

A proud week

2 who serve get well-deserved community plaudits

Residents have two reasons to feel proud this week — Bob McConnell and Al Jean.

Although different in personality and professions, both share a common attribute — service to the community.

Residents also have those same two reasons to feel fortunate. For in truth, we all have benefited from these two persons who have dedicated much of their time to making this area's future more secure. Last week McConnell was honored by the Chamber of Commerce as Citizen of the Year. Jean was lauded by the Farmington Rotary with the presentation of the service club's Vocational Service Award.

McConnell was Farmington Hills' first mayor and a driving force in creating the city out of old Farmington Township. He served as chairman of the charter commission which drew up the Hills' found-

ing document.

Presently the chairman of the Economic Development Corporation, McConnell has been instrumental in building the young city's tax base by luring business to the community.

He also served as an Oakland County commissioner and was the township's last supervisor. He is a textile engineer.

JEAN HAS BEEN an institution in the community for decades. And although he isn't the kind of guy to be in the headlines, he has made a dramatic impact on many young persons throughout the years.

Owner of Jean's Hardware on 12 Mile, across from Harrison High School, he has made it a habit to hire young persons and show them the ins and outs of running a business.

The list of students who have worked for him is long. Some guess as many as 175 have learned the

ways of American mercantilism under Jean's tutelage. He works in cooperation with the Farmington School District's cooperative work program to hire students.

At this week's Rotary luncheon, some of those students attended to tell what impact Jean has had on them. Each story, in its own way, was touching and a little different. But the underlying theme was the same — Al Jean took a lot of extra time out of his workday to work "with" the students.

"Every day was a learning experience," said Gregg Johnson, who took time out from his day at a landscaping firm to honor Jean. "He went out of his way to show me things."

Another former student, Jeff Potrykus, now a supervisor at the hardware, worked for Jean seven years before deciding to go out on his own.

"I wanted to go out and explore — to see what I had missed," said Potrykus.

He soon found out and decided life at Jean's was all right with him. He returned and has been there ever since.

"I didn't enjoy it out there. I wanted to work with people, to help them," he said.

Those are the qualities which Jean has passed on for many years.

Two different types of persons, McConnell and Jean, serving this community in the best way they know how. How fortunate we in Farmington/Farmington Hills are to have such individuals in our midst.

Our hats go off to them. We all should be more like them. The world would be a better place.



Tim Richard

Partisanship muddies up great county

DISAPPOINTING — that's the only way to describe the Oakland County Board of Commissioners candidates' answers to question No. 3 from the League of Women Voters.

I had an advance look at the questionnaires, and you'll be reading the League's pieces in the weeks ahead. Frankly, I thought the third question went to the heart of much of the political controversy in Oakland County.

"How do you view the balance of power between the Oakland County executive, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners and the Oakland County departments?"

Some Democrats said they had become "eunuchs."

OAKLAND WAS the pioneer county in Michigan in adopting the executive plan in 1974. Democrats had generally favored an elective executive, Republicans an appointive manager. The Democrats won that argument, but the Republicans elected their man — Daniel T. Murphy.

There have been fights ever since. Although one would expect Democratic commissioners to support consolidation of authority under an executive, it hasn't worked out that way. The chief reason seems to be that the executive is a Republican.

In the last two years, Murphy has sought to tie up a lot of loose ends that weren't clearly covered by PA 139, the public act of the Legislature that allowed Oakland voters to adopt the executive system.

After a battle, he is winning jurisdiction over the children's institutions, which have been under the Probate Court. After a battle, he won the right to appoint the county's civil counsel. After a battle, he still has jurisdiction over the security division, a buildings and grounds operation Democratic commissioners would like to hand over to the Democratic sheriff.

Murphy still doesn't have state legislation that would allow his office to take over the drain commission and combine it with the public works department. Nor has he been able to win operating jurisdiction over the road commission, even though the Legislature has given the executive of Wayne County (no doubt a Democrat) power to absorb the road commission there, beginning next year.

