

Regional comeback: lessons from New York

John P. Keith, president of the Regional Plan Association in New York City, talked about resurrecting metropolitan areas last week as guest speaker for the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. Here are key portions of his text:

THERE ARE many similarities between your situation throughout southeast Michigan in the recession of the early 1980s and ours in the New York region during the recession of the early 1970s.

Everyone got together to go to Washington and the country for loan guarantees — and you were forthcoming. The federal loan guarantees to New York City, like those to Chrysler, turned out to be good business for Uncle Sam. He's being paid off with handsome interest.

People forget that, until recently, New York City was the premier manufacturing center in the U.S.

During the 1970s, the city lost half a million small business and blue collar jobs.

But we were able to catch the tidal shift to white collar and service activities, and we have added some 300,000 new jobs over the last five years.

DETROIT IS NOT New York, and you can't copy what we did, but there are three lessons we have learned that I believe apply equally to Detroit:

1) You have to think in terms of the whole region — not just the city, not just the suburbs.
2) You need goals and a plan for achieving them. You must have a regional strategy to guide development.

3) You have to work together to implement the plan — city and suburbs, labor and management, blacks and whites.

We discovered that in big centers like Manhattan, which are well served by public transportation, it

takes people twice as long to get to work as in suburban campuses where everyone drives cars — but the Manhattan workers expend only half as much energy in getting to work.

WE DID A book called "Urban Rail in America," which proposes a 20-year program for improving public transportation throughout the nation. It suggests that about two dozen cities in the U.S. have dense enough travel corridors to accommodate either light or heavy rail.

It identifies Detroit as one of the suitable candidates for a light-rail system in two corridors about 15 miles long without a couple of miles of downtown tunneling.

We believe that these cities should form a coalition on behalf of rail transportation to pursue the necessary funding in Congress — some \$1.5 billion in 1981 dollars over the next 25 years.

Our studies have pointed to the prime importance of centralizing activities in urban centers. It saves massive public and private investments, keeps opportunities available to the poor, conserves energy and farmland and reduces air and water pollution.

DETROIT, IT seems to an outsider, has been moving in the opposite direction — New Center, GM and Fisher buildings, Northland, Fairlane.

Can the suburbs survive without a strong city at the center? Can you place activities in non-centers such as Southfield, where people can't walk among the pieces of a downtown? And where public transportation can't work because it would lead from no place to no place?

Only you can tell whether our prescription — centralizing activities in urban centers — has any validity for you.



Nick Sharkey

Area seniors set example for all of us

GROWING OLD is something most of us don't like to think about. It reminds us of our mortality and eventual death.

I sense that much discrimination suffered by senior citizens comes from persons who are afraid. If they ignore seniors, they do not have to be reminded of their own approaching old age.

Over the years Observer & Eccentric Newspapers have run countless stories about senior citizens. We've had thousands of column inches devoted to the struggle of seniors to find adequate housing in suburban communities. We've covered hot lunch programs for the elderly. We've discussed transportation problems of seniors. We've outlined the problems caused by skyrocketing utility bills.

Frankly, much of it has been depressing.

IN THE PAST few months, however, I've noticed a change in the portrayal of seniors in our pages. Photographs of smiling seniors have replaced the sad expressions of the past. Seniors are seen dancing, attending parties and renewing their wedding vows. They are being honored by various community organizations.

For example, as part of its Michigan Week awards breakfast, West Bloomfield honored M. Corine Smith who, at 99, is the township's oldest resident.

A few weeks ago 400 senior citizens gathered for a "Golden Ball" in Westland. The dance honored four couples who had been married 50 years in 1983. The celebration was joined by other Westland couples who had been married more than 50 years, including Levi and Ann Bartlett, who were married Sept. 11, 1923.

During Michigan Week, Garden City honored 89 people who had lived there for at least 50 years. Special commendation went to Marguerite Stolz, who at 71 is the oldest resident in terms of years in Garden City.

