

Opinion

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Unity: it's more than unanimity!

IS THERE unity on the Farmington Hills City Council? Should there be? That depends not only on whom you ask, but also your definition of unity. Unity could be defined as a unanimous council vote, no matter what the issue. But because unanimity could be construed as timidity, it should never be a prerequisite for unity.

Simply put, council members can disagree yet still be united. As Mayor Joe Alkateeb aptly observed, "In our disagreements, we must always maintain the unity of our purpose — and that is the public good of all the people of Farmington Hills."

Although penned earlier, Alkateeb's comments were timely insofar as the Dec. 16 mayoral and mayor pro tempore elections were filled with intrigue.

In the mayoral balloting, Alkateeb, outgoing mayor pro tempore, followed tradition and became mayor — but surprisingly not by acclamation. A largely ceremonial position, the mayor can be tremendously influential by the way discussion is chaired at council meetings and the way the city is portrayed at public gatherings. Clearly, the mayor helps set the tone for the city.

IN OPPOSING Alkateeb's election as mayor, Councilwoman Joan Dudley questioned the behind-the-scenes posturing of some of her cohorts. During the days leading up to Dec. 16, it appeared Dudley might have enough support to become mayor pro tem, but that support obviously waned.

So outgoing Mayor Jan Dolan faced the unenviable task of breaking the 3-3 deadlock in the mayor pro tem balloting. With Terry Sever joining Dudley in supporting JoAnn Soronen and Alkateeb joining Don Wolf in supporting Sen. Marks, Dolan saying she hoped council members weren't playing politics with their votes — backed Marks.

Given there's no reason to doubt the

maturity of anyone on the council, it's unlikely the pre-election posturing will leave any long-term political wounds.

If anyone had a reason to harbor a grudge, it would be Soronen, the only council member to openly declare her interest in serving as mayor pro tem. She has too much class to hold a vendetta, however.

As she perceptively acknowledged: "It takes a lot of energy to keep up a dislike for someone. I'm guessing with the passage of time, we'll all go on. We have to. There are more important things for us to do."

GRANTED, it was democracy in action, but the maneuvering for mayor pro tem came across as strictly self-serving. You'd think a \$100,000 job was at stake. What really was at stake was the mayorship in 1987.

Infighting has ebbed and flowed through the years. And it's no secret that personality conflicts have existed on recent councils. But even with occasional snapping between council members, the public good appears to have been well served.

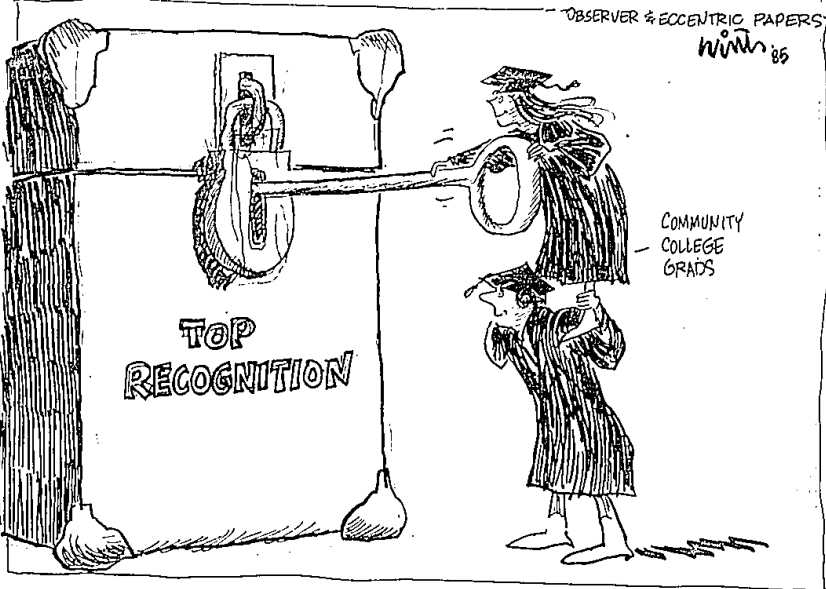
Says Soronen, an eight-year council veteran and mayor in 1980: "It's the rare city council where everybody likes everybody year after year after year. We've had years where personalities have meshed better. But, for the most part, I don't think individual conflicts have impaired us."

As a visit to the council chambers quickly underscores, no one on the Farmington Hills council shies from speaking up.

That not only makes a reporter's job easier, but also — and more importantly — fosters an exchange of ideas, a defending of views and a challenging of concepts.

This kind of healthy give-and-take, when coupled with compromise, not only represents unity in serving the public good, but also is how the best solutions usually come about.

— Bob Sklar



OCC's wish list

A chance to say thanks; renewal for staff

by R. Stephen Nicholson
president, Oakland Community College

A new OCC president has the rare opportunity both to assess the college's record of success over the past 20 years and to plan for the next 20 years of service. What items would appear on Santa's list were it prepared by the president? As the newest member of the 780-member OCC family, I would like to submit these few.

First, I would like Santa's magic to enable us to sit down personally with each of the families in our community and tell them how much we appreciate their support for the last 20 years. We try hard to let everyone know we recognize that it is their tax dollars — and their vision of a future that fulfills each student at the hour of greatest need — that makes the college a reality.

