

Opinion

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Downtown A key challenge awaits

THE JOB description includes coffee making. But her responsibilities — reflected by her other duties — will be much more significant. Wendy Strip Sittsamer will begin work as executive director of Farmington's Downtown Development Authority (DDA) May 26.



Bob Sklar

Her chief goal will be to make downtown Farmington a village square, not just a row of stores. Downtowns are more apt to thrive when they're bustling with diverse activity. Central business district improvements would have come to Farmington even without the naming of a full-time executive director.

The city is planning new pedestrian lighting, shade trees, sidewalks and planters, more parking, a spruced-up mini park, a new mini plaza and other capital improvements worth \$1.4 million.

But clearly, Strip Sittsamer will heavily influence the scope and quality of those improvements.

SHE'LL BE the one prodding, coaxing, evaluating. She'll be the one promoting downtown's image.

She'll be the one trying to convince absentee landlords to fix up their buildings, or consider selling them to someone who will.

It's the executive director who must exert leadership for a downtown trying to carve out a clientele in these days of climate-controlled malls.

It's the executive director who must elicit support from landlords, shopkeepers and city leaders alike — people of divergent egos and interests.

As business people and civic volunteers, DDA members must rely more on subtle persuasion. The executive director, beholden to no one but the DDA and the city council, can employ both gentle and direct encouragement.

A people-oriented person — that's what the DDA looked for. It felt technical competence — to deal with every-

thing from architectural design and beautification to marketing strategy and window displays — could be refined on the job.

TIME WILL tell how Strip Sittsamer measures up.

But if personality is a plus, she's a leg up already. In choosing her over two other finalists among 50 applicants, the DDA gushed about her vitality.

Said DDA member Ron Oglesby: "Her enthusiasm is contagious, and I think that's what this town needs."

You betcha, Ron. You want folks to warm when the executive director walks in, not wince.

The DDA's role is still evolving. And DDA members hope Strip Sittsamer not only helps shape that role, but also helps sell it.

Downtown Farmington's main street — Grand River — is the ideal place to base the executive director. Rubbing elbows with merchants and shoppers is the most effective way to keep tabs on the subtleties of small-town commerce.

DOWNTOWNS DON'T exist in a vacuum. They function best as a complement.

Rejuvenating downtown Farmington — the city's showpiece — is great. But the process shouldn't obscure the neighborhoods beyond. They represent the city's heartbeat.

Make no mistake about it: A downtown revitalized with the care of a master craftsman can't help but bolster pride and property values all around it, including the ever-important neighborhoods.

Real loss Educator will be missed

WE LIVE in a turbulent time.

It grabs us by the throat, shaking us to new realities each day. It challenges us to find the answers that are, many times, hidden in each of us.

We also face changes in traditional values — some causing progress and others decay — but it is certainly a time when strong leadership is necessary. Such leadership can help us find the answers we seek.

In less than one month, the Farmington community will lose the services of a longtime leader and educator, Larry Freedman, who will leave Farmington schools after 26 years as teacher, musician, principal, assistant superintendent, and friend and associate to many.

He helped many find the necessary answers.

PEOPLE'S LIVES change for a variety of reasons. In Larry's case, it will suffice to say he was caught up in the political changes of a new administration. It was time to move on.

So next month, he will retire from his current post at the district's central office to seek out new paths and new facets to his life. What should upset this community is not only the loss of this leader, but the loss of an educator.

Larry Freedman is leaving education. And that's a shame.

Although he hasn't ruled out returning to education in the future, he has chosen to take a different route for now.

Larry is a man with strong, individual ideas and feelings, which guided him through his years of teaching, principalships at High Meadow and Wood Creek elementary, and into his specialty field of curriculum at the upper echelon of the district, where he specialized in elementary education.

HE ALSO specialized in people, always keeping his community in mind.

Most weeks, I would receive a call from at least one teacher or elementary principal who said, "Larry Freedman



Casey Hans

thought I should call you. He thought this would make a good story . . ."

Thus began my school coverage in Farmington in 1985. After polling several Observer reporters who covered Farmington schools over the years, I found they felt much the same way about him.

Not only was he mindful of keeping in touch with his community, but he knew how to do it. He was always fair and honest in his comments for articles that would keep you — the public — informed about your schools. If he couldn't comment, he would say so and tell us why.