To me it has been uplifting to read all of this positive news about seniors.

SENIORS CAN usually take a more reasoned approach to the problems facing a community. They can see better the evolutionary changes. For example, at the Garden City Michigan Week celebration, seniors recalled when there were only a few hundred homes, only 2,000 residents and neither side-walks nor street lights.

Seniors' memories can often straighten out confusing issues. I recall a few years ago when an overly aggressive mayor in Birmingham decided that the framers of the city charter wanted a "strong mayor" to run the city's daily operations. He lobbied for a ballot proposal to amend the charter.

A call went to Milton F. Mallender, still a practicing attorney who helped write the charter in 1922-23. Mallender distinctly recalled that those who wrote the city charter wished the day-to-day operating responsibility to remain with the city manager. The mayor's ballot proposal failed miserably.

THE CONTRIBUTIONS of seniors go beyond merely recalling what has happened in the past. Many are vital, active participants in improving their communities.

Consider Westland's George Raub, selected a senior citizen of the year by the Michigan Parks and Recreation Association (along with Westland's Margaret Luchewski).

Raub, 88, is blind. He is the guiding force behind starting classes for other blind persons. He has taught history in the Wayne-Westland school district for the past five years. He has collected thousands of glasses for sight-impaired persons. He has made Braille peg boards for the blind.

Raub is now beginning to write a book. One time Raub wasn't successful in his volunteer efforts. Westland was selecting the grandmas with the prettiest legs. He wanted to be a judge even though he is blind.

"I know I can't see, but I can feel," Raub said. He was turned down.

If we all had George Raub's attitude, no one would fear growing old.



"What constitutes the bulwark of our own liberty and independence? It is not our frowning battlements, our bristling sea coasts, our army and our navy. . . Our reliance is the love of liberty which God has planted in us." — Abraham Lincoln, 1858



Tim Richard

Mansour's pitch for poor is impressive

HER SENTENCES are long and scholarly. But there is a faint sob in the voice of Dr. Agnes M. Mansour, director of the Michigan Department of Social Services, as she asks for more money for welfare.

"Very effective." "A fresh breath of spring." "Convincing," say even suburban Republican legislators, who smile in describing the former nun's performance.

"She spoke to the Republican caucus, and they applauded her. I've never seen anything like that before," said an amazed Rep. W.V. (Sandy) Brotherton, R-Farmington, in his ninth year as a legislator.

"She talked about holding down staff costs and instituting efficiencies. She said all the right things they wanted to hear," Brotherton added.

That's high praise, coming from Republicans. Welfare isn't their favorite area of the \$11 billion state budget.

"**IT'D SACRIFICE** anything to get that \$43 million into the budget . . . to get a 5-percent increase for people who have been frozen since 1979," Mansour told the Senate Appropriations Committee in an attempt to restore a cut made at the subcommittee level.

"Is government here only for the providers and itself?" asked the former Mercy College president rhetorically.

She protested against a proposal not to pay additional AFDC benefits to families who have more children. "To put in boiler plate that a woman should not have a child if she's on public assistance is blatant social control," she said.

Sen. R. Robert Geake, R-Northville, recalled that in her confirmation testimony, Mansour was asked her attitude toward the level of welfare benefits, which Republicans say is far higher than such neighboring states as Indiana. "She told us Michigan should be a leader in providing benefits for the poor," Geake said.

SEVERAL THINGS still bothered me about her approach, with its condescending tone of a second-grade teacher advocating a tax increase.

She presides over the largest single portion of the state budget, a portion that has grown from 12 to 40 percent of the total in 20 years, with no end in sight. It wasn't her fault, but if Mansour is worried by that cancerous trend, she doesn't show it.

As she talked, her voice tight with emotion, Mansour reminded me of what the old-timers used to say about Eleanor Roosevelt: That she reduced every issue, no matter how complex, to a matter of milk for starving babies.

