

OBSERVATION POINT



By Philip H. Power
Publisher

Community Papers Do Best To Serve Their Communities

Like winter squalls of snow, they flatter whitely onto that disaster area sometimes called my desk. Press releases announcing National Pickle Week. Or National Cigar Smoking Week. Or Michigan Coho Salmon Week. I haven't yet received one announcing National Be Good to Three-Toed Sloths Week, but I can only assume it's not far off.

Just what the flacks expect us to do with these things isn't clear. Usually there isn't anything going on locally to mark whatever week it is—imagine, if you will, Southfield's Mayor Norm Feder looking tenderly at a three-toed sloth or Farmington's equally honorable Sandy Brother-son fondly regarding a pickle.

Amusing speculation, but improbable.

But still the press releases are churned out in a steadily increasing stream, leading me to conclude that somewhere in the bowels of Washington and Lansing there is a steadily growing bureaucracy in charge of designating special weeks for us all to

celebrate. If Oakland County's gift to statewide politics, Sandy Levin, wants to cut the state budget, there's one place to start. In any event, this week is National Newspaper Week.

And, predictably, we who hold the megaphones of free speech are being urged by our journalistic peers to trumpet forth the good word about the virtues of the free press, how it's essential to the democratic process, that it's constantly threatened by the forces of darkness, etc., etc.

Funny thing. It's true.

TRUE, AS FAR as this newspaper is concerned, in a special sort of way.

This is a community newspaper. It serves a suburban community, located near the City of Detroit but separate from it, part of a huge metropolitan complex in southeastern Michigan but separate from it, too.

Take Southfield as an example. According to the 1970 census

estimates, the present population of the city is near 68,000.

It has a city hall, a city council, an effective city administration, a board of education and numerous schools in the school system, two big shopping centers and many more of smaller size, a lively social and artistic life. In short, Southfield—and the other suburban communities served by this organization—has all the attributes of a big city in its own right.

For if you took Southfield and plunked it down somewhere away from the Detroit metropolitan area, it would have a big city status, complete with its own daily newspaper and radio and TV stations.

THAT'S WHERE a newspaper like this one comes in.

We try to do the job for the community of Southfield—or any other community we serve—that no other organization can.

The big Detroit dailies do a good job; but they have to think about Detroit and the entire metropolitan area. They simply can't

act as a hometown newspaper to people living in Southfield.

The radio and TV stations have the same problems, but only more so, since there are so many of them that no one can concentrate on Southfield news and information and still compete with all the others.

But, we in the community newspaper field get our satisfaction and achieve our function by

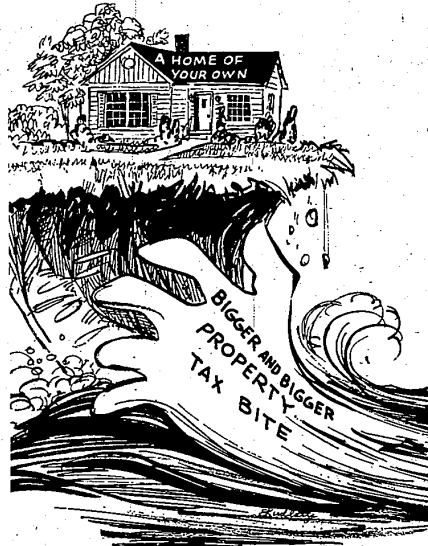
serving communities like Southfield.

We seek to do so in accordance with the highest standards of professionalism we can attain.

And we like to think that to the degree that we serve the community, that community benefits, grows, and enables us to serve it that much better.

For us, that's the meaning of National Newspaper Week.

Just Another American Dream?



Jackie Klein Writes:

One Wonders Just What Insurance Does Cover

I read somewhere that Americans are the most heavily insured suckers—oops, I mean people—of any country in the world. I believe it.

This makes insurance one of the biggest businesses in the world, but to hear them tell it, they get gyped out of every nickel by unscrupulous customers.

