

Stance on handgun safety provokes gun lovers

Handguns is one of those subjects, like group homes for the retarded and the rights of homeowners to protect their property from someone's pesky pets, that always raises the ire of Farmington folk.

Earlier this month a 4-year-old Farmington Hills girl was shot in the stomach by her 6-year-old brother with a .32 caliber pistol. Luckily, the girl survived.

A reporter learning of the incident from the police was confronted with groans of: "You're not gonna print this, are you? That kid has been through enough suffering. The shooting was definitely accidental."

Obviously the shooting was accidental. Of course the little boy didn't premeditate shooting his younger sister. Kids are known to do dumb things like sword fight with kitchen knives and jump off beds with towels tucked into their T-shirts in imitation of Superman.

At some point that type of behavior stops being innocent horseplay and turns into a real life-death situation — as it did for the 4-year-old girl.

Why in heaven's name was a loaded pistol on a closet shelf where a 6-year-old had no trouble reaching it?

And why shouldn't the local newspaper print such a story on the front page so that other careless parents can double-check the whereabouts and condition of their handguns? A little reminder doesn't hurt, especially on the heels of a life-threatening episode involving children.

A LITTLE SENSATIONAL you say? Maybe, but worthwhile if even one parent out there hides his gun in a better place and takes out the bullets.

That's the point of printing the story. Not to say that handguns are dumb, which is my personal belief. They serve no other purpose except

to kill or maim other humans.

That's why John Lennon is dead. That's why President Reagan, Pope John Paul, and Press Secretary James Brady all underwent surgery this year and will suffer ailments for the rest of their lives.

They are just a few notables in a sea of handgun victims in this country. In Miami, via national news, we see a woman carrying a bag of groceries in one arm and a handgun in the other as she walks up to her apartment.

Also via the news we see rioters in the Brixton area of London and in Liverpool being quelled by bobbies armed only with plastic shields and wooden sticks. Despite several days of rioting, the death toll is zero.

Closer to home at an international border as peaceful as the Detroit/Windsor crossing, American custom officials tote handguns. Canadian custom

officers do not. The message is immediately clear to visitors: handguns are the American way.

BUT THAT'S THE sort of talk that inevitably raises the ire of the seemingly evergrowing number of handgun enthusiasts and owners. Your local police department deals with them daily: the throngs who come to get handgun permits and concealed weapons permits.

Some proudly display bumper stickers that tell us the only way we will get their guns is when we unwrap their cold, bloody fingers from around them.

If adults want to cherish their handguns, that's their business.

Let's at least protect the children until they're old enough to decide whether they're pro or anti-handguns.

MARY RODRIGUE



Nick Sharkey

Eight Mile boundary edges north

A sign outside the building bluntly states: "Stouffer's Northland Inn has discontinued operations. For reservation information please call 1-800-321-6586."

Taped to the wood-frame entrance door was a cardboard poster: "Edward C. Luz Company party at Superior Room, Michigan Inn."

The Edward C. Luz Company obviously had planned its party at Stouffer's Northland Inn before it was abruptly closed last week. Stouffer's officials cited the dismal economy and low occupancy rate in metro Detroit as reasons for the closing.

Whatever the reasons, last week's closing of Stouffer's Northland Inn was a sharp blow to Detroit and the suburbs.

Not many years ago, it was fashionable to draw a line along Eight Mile and Telegraph roads and pretend such metropolitan problems as hotel closings and crime existed only inside those lines. According to the theory, north and west of those roads were well-groomed suburban hideaways that were not afflicted by the harsh realities of city life.

That view has been slowly changing. Suburban communities have increasingly been facing some of the difficulties of metropolitan central cities.

Last week's closing of Stouffer's was another reminder. It may take a few years but Detroit's difficulties become the suburbs'.

I HAD BEEN to the Northland Inn only a few times. Last summer I visited several delegations staying there during the Republican National Convention.

When I walked into the Northland Inn last summer, it was a bustling, bustling place. Registration clerks were busy, and the lobby was filled with enthusiastic delegates.

A year later I had to peer through a padlocked door to look at the same lobby. The physical structure didn't look any different from 1980. The red brick exterior had been well maintained. Large, comfortable chairs were placed throughout the lobby. Several lamps were lit. The fireplace even had some logs.

To the outsider it looked as if the hotel were still operating. One-half mile north, the lights of the newer Michigan Inn could be seen. Just east of the Michigan Inn is the large Southfield Sheraton. Maybe competition for the shrinking traveler dollar had killed the Northland Inn.

Only a few hundred yards away from the hotel stands the recently renovated Northland Shopping Center.

Northland is justifiably proud of the millions of dollars which have been spent into sprucing up the shopping area. The oldest of the major shopping centers in the Detroit area has let age decay and destroy it. Instead it has literally put its money where its mouth is by investing in the future.

Last week was not a good week for Northland. In addition to the closing of a hotel which bore its name, Northland Center was hurt when a Detroit daily incorrectly stated in a headline that a woman had been stabbed to death in a Northland parking lot. Actually, she had been stabbed in the parking lot of a nearby office building.

WHAT THE MERCHANTS at Northland Shopping Center have done should serve as an example. As the difficulties of crime and age came to the center, they refused to fold up their tents and move to another area. They stood their ground and fought back. Despite Northland's setbacks last week, one has to wish the merchants well.

Consider the alternative to working on the problems of Detroit and our suburbs. One northern suburbanite told me recently, "I'd never let my daughter travel south of 10 Mile Road." So he's bringing the "Eight Mile Road line" a couple miles north.

When the I-595 freeway is completed, will the new line become 11 Mile Road? What after that — 14 or 15 Mile Road, Beech Daly or Middlebelt?

As the closing of the Northland Inn reminded us again, we can't continually run away from our problems.



