

Unthinkable happens: Builders downsize

TWO YEARS AGO, the idea would have been considered heresy, treason, socialistic. Late last month, however, the word came from no less an authority than the Western Wayne Oakland County Board of Realtors.

House builders, they reported, are following the lead of car makers by downsizing their product and dropping costly add-on features.

Never mind that those dizzy environmentalists and pinko newspaper columnists had been saying for years that houses were eating up too much space. It is now a fact, on the Board of Realtors letterhead, that new houses are getting smaller.

The details are these, according to the realty folks:

- Houses built in 1981 had an average square footage of 1,550, or 45 fewer square feet than in 1980, and 105 fewer than in the peak year of 1978.

- Houses with four or more bedrooms were 20 percent of the stock in 1981 compared to 24 percent in 1978. Those with three bedrooms dropped from 64 to 59 percent in the same period. The proportion of two-bedroom houses climbed from 12 percent in 1978 to 21 percent last year.

- Fireplaces slipped in popularity from 64 percent to 55 percent.

- Fewer houses were built with two-car or larger garages — 53 percent last year compared to 62 percent in 1978.

- Houses able to use wood, coal and/or solar energy climbed to 7 percent in 1981 versus 2.5 percent a decade earlier.

- Builders achieved economies by paring formal living rooms and hallways.

WELL, WELL, well. It seemed as if the day would never come. Until the deep recession and energy crunch made buyers listen to their checkbooks, it seemed as if houses would get bigger indefinitely.

Realtors cite the growing number of singles and a desire for less or maintenance as major reasons for the trend. Maybe most of the folks I know who have purchased houses in the last few years are couples. And as they talk about the nerve-shattering experience, they cite several lessons.

Big houses mean big property tax bills. Even in a recession, assessments continue to rise.

Big houses mean big heating bills.

Big houses and big interest rates husband and wife must both work to make the payments. If a blessed event occurs, the wife doesn't plan to wait until Junior is in kindergarten before she returns to the job. She's back in a few months. Gotta make those \$750 payments.

SOME BUYERS didn't really want to become homeowners but feel compelled, for various reasons, to do so.

Realizing the real estate market won't continue upward and upward forever, they see themselves surrendering job mobility by being tied to a house they can't peddle easily.

From an economic point of view, there are some decided blessings in the downsizing of houses.

Smaller houses will mean smaller lot sizes, so less farm land will be gobbled up.

Smaller houses will mean smaller mortgages, so less capital will be lured away from high-technology industry.

It is unfortunate that the housing industry and its workers have suffered so the last two years. But it's laudable that the industry has finally come to its senses about house sizes.

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23352 Farmington Road Farmington, MI 48024 (313) 477-5450

Steve Barnaby editor
Nick Sharkey managing editor

comment

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Some campaigns should win awards

THE PRIMARY elections are over, the winners have made their victory speeches, the losers now have long days to try to determine where it was that they went wrong, and the public will have a slight breather before a new onslaught of political oratory fills the airwaves.

Before the primary fades into obscurity, however, it is necessary to focus some attention on a few of the participants engaged in the timeless and often shameless drama known as politics.

To bestow the proper recognition on certain feats, we are instituting the Roberto political awards. For this primary election, they are awarded in the following manner:



Bob Wisler

The Harold Stassen Graduates Loner Award: to Stephen, 65, and Helen Gotowka, 60, of Dearborn Heights. Helen ran for Wayne County executive Democratic nomination and finished seventh in a field of ten. She got 3,618 votes, some 161,000 votes behind first-place finisher Tom Lucas. Bill it was about three times the number of votes that brother Stephen received in his bid for the Democratic nomination for the 10th state Senate District (Dearborn and Dearborn Heights). Stephen had 1,038 to finish fourth in field of four (some 11,100 behind the winner).

The Gotowkas live in the same house in Dearborn Heights and find that plotting political campaigns is more fun than gardening and shuffleboard.

They have never won an election despite the fact that they have been candidates in more elections than you can remember on short notice.

How do they feel about losing? "It doesn't bother us, we're used to it," says Stephen. "We always run a clean campaign, — no mud — so we're friends afterward with whoever beats us."

The H.L. Mencken Nobody Ever Lost an

Election Underestimating the Knowledge of the Voting Public Award: to William R. Ryan of Livonia — whoever he is — who received 7,350 votes to defeat Walter H. Roessler, with 3,240 votes, for the Democratic nomination for Wayne County Commissioner from the 10th District (Livonia, Northville and Plymouth). Roessler passed out literature, appeared at candidates gatherings, put up signs and walked door-to-door.