Telling like it really is, it's like pulling a mouthful of impacted wisdom teeth to get a nickel out of them.

The pay as you go plan works fine, as long as you don't have to collect. Of course, according to the insurance salesmen, you never pay, you save. But in reality you're paying out so much money to take care of your future that you're starving in the present.

You might as well believe in the hereafter, because you're probably insured for that too.

THEY SAY MOST accidents occur close to home and it's a good thing, because with all the premiums you have to pay you can't afford to travel.

Once my car was hit while parked near my house. I was told repairs would cost \$250. I had \$100 deductible, so I called the insurance company, which was my first mistake.

"Just give me \$150 and I'll be satisfied," I offered. I remembered all the commercials I'd seen where a guy had an accident and was pinned under the car and the adjuster was handing him money underneath the car.

Six months later I get canceled for being careless, my policy goes up \$500 and the insurance company sends over a guy

with a paint brush and a can of paint to fix my car.

That was the last accident reported, because it's cheaper to keep it from the insurance company.

ONCE I BURNED a hole in my fur coat. I called the insurance adjuster, who came out, gave me a dazzling smile and asked, "When did it happen?"

"Just last month," I replied. "But that was June and it was too hot to wear a fur coat," he pointed out on a note of victory.

"Well, it might have been in March," I reconsidered.

"Sorry, we only pay for things that happened within the last month," said he smugly.

They canceled my hole-in-the-fur coat insurance and it still hasn't been fixed.

Once I reported a theft and they canceled me out because they said I was careless and should have stayed home and guarded my belongings.

STATISTICS PROVE that women live longer than men. The reason is, men work themselves to death to pay for their life insurance. When a man dies, every body asks, "How did he leave his wife?"

If an insurance company asked someone to do a study on the feasibility of lowering premiums, he'd probably sit on it for three years and they'd make him vice president.

If you want to keep the insurance companies happy, don't smoke, drink, eat, drive a car, or fly. Just take your policies and lock yourself in the closet.

Does Board Need Retreat To Discuss Problems?

By TIM RICHARD

It's common for people whose work involves a lot of decisions to want to "get away from the bustle and bustle" and do some long-range planning and thinking in seclusion.

But only in the Livonia School District has it become a political issue.

The board majority decided to wander out to the post St. Clair Inn the weekend of Oct. 30 for a 2½-day "skull session," and immediately found itself the object of criticism and sarcasm.

One issue is the cost—\$28 a day per person for seven elected board members and assorted administrators. Another is the length of time; one member fears people will be getting on each other's nerves after 2½ days and suggests the session be shorter.

THESE ARE nuts-and-bolts difficulties, however, and the real question is whether the board needs such a skull session at all.

It would be short-sighted, in a society which praises business-like methods, to deny a governmental agency the kinds of techniques that business has. If business uses computers, why should schools be confined to adding machines? If business finds that heavy-duty carpeting is easier to maintain and deadens sound, why can't a classroom or school office be carpeted, too?

Churches have long sponsored "retreats" for spiritual purposes. A person gets away from routine to think, read, meditate, pray, examine his conscience and figure out where in heaven, earth or hell he's going.

Business picked up the idea, and even corporations of modest size find it's good for decision-making executives to be able to spend a few days out of the office and do some long-range thinking about corporate goals.

Even organized labor, for pete's sake, is doing it. That's part of what the UAW Black Lake camp is all about.

Shouldn't a school board be allowed to do the same—especially a school board whose ballot proposals have been so consistently and rousing rejected by the electorate? Wouldn't it do them some good to meditate on their defeats, lick their wounds and figure out a way to regain public confidence?

MOST ARGUMENTS favor letting a decision-making body "blow its mind," as the kids say, "and equip itself mentally to make decisions under pressure later on. But the analogy is less than perfect.

A school board is a public body. Its decisions are public policy. Added up, the individual decisions a school board makes on building sizes, administrators, curriculum and so on—these decisions add up to a philosophy of education.

