

# Opinion

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The Oslato house at Heritage Park — a historical landmark.

## 1986

### Let's take another peek

**B**EFORE 1986 slips too far from memory, let's resine the spotlight on a few Farmington Hills happenings worthy of another look:

#### YEOMAN'S SERVICE

Outspoken and dedicated, Joe Alkateeb did yeoman's service as mayor of Farmington Hills in 1986. The veteran city councilman worked hard to provide leadership and a sense of direction.

Largely ceremonial, the mayorship includes chairing city council meetings and representing the city at community events.

But make no mistake about it: There were times when Alkateeb acted more like a jurist than a mayor.

His advice following a public hearing on whether to overturn the city clerk's denial of an operating license to the owner and manager of the Tokyo Oriental Health Spa was a prime example.

He urged his fellow council members "not to get so technically involved in the legal mish-mash and 100 percent proof of this and that." That "legal mish-mash" raised many points deserving of council scrutiny.

And although Alkateeb clearly values public participation, he came up short at times in pacing discussion. He cut some speakers short — often in the interest of time, but sometimes, it seemed, to sway opinion. Other speakers he'd let talk well beyond the point they were trying to make. He didn't always grasp that some speakers truly were, as one woman aptly put it, "talking about their lives."

Still, given the sharp debate and late hour the council typically faced, Alkateeb deserves credit for trying to keep meetings moving.

As for visibility in the community, Alkateeb seemed to be everywhere. Tag-rallies, banquets, open houses, parades — no matter. When invited to speak and represent Farmington Hills, he gladly accepted. And he carried the city banner proudly.

When he accepted the mayor's gavel, Alkateeb said: "As we forge ahead with new construction, new plans and new demands on our environment, let us never lose sight of that special character that is unique to Farmington Hills and quite important to our residents."

In striving to meet the challenges of 1986, Alkateeb never lost sight of that special character.

Simply put, that character is rooted in an attractive quality of life — a quality of life that has drawn a stream of new residents and businesses.

But it's that very attraction — that very quality of life — that now is threatened. Threats have ranged from clogged roads and rezoning battles to backyard flooding and youth gangs. These are just some of the pivotal issues the Farmington Hills City Council and new Mayor Ben Marks — must continue to watch closely in 1987.

#### A GODSEND

Watch for more publicity and activities at Heritage Park, the cornerstone of the Farmington Hills Master Parks and Recreation Plan's five-year action program.

But make sure the city delivers on its pledge to emphasize passive development.

Nestled in a quiet residential area, the picture-postcard, 212-acre tract is both a wildlife refuge and a nature preserve.

Fragile and virgin, the former Spicer property is a godsend to those who care about nature's best.

The Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Commission vows to keep it a passive recreation site as long as practical — a vow the Observer won't let the city forget.



Bob Sklar

Only low-intensity uses should be allowed on the rolling, wooded land to the west.

The 212 acres are a microcosm of what drew the Farmington area's pioneers — woods, wildlife, meadows, marshes, wildflowers, trees, a river.

Meanwhile, in deciding the future of the 60-year-old estate house on the property, let's not ignore its historical value.

As the Observer underscored last spring, it's wise to tread cautiously when evaluating building code and municipal liability requirements. But houses that became part of historic districts in other cities have opened for public use.

Granted, the estate house is a bit rickety. A newly commissioned architectural review should reveal to what extent.

Heritage-minded residents should speak their mind now — in the early stages of charting the house's future.

A free exchange of ideas would not doubt reveal whether the house could fulfill a useful community role while a part of Farmington Hills' historic district.

#### FREE SPEECH

Why do we quote Councilwoman Joan Dudley so much? Don't we know she's a headline seeker, and we're playing into her hands?

So say some of our readers, who, of course, can say whatever they want to about our coverage.

We welcome their opinion — even if it's critical. Newspapers represent the very essence of one of this country's most basic rights — free speech.

But while we encourage reader feedback, we reserve the right to exercise professional news judgment.

We often quote Dudley simply because she's very quotable. She's a maverick of sorts — and articulate to boot.

This past year, we quoted each council member, some more than others. It's not our duty to quote each council member equally. If some are quoted more, so be it.

We're in the business of providing informative overviews of the city council's more salient actions — not of keeping a scorecard of quotes.

#### POLICE BEAT

Residents victimized by vandals or thieves often look for more than a sympathetic ear when officers arrive to take a report.

Victims want to know what the police are going to do to bring the perpetrators to justice. They want a detective assigned — pronto.

When several homes in a neighborhood fall prey, the men and women in blue face an even tougher task in discouraging vigilantism.

The Farmington Hills Police Department has done a good job in promoting crime prevention and Neighborhood Watch programs.

But in some victims' eyes, it hasn't adequately explained why a burglary or vandalism that's several hours old, and short on leads or evidence, isn't given top priority.