That is not to say that we see taxpayers as Santa Claus. Instead we are humbled by the trust placed in us to meet the human needs of students from every ethnic, age and social group.

SECOND WOULD be the wish to have the college fully recognized by our citizens for its record of excellence and prov-

en success. OCC is one of the 10 largest community colleges in the United States. As a recent outsider, I can tell you that OCC compares very favorably with other colleges and universities, standing well above the norm.

However, because it is a relatively young school, its achievements often go unnoticed. For example, OCC operates at a per-student cost far below the state and national college average. Many of OCC's programs and instructional methods are national leaders.

All of our instructors' time is given to students, either in or outside of classes. OCC students get to know their teachers, benefiting from face-to-face relationships and small classes that are seldom possible except in exclusive private schools.

BECAUSE TEACHING and learning are at the heart of all our activities, the third gift I ask is new resources to assure new experiences for our staff.

After 20 years of intense effort directed toward teaching classes, finding or building space, and scheduling services, our staff is tired.

Few realize how exhausting teaching is when it is done well.

I teach regularly, and it is my experience that the process of preparing several hours for a single class, then actually conducting it, leaves me exhausted.

When we expend physical energy, it must be replaced. Physical, emotional, and intellectual resources get used up, too. Only study and reflection strengthen the mind.

OCC needs additional resources to assist our staff in discovering new ideas, new methods and new plans for the re-creation of a new tomorrow. If we reduce classes in order to provide staff members more time, we leave thousands without the college experiences they need. This is unacceptable.

New resources are needed to keep our staff in top shape. We may have robots in our high-technology classrooms, but our staff is human. It needs rest and recreation and, more importantly, time to study, think and plan.



Nicholson

FOURTH ON the list would be a wish that the busy people of Oakland County realize the important leadership they provide in national and international production, in economics and in consumer services. Oakland County is unique in America, not only for its salaries but for the high levels of skills that those salaries reflect.

I wish the citizens of Oakland County could more fully appreciate the fact that the eyes of the nation and world watch our every move. We have the brightest and best minds in America working on new human, industrial and scientific services.

Thoughtful social observers have called the present era the "post-industrial age" or the "information society." Labels are unimportant. When the history of these times is written, our country and the world will realize that Oakland County stood near the apex of leadership.

THE FINAL item on the list would be a request that Santa bring us a Magic Mixer that would enable OCC to work as part of a team with all the educational, economic, social and production groups in the country.

Society no longer has enough resources to permit business, government or education to go it alone. We must work as partners to create a synergistic system that generates strength because we have learned to cooperate more than compete; to create, rather than complain; to complement rather than criticize.

"Community" is our middle name, and we never forget it. Call us if you or your group has a dream of the future.

OCC's president since September, Nicholson has been president of community colleges in Oregon, Nevada and suburban Chicago. His doctorate is in sociology.

Group homes

The hysteria shameful; state inspection is weak

DURING THIS season, we hear a lot of lip service about helping others. But you've gotta wonder when you see the on-going hysteria surrounding group homes in our suburbs.

In a rather frightening and off-hand fashion, we have thrown the mentally ill and retarded into the hands of private enterprise capitalists who will make a profit from these folks' misfortune.

It's a totally inappropriate place in which to take care of those who need help. Overall, group homes will work only if the state properly oversees their operation.

Although we've come a long way out of the dark ages in taking care of the mentally ill and retarded, society still is trying to hide from this very important obligation.

We certainly get mixed reviews.

ON THE one hand, we can rejoice in the efforts of such folks as Mary Wagner, operator of 11 group homes in seven Oakland County cities.

If the state, in its earnestness to sell the group home philosophy, would ensure that all operators were as well-intentioned and well-qualified as she, the public would feel much more at ease.

The 11 homes cater to the needs of particular groups. They are staffed with live-in managers, and most have special education teachers with degrees. Vans transport residents to workshops, jobs, programs and medical appointments.

Unfortunately, all group home facilities aren't run as well as Wagner's.

The state, which is promoting group homes simply to get rid of the financial obligation, isn't doing much to ensure that operators are necessarily qualified to take care of these folks.

OF PARTICULAR concern are foster care home regulations for the mentally ill. An application is sent to the state, dis-



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

closing an applicant's health and financial background. The state checks for a criminal history and previous licensing complaints. A notice of application is sent to the local community.

Finally, a licensing consultant hired by the state reviews the records and the proposed program and may inspect the site.

That's it, folks. And that just isn't good enough.

While state bureaucrats are trying to get out from under the financial obligation, local residents and politicians are screaming bloody murder to keep group homes out.

The All-American guldon is unfurled to justify the indignation — properly values.

YOU'VE HEARD that one before. That's the excuse society uses when it wants to keep out anything and anybody that seems undesirable at the time.

And that's kind of sick in itself.

For years now, we've hid away the mentally ill and retarded in state institutions, pretending they really didn't exist. Then we complained about the taxes it took to care for them.

And now we complain that our property values will go down.

Without a doubt, the soul of a society is reflected in the way it takes care of those who are unable to fully care for themselves.

During this season of caring and giving, we must stop to contemplate our intentions.



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