And so it's puzzling that Democratic commissioners would be so hostile to unifying all administrative operations, not otherwise headed by an elected official, under the executive. Their sniping smacks of raw partisanship.

DEMOCRATIC CANDIDATES, however, do have a point when they accuse Republicans of playing heavy-handed partisan games. Oakland County has three seats at the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments' General Assembly. One always used to be awarded to the minority party. Lately, Republicans have taken all three.

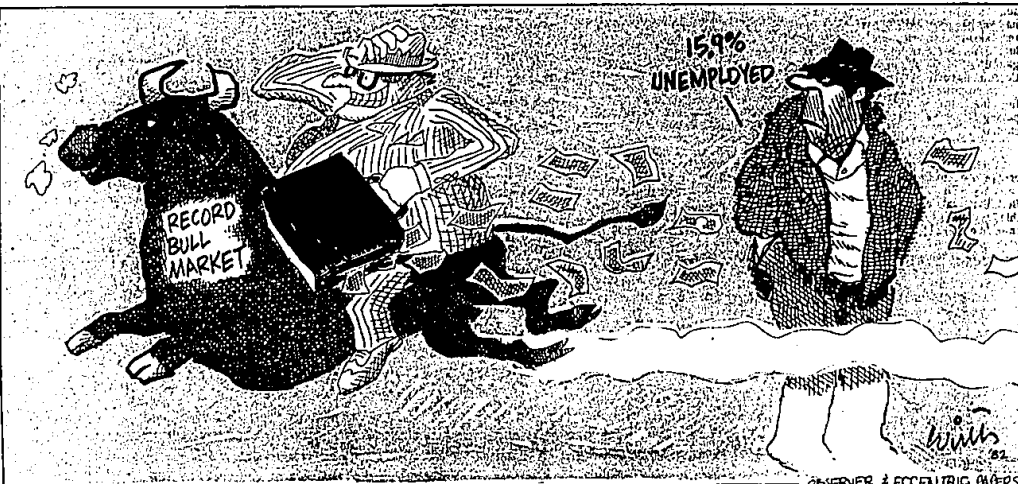
Republican commissioners have been making more and more decisions in their caucus and effectively shutting Democrats out of a dialog. Reporters on the best way to fix the problem is to elect the Republican caucus prior to a board meeting than the meeting itself.

At a recent meeting, Democrats were unable even to get a roll call vote on a resolution.

By the same token, Republicans could complain about the way Democrats, both on the county board and in the Legislature, try to force the Democrats' efforts to give voters the kind of unified government they asked for back in 1974.

That's sad. I have seen a fair number of county governments at work and read more than a little bit about them, and it has always seemed to me Oakland County was at the top of the heap.

But read the candidates' answers and judge for yourself.



OBSERVER & ECCENTRIC ARTISTS

A quiet proposal to boost car sales

Like it or not, we all work for the auto industry. You probably don't punch a clock every morning at Ford's transmission plant in Livonia. Nor do you spend your working hours at the American Motors Corp. headquarters in Southfield.

You may consider yourself a gasoline station attendant, a lawyer or a housewife. But, believe me, you work for the auto industry. Dollars produced by the auto companies and related suppliers provide the lifeblood for the Detroit area. That money then supports suburban life insurance agents, accountants, grocery store clerks, etc.

The last two years have reminded us of the relationship. Auto sales are the pits. Thus, Michigan's unemployment rate for September was an astronomical 15.9 per cent.

IT'S WITH this in mind that I offer a modest proposal for our troubled industry. It is: put a muzzle on the chief executives of the automobile companies.

As evidence, look to Chrysler Corp. Today the final votes will be tabulated as the UAW overwhelmingly rejects a new contract.

What happened? According to most observers, approval of the new contract was going to be close. Then Chrysler Chairman Lee Iacocca began bragging about his company's financial statements. Iacocca proclaimed that Chrysler was profitable and in fact had a \$1 billion cash reserve.

Naturally, this didn't go over well with the rank and file. They were being asked to approve a contract that did not include an immediate wage in-



Nick Sharkey

crease, even if it did restore a cost of living allowance.