As the department prepares to open a new, \$3½-million headquarters this winter, it should seize the opportunity to broaden community awareness of its role, services, resources and budgetary limitations — in short, its need to set priorities.

THINKER



## Economic problems ahead

THE START of new year is a time of hope. We hope that things will be better in our personal lives. We hope that things will be better in our communities, our state and our nation. Often we even hope that things will be better in the world.

Yet as much as we want to have a new optimism and new hope, we can't help but feel that the year and years ahead will be difficult and challenging in our corner of the world.

In his inaugural address, Gov. James Blanchard spoke pointedly about the need to retrain and educate workers for new jobs as a keystone to any long-term state recovery.

In his inaugural talk, Wayne County Executive Edward McNamara spoke about the necessity of economic revitalization to provide the framework for continuing improvements in government.

MICHIGAN HAS recovered significantly in the past few years at least partially because of a diversification that made the state somewhat less dependent on the automobile industry.

But still the auto industry is king in this state and will continue to be the mainstay of the state's economy for years to come.

In that industry, we see improvements in product, reliability and reputation.



Bob Wisler

And yet, there are still signs that the industry continues to slip.

The leader, General Motors, loses money and continues to lay off workers. We are warned that automation and technology will continue to increase production capacity and continue to decrease job need. Japan's share of the auto market continues to climb upward.

AS UNEMPLOYMENT mounts it falls increasingly to government to handle the social problems involved.

Blanchard is well aware that many of the state's financial problems are caused by social problems brought about by failing businesses, job layoffs and dwindling opportunities for the less skillful to acquire meaningful work.

His strong pitch for a well-coordinated job retraining program is an idea inspired, in strong part, by apprehension over what may happen if the state starts another economic slide.

The state's costliest programs are social welfare programs, which were put

into place to help people who cannot find meaningful work and who do not have medical insurance. The next costliest are the criminal justice programs made necessary, to a large degree, by our inability to make this something less than a have-and-have-not society.

SIMILARLY, Wayne County's biggest expense is handling the medical costs of indigents who have no medical insurance, and the majority of these costs are to pay for treatment of a relatively small percentage of the population.

Any increases in the population that needs government assistance to survive will mean more burden and problems for government.

This explains why our governmental leaders are so intent on trying to help resolve the current social and economic problems before they get worse.

But, of course, to even approach a resolution, there is needed a strong consensus for action and a coordinated approach involving not only government efforts, but those of business and industry and society as a whole.

We need more of a realization that we move together up and down the economic ladder, and we need a commitment to resolve not only our problems, but those of our unfortunate neighbors so that we may as a community avoid the problems of economic downturns.

## Economic war won in schools

OK, so the Japanese have done it again — taken one of our ideas and made it work for them.

First it was economic development, now it's education.

The next time you drive by that local schoolyard, think about it.

Progress, any country's progress, all starts and stops in the same place — the classroom.

Education is our biggest tool of defense against crime, disease, poverty and ignorance — the maladies that really hurt our nation, our communities, our neighborhoods. It is the firmest foundation on which we can build economic development.

Educators are our front-line soldiers in the battle. How well they are trained and maintained will determine whether we win.

ROCKETS, MISSILES and tanks just don't compare.

Just ask the Japanese. From a war-torn nation, they have built one of the best primary and secondary education systems in the world. Not faultless, mind you, but one that produces results.

Japan also has risen from the ashes to become one of the strongest economic powers in the world.



crackerbarrel debate  
Steve Barnaby

clude that we've got a way to go in cleaning up our educational act.

The American study concludes that Japanese education has aided in creating "a powerfully competitive economy, a broadly literate population, a stable democratic government, a civilization in which there is relatively little crime or violence and a functional society."

The Japanese study tells us where we could improve. And we really might try and listen for once. After all, 90 percent of Japanese high students graduate. They must be doing something correctly.

Their recommendations:

- Make sure there are enough qualified teachers.

- Involve parents more in their children's education.

- Decide who will be responsible for academic content.

- Pay more attention to character formation of students.

- Find ways of educating gifted and disadvantaged students without neglecting one at the expense of the other.

WHILE THE U.S. will be short by about 30,000 teachers next year, teachers are considered a valuable commodity in Japan. While it spends less of its gross national product on education than the U.S., it spends a higher percentage of its educational budget on teachers. For instance, Japanese teachers are paid approximately 12 percent more than engineers.

That may make teacher union representatives happy, but U.S. Education Secretary William Bennett notes that Japanese teachers also carry a heavier load, doing more counseling and curriculum duties as well as teaching larger classes than do American teachers.

Oh yes, you might also note that Japan spends only 1 percent of its gross national product on defense. It's the law of the land.

Under the just-announced Reagan budget, defense spending would increase 7.7 percent to \$312 billion. Education will be cut 12.5 percent to \$14.7 billion.

Some defense.