When the Goldwater types used to reduce issues to being "for America" or "against America," liberals called them "simplistic." But is not Dr. Agnes Mansour simplistic in her single-minded advocacy of giving more "social services"?

"**I'M CATHOLIC** myself," a suburban legislator of more conservative bent told me, "and I know how the minds of the religious (priests and nuns) work. They don't worry about a job. They don't have to worry about families. They don't worry about mortgages and property taxes."

Much more impressive, if you want a liberal point of view, are the laud arguments of Sen. Lana Pollack, D-Ann Arbor, who picks apart the opposition and tells it to back down when it can't match her facts.

Myself, I much prefer the approach of Plato in the Socratic dialog. The Greek philosopher taught the rulers of a state to decide fairly, seeking truth rather than pushing a single point of view, governing for all and not just pushing for a single class — rich or poor.

Pay raises: no easy matter

U.S. SENATORS the other day voted themselves a \$9,138-per-year raise, up from \$86, 662. Senators will now make the same as U.S. Representatives, \$59,000.

While the pay was going up, the lid was coming down on income to be derived from speeches and similar endeavors. The pay bill calls for a cap of 30 percent of the senator's salary from such outside sources.

(It should be noted that Michigan's senators, Carl Levin, D-Detroit, and Don Riegle, D-Flint, voted against the raises.)

It's to early to tell whether the increase will be met with public outrage.

The same increase approved a few months back by the House of Representatives didn't cause as much commotion as the previous attempt by Congressmen to enrich themselves. That was the disaster last year in which Congress voted to exempt some \$18,000 of each Congressman's salary from the federal income tax toll.

THAT MEASURE was passed so surreptitiously that the populace wasn't aware of it until the deed had been all accomplished. The exemption was quickly nullified when citizens from coast to coast expressed disgust.

It was a sneaky attempt by Congressmen to get a pay increase. They probably deserved a raise. A survey shows that Congressmen's salaries have risen nowhere near the likes of such toilers as doctors, attorneys, plumbers, carpenters, factory workers, etc.

Congressmen voted for the income tax exemption on the theory that a flat-out pay raise wouldn't sit well with the folks back home. The Congressmen are probably right. There is still a good percentage of the population unhappy with the fact that Michigan Senators and representatives are going to receive a pay raise from \$59,000 to \$86,662.

The fact is that most citizens begrudge politicians

(elected officials) almost any kind of raise, especially during tough times.

The pay raises approved for Congress, state elected officials and most local officials are initiated and approved by various compensation commissions. These are bodies of supposedly impartial and outstanding citizens who theoretically have the acumen and wisdom to set fair salary schedules.

WHY DID they come into existence? Partially because the citizens rarely felt that an elected official should make more than the neighborhood shoemaker. They approved charter changes only begrudgingly. If all they saw was a legislative body approved raises, Compensation commissions took the heat off.

If you want an example of the parsimoniousness of the public, take a look at the career of Dearborn Mayor Orville Hubbard. He had the longest mayoral reign in Michigan and was the people's choice in Dearborn for 30 years. He tried to get a decent salary by charter change and five times the Dearborn public voted it down.

Orv had to start marrying people en masse to pick up pocket money. He finally got up to the lofty sum of \$25,000 a year after a civic-minded group carried the ball in a charter campaign. Three subsequent attempts to gain a salary increase were voted down by the public.

THEN, after doing his darndest all those years to keep Dearborn clean, Hubbard had to retire on a miserly pension. Even after Hubbard became ill and a special ballot proposal was put on to increase his pension, the people voted it down.

Poor Orv. Most of his days in the sun were spent before compensation commissions were invented.

Unfortunately, they don't answer the need either. One problem is that the people who appoint compensation commissioners usually pick their chums for the job. This is not conducive to impartiality and in many cases officials' salaries are out of line with the pay of other officials and government employees.

One of these days, someone may come up with a better way.



Bob Wisler