Iacocca's comments ended any hope of getting the contract approved. It was learned later that Iacocca was giving a false impression. Technically Chrysler is profitable, but not because of current car sales. One-time sales such as the tank plants in Lima, Ohio, and Warren improved the financial picture.

Until the company makes a profit on current operations, it is in trouble. But that message was lost on UAW workers because of Iacocca's braggadocio.

IACOCCA IS not alone in suffering from a loose lip.

Earlier this year, General Motors was also involved in delicate negotiations with the UAW. In the midst of many offers and counter-offers, GM Chairman Roger Smith surprised everyone by promising that any dollar concessions GM received would be "passed through" to the consumer.

Auto sales immediately stopped. Why buy a car

today when you can wait a few weeks and pay a reduced price?

Finally, the talks ended with no agreement. No "pass through" savings resulted, and GM dealers were left with a large inventory.

A few months later, after a second round of tough talks, the 430,000 UAW workers accepted several significant contract concessions. Within hours of receiving that approval, Smith announced a new executive bonus plan.

The resulting public outrage forced Smith to withdraw the new bonus plan.

WHAT MAKES auto executives make dumb statements? Obviously, they're not dumb people.

It can be argued that Iacocca was only trying to reassure bankers and suppliers about Chrysler. Smith's supporters argue that he wanted to prove to consumers they would benefit from contract concessions. The bonus plan announcement was said to have been made to stop the loss of GM executives to other companies.

Like the rest of us, these executives sometimes talk too much.

Issues facing the auto industry like high interest rates, international trade restrictions and consumer confidence are complex. That's the beauty of my remedy.

Shut up, Mr. Chief Executive. Give our automobile industry a chance.

Schools need more than face lifts

It's sort of a bad joke but here goes: What lasts for five years and then reverts to its original shape? Possible answers:

- A) a face lift.
- B) a school public relations program.
- C) both.

Well, you guessed it folks. Unfortunately for all concerned, the answer is C. It's unfortunate because educators are generally well-intentioned and try awfully hard to reach students and parents alike. They've met with varying degrees of success.

In recent years, that success pattern has been on a downward trend. More persons have fewer children in school. Economic inflation has created skyrocketing school budgets that taxpayers are more reluctant than ever to bankroll.

Misage is a dirty word. And we have a president who, as governor and chief executive, fostered programs that make it difficult for all but the economic elite to receive a college degree.

And to make the challenge even more difficult, educators, as a rule, are lousy communicators. Most show little understanding or respect for the communication skills. To others, it is just an annoyance. After all, among the first things cut from school budgets are speech, newspaper and electronic-media classes and activities.



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

The public relations director, if a district has one, is usually a former teacher trained in something other than communication.

The public has become generally uninterested and, in some cases, hostile to hearing about education's plight. Ironically, it is the same public that just a few years ago was educated through the present system.

Somewhere along the line, the educational system missed the boat in creating good will among its offspring.

Recently, a number of area school districts have joined in a promotional program to put public education on a better footing with the community. Its symbol is an apple with a numeral "1" on it. Its motto is "Your public schools . . . no better place to learn."

THE OBJECT of the program is to sell public education to the public — especially those people who don't have children in school.

As is usual with these programs, much hoopla is heard from education circles. Reports of better communication between student, parent and teacher are heard. Records, bookmarkers, bumper stickers, pencils, posters and magnets, all embossed with the motto, are being distributed.

Those of us who have covered education have seen many of these programs come and go. Their fates are similar — guaranteed extinction.

William Banach, who has been directing this program in Macomb County, hits on the problem of selling public education. School districts, he says, must first clean house.

"You can't sell junk to the American people. So if you've got a bad school, fix it before you try to sell it. And if you've got a good school, make it better."

It's time for educators to get serious about communicating with the students on a day-to-day basis in the classroom. That's where it counts.

It is time once again to teach students how to think and to arrive at well-thought-out decisions, rather than molding them into robots fit for little but a ho-hum existence.

Restoring public confidence in education can be done — must be done — for the sake of us all.