of deeds would be harmed by the 15-percent cuts. However, that does not restore the money already expended by the others," said Commissioner Beard.

A FINAL ironic note: At the beginning, I noted the county is hiring nine more civil lawyers to handle the burden of lawsuits and claims.

If those lawyers didn't have to be hired, it would save the jobs of more than nine sheriff's deputies.

Thus, Sheriff Lucas' own "sue the bastards" mentality is part of the reason we will have less law enforcement protection in Wayne County.

K.O. made big success as failure



the stroller

W.W. Edgar

He was quite a character — and one of the oddest ever to grace the rings around the country.

To The Stroller's knowledge, K.O. never won a big fight, yet he was booked in the main event in all the major boxing centers.

What made his career all the more unusual is that while he never won a major fight, he seldom finished one in any other position than on his knees in the center of the ring being counted out.

K.O. was what they called a "trial horse" in the fight game. Any time a young boxer with any promise came along, he was matched somewhere with K.O. And by beating him — as was the custom

— the rookie pugilist had his confidence built up for bigger game.

K.O. HIT the Detroit scene in the early '30s and soon became one of the favorites among the odd characters for which the fight game is noted. He was nothing more than human punching bag, but a smart one. He saw to it that he never was hurt in any of his bouts.

One of his queerest "fights" took place at the Michigan State Fair Grounds when he was matched with Primo Carnera, the "Ambling Alp" who went on from that bout to win the world heavyweight title.

Carnera was a giant of a man and the kind of an opponent who could be difficult to handle. But old K.O. didn't let this bother him. He came out for the second round and deliberately delivered a low blow and was ruled the loser on a foul.

Back in the dressing room, while the crowd hollered "fake," K.O. sat on a trunk and smilingly said, "Let them holler. My end of the purse was put in a bank in Windsor this afternoon."