Rewarding public servants

A significant event took place in recent days in the Walled Lake School District.

Four of the seven elected school board trustees voted to ignore one of the sacred commandments of elected officialdom, the one which states, "Thou shalt not serve without adequate reward."

In a rare move in such circles, the school board voted to forego remuneration for the 1981-82 school year.

Even though the vote was a 4-3 squeaker and even though the total amount forsaken will not significantly aid the school district budget, the action is almost astounding.

LOCAL HISTORIAN Herodotus Cooper believes that the voluntary pay cut by a board may be the only one of its kind in this area in the last decade.

"We have many examples of public officials who say they will give up part of their salaries, but usually the promise is tied to some condition impossible to meet," Herodotus relates.

For example, a Wayne County commissioner recently promised that he would give up the cost-of-living allowance part of his salary (roughly \$6,700) if the county sheriff were to eliminate all overtime, and if independent county offices were to make across-the-board layoffs.

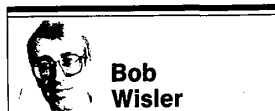
"Knowing the conditions won't be met, one can use the technique in attracting attention to one's supposed good intentions, without seriously threatening his own pocketbook," Herodotus said.

The Walled Lake school board members — even the minority members who were dragged along by the majority — will not see \$25 per meeting that trustees had been receiving. It is estimated that the board holds about 26 meetings per year, so each board member will have about \$650 less income in the next school year.

IN AN ERA when political leaders are continually demanding sacrifice by employees and taxpayers, it is refreshing to note some leaders are willing to set the example themselves.

It would be truly inspiring if a sense of sacrifice were to affect the elected officials in other jurisdictions.

For example, recently there has been some grousing about the method of rewarding West



Bob Wisler

Blomfield township trustees for their arduous duties. Under township rules, those trustees who are not full-time employees are paid \$50 per meeting. Trustees who attended a regular meeting and two special meetings on a Monday and Tuesday in a recent week stood to receive \$150 for that week. At times, according to our reports, the special meetings last less than a half hour.

Treasurer Andrew Lobodocky — one of those full-time elected officials who gets the same pay no matter how many meetings he attends — called the practice "triple-dipping."

A board move to a safer policy, perhaps merely double-dipping instead of triple-dipping, would be in order.

EVEN MORE inspiring would be a return to the lofty ideal that elected officials are those able, respected and committed community leaders who are willing to donate some of their time, talent and energies in order to make their community a better place in which to dwell.

In days gone by, leaders sought office primarily to serve, and they received hardly token remuneration.

From there we have come to the point in cities where faceless compensation commissions, who are not accountable to the public, reward part-time elected officials with benefits that make many full-time employees shiver with anticipation. In some communities, these rewards have included \$9,000 annual part-time salaries and pension plans for elected officials after serving only a few years.

Since the cynic in us tells us that elected officials will not willingly return to the days when public service was its own reward, it is incumbent on the public to become aware of what is happening in the matter of compensation for elected officials.



Tim Richard

Home: place to live, not investment

When Phil Power bought these newspapers, he vowed they wouldn't be a political organ.

"When the Democrats do something silly or stupid, we will say so. When the Republicans do something silly or stupid, we will say so again," he said in just about those words.

What is good for politicians is also good for the real estate industry, a group I have been known to kick around when it had it coming. Now it gets a pat on the back.

Last week I heard a man in the real estate business say something that made sense.

"We've talked too much about the investment side of housing. You buy a home to live in," said Richard Elsea, president of Real Estate One, Inc.

IT'S TRUE. For years, people have plunked bigger and bigger chunks of their incomes into single-family detached houses on the theory they were somehow investing.

Realtors have conditioned us to think of the single-family detached house as a "home." Actually, an apartment can be a home. A condo can be a home. A farm can be a home. A trailer can be a home. Indeed, for the Bedouin, a tent is a home.

In national income accounting, an investment is something that produces more goods and services, like a factory, an office, a stamping machine, word-processing equipment, a wrench or a meeting table. Each year, the business depreciates part of the value as a cost of making sales.

A house is more properly thought of as a durable consumer good, like a silver table service or a stove. In the national income accounts, the use one gets from a house shows up as non-cash rent received. In other words, the house owner gets a valuable service for which he otherwise might have to pay rent.

So much for the macroeconomic side of houses.

HOUSING IS supposed to be a great buy, to hear some real estate salespersons tell it, because you get so many "tax deductions." Mostly untrue.

To begin with, money you spend on interest and property taxes is not deducted from federal income taxes. If you try it, you will go to prison.

Study the Schedule A with your last year's tax return, and you'll find interest and property taxes are reductions in taxable income. Look at lines 39 and 40 of Schedule A. Only the excess of line 39 over 40 is deductible from taxable income.

In my own return, the excess is \$823. Big deal. That reduction of taxable income is only a small portion of what we paid out in property taxes and interest.

FAR FROM producing dividends and interest — as do true investments — a home costs a lot of operating money.

I've mentioned property taxes and interest. There are also insurance, heat, electricity for lights, electricity for the water heater, water, sewer services, paint, landscaping, lawn care and repairs (know what a water heater costs these days?).

You sure don't pay those kinds of costs on your Merrill Lynch account.

Housing as an "investment" or as a "tax deduction" is nonsense.

A HOUSE as a way of living is something else. "You buy a house to live in," as Dick Elsea put it.

With your own house, you can have some fruit trees, a bird feeder, a private patio, frisky dogs, a work bench, more room for guests, a place to store your canoe, a rec room for your own pool table and many other things you can't have with other kinds of housing.

Realtors would be well advised to sell a house for what it is — a place to live your lifestyle — rather than for what it can't be — an investment and a method of beating taxes.