None of the locals can recall Ryan doing anything — no signs, no literature, no meetings. Ryan, the manager of a drive-in theater, has not been involved in a campaign for office before and didn't return questionnaires as requested from the League of Women voters. Attempts to reach him by phone were for naught.

There is a suspicion that, when it comes to Wayne County elective offices, the name is more important than the campaign, and a familiar name like Ryan is better than a real grass-roots campaign any day of the week.

The Francis Bacon What's in a Name Award: to Sandy Levin, the one-time state Senator who left the area some time after his second gubernatorial race loss to Bill Milliken in 1974. Levin popped back into town after popular U.S. Bill Brodhead announced his retirement from his 17th Congressional District post. State Sen. Doug Ross was endorsed by the Detroit News, Detroit Free Press, Observer Newspapers, assorted other institutions, and by no less than Brodhead. The result: Levin buried Ross, 44 to 26 percent.

Vying for the award were Wayne Circuit Judge finalists Robert Colombo Jr., the son of a circuit judge, and Richard Hathaway, the nephew of a circuit judge.

The Mary Cunningham She's Not Just Another Pretty Face Award: to Helene White ("She Just Right") who led the balloting for Wayne County Circuit Court nomination thanks to a very visible advertising campaign which featured a pretty face, long blond hair, a black robe, two giant flags and a short speech that

few heard and fewer could understand.

The John Wayne Macho Politics Is Good Politics Award: to State Rep. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, who won the Republican nomination for state Senator from the 16th District (Troy, Birmingham, Clawson, Pleasant Ridge, Berkeley and Royal Oak). The most publicized event during the race involving Cruce, former State Rep. Dave Campbell, conservative public relations expert Bill McMaster, and Jeanne Stine, was the battle of the median between Cruce and McMaster.

One night about 10 p.m. McMaster and Cruce had a confrontation in the median of Woodward Ave. McMaster claimed he was inspecting a Cruce sign on a bus stop bench to ensure that it had certain designations required by law when Cruce and a campaign aide came along and attacked him.

Cruce said he spotted McMaster ripping Cruce's signs from their moorings, chased McMaster on to the median and sat on him until police arrived. Police refused to recommend criminal action. McMaster sued Cruce for \$10,000. Cruce got the most votes, 7,630, to edge Campbell, 7,490, for the nomination, and, in a heavily Republican area, probably the election in November. The sat-upon McMaster finished fourth with 2,017 votes, 2,720 votes behind the third-place Stine.

The Roman Hruska Bigots Should Be Represented Too Award: to Gerald Carlson, a private detective who boasts of being a white supremacist, for capturing 7,170 votes in the race for the Democratic nomination in the 15th Congressional District (Garden City, Westland, the southern part of Livonia, Canton Township and several other communities). This was more votes than Carlson received two years ago in the Republican primary for the same job when he defeated another candidate to become the Republican nominee. Two years ago, he lost in the general election to long-time Democratic incumbent U.S. Rep. William D. Ford, the man who defeated him handily in the primary.

Yearning for corn

The sight of yellow corn always has been fascinating to The Stroller.

From the days of his youth when he lived only a stone's throw from the fields of yellow corn, his mouth always watered, as the Pennsylvania Dutch say, for a cob of the delicious kernels. And more so at picnic time in the fall.

To him there is no greater meal than to sit down at the table, take a steaming cob, brush it with melted butter, and then enjoy a feast.

HOWEVER, the folks out here in the Midwest are not fully acquainted with the various ways of preparing corn. They just boil it, or roast it.

What The Stroller likes best is the old fashioned clambakes in the East where corn is only one of the many dishes, but it is a different-tasting corn, and for a good reason.

The original clambake was held out in the open, preferably on someone's farm at the end of town. It was an all-day affair.

We'd gather in the morning and dig a large hole in the ground. Then we filled the hole with wood and covered it with a big steel plate. Then began the interesting task of piling on the food.



the stroller
W.W. Edgar

WE'D START with "Irish" potatoes, then a layer of corn, a layer of chicken that was cut and placed in lace-like bags. This was followed with a row of sweet potatoes, then a layer of cherry-stone clams. And another layer of corn. This was followed until enough food was placed on the iron plate to satisfy the number to be fed. It was covered with wet burlap.

At about noon the fire was started. For the rest of the day the food was allowed to simmer in the heat.

All the while the juices from each layer descended to the row below until all the food had the benefit of the tasty juices of fish, chicken, corn, sweet potatoes and clams.

Late in the afternoon the bake was opened and the food was served in water pails with a pound of butter at each place on the table.

There was a dish to set before a king.

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