A public body should be prepared, therefore, to operate in a goldfish bowl. It should be prepared to accept scrutiny from the public. "If you can't stand the heat," Harry Truman used to say, "get out of the kitchen."

From personal experience, this writer has learned to be suspicious of public agencies on retreat. The classic case occurred when the Western Michigan University board, composed of pillars of the state's industrial and philanthropic community, held such a retreat at Walden Woods in Oakland County, conducted a two-hour routine business meeting open to the press—and then made a sneak decision, without a chance for public comment, to close University High School.

Livonia's "skull session" idea isn't all-bad, and it isn't all-good either.

Sense And Nonsense

The grand defender of our infrastructure society and arch enemy of radiballs is none other than the Vice President of Agnewia. (That's called coining a craze.)

Bob McClellan Writes:

Are Degrees That Valuable?

"College degrees useless?" So asks the headline in a recent issue of the Detroit News over a story by Russell Kirk, national columnist. Kirk believes a college degree is fast becoming meaningless as an indicator of academic proficiency and he makes several interesting points.

He says too many students want knowledge and understanding by revelation, not by study and thought. He declares the growing number of ungraded classes and elective programs make the degree an even poorer barometer of adult competence.

He asserts we are suffering from overemphasis on academic degrees that discriminates against the prospective employee who has the ability but lacks the necessary credentials.

He states that continuous schooling from age five has dulled the minds of many degree-holders. And he encourages parents to let their kids work or travel, if that's their big, rather than grudgingly attend college and become ideological malcontents or marijuana addicts.

KIRK'S CRITICISM is harsh and, unfortunately, contains more

than a grain of truth. But his view may not be the last word—yet.

There are still a good many idealistic kids who set off for college with the idea of expanding their minds through academic, cultural and spiritual growth. But a growing minority are going to the university, not for an education, but strictly for a degree. And there are many radicals and non-learners, it appears, who are not even attending school for that.

It is these latter people who are going to get a rude jolt when they leave their ivory tower and enter the outside, realistic world of work. They're going to find out that the boss who has to meet a payroll and make a profit could care less about who has a degree if the job's not being done.

It's about time someone tipped off the radical, the non-learner and the degree idolater that his sheepskin is only a box-seat ticket to the ball game. If he can't perform, he'll find himself relegated to the bleachers—or even put out of the park.

The kids should realize they're making their degree less precious every time they take a

hostage, beat up a teacher, burn a building or disrupt classes.

It should be brought home to professors they're lessening the importance of a degree every time they turn over their classes to less capable substitutes to spend the bulk of their time writing for various journals or working for industry or the federal government.

It should also be brought home to the professors they're making a degree less credible every time they persist in cramming down the throats of students their pet social, economic or political theory.

AND ADMINISTRATORS must be made to understand they're belittling a degree every time they meet unjustified student and faculty activity with appeasement, permissiveness and lowering of academic standards.

Some rebellion and instability can be expected of some college students. After all, many are not yet physically or mentally mature. And most have not experienced the vast number of problems and situations that have confronted their elders. But there's no excuse for the adults at our colleges not to provide a good example and sound leadership.

All too often this they fail to do.

Specific reference is made to the recent fiasco at Schoolcraft College. Despite their profusion of degrees and supposed wisdom, the faculty and the administration could not hammer out a labor contract after nine months of negotiating and thus delayed the start of school for a month.

In addition, the students were subjected to the spectacle of the faculty using the strike as a platform to promote partisan political candidates.

This type of conduct does little to enhance the prestige of a college degree.

If, as columnist Kirk implies, a college degree is becoming useless, then changes in the process of higher education must be made. And those changes can be made only by the students, the teachers and the college administrators. It'll be solely up to them to determine whether a college degree is worth more than just the paper it's printed on.

Editorial & Opinion

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Philip H. Power, Publisher
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