Larry Freedman bore the brunt of community outcry when elementary schools in this district were closed during the past several years due to declining enrollment.

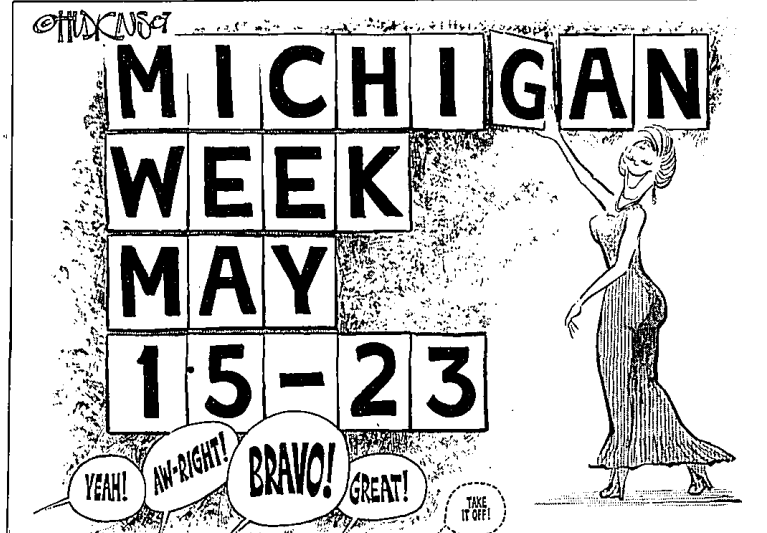
AND WHEN it appeared last year that elementary populations would rise, he told westside parents he thought the best option for the district was to build a new school. He said it frankly and honestly, as it should be said.

Building a new school is now what the school board is considering.

In musing about what to do after retirement, Larry and Marilyn Freedman considered moving to Florida. But they chose to stay in the Farmington area and continue to be part of the community.

Larry plans to strengthen his family ties by opening a business — a restaurant — with his son-in-law.

Instead of being fed educationally, I guess, for now, we'll have to settle for a sandwich.



We deserve to celebrate

SOME YEARS AGO, I packed the Volkswagen and headed back to Michigan — from California. To this day, folks ask why.

California, we know, is looked upon by many as the place to be.

Well, most of those folks don't know Michigan. Oh sure, they may live here, but their focus has been tainted by all the PR about how beautiful every place else is.

But the PR is wrong. Michigan is truly one of the most beautiful states in the union. From the Porcupine Mountains (betcha didn't know we had mountains) with its glacial lakes to a revitalized southeastern Michigan, this state is one of the better places to live.

But up until recent years we've done a poor job in telling our story. That's why this Michigan Sesquicentennial celebration is especially exciting. If nothing else, we're beginning to take pride in ourselves.

And this coming week, perhaps more than any this year, will give us a chance to reflect on our virtues. From now until May 23 most communities will be celebrating Michigan Week.

Some of the highlights include: ● Heritage Day. The contributions of our varied cultural, historical, religious groups over the last 150 years will be reviewed. ● Family Day. This day is set aside

for enjoying Michigan's primary asset, its natural resources. Families are urged to gather for outdoor recreational activities including picnics and social and religious gatherings. Michigan, you know, has one of the best parks systems in the country.

● Government Day. This gives us all a chance to reflect on how, through our increased participation, we can make government work better for us. Special activities from the classroom to the legislature will educate residents about state government. Many cities will participate in Mayor Exchange Day and have special functions for residents.

● Technology Day. This day's activities will center around community recognition of individuals and businesses for innovations in the fields of science and technology. You'll be pleasantly surprised to find out the contributions your community and this state make in these areas.

● Business/Industry/Labor Day. The Governor will present the New Product Award on this day. Industry, business and labor will come together to better understand and appreciate the products, services and work forces each provide to their community's prosperity.

● Education Day. The cornerstone to Michigan's future is rooted in education. This day will pay tribute to the univer-



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

sities, schools, professors, teachers, support personnel and students for their commitment to quality education.

● Cultural Day. The contributions of the arts in this state are very often underestimated. We have some of the finest in the nation. Many of them live in your very own community. And on this day you will be hearing about them.

● Farming/Aviation Day. Agriculture is one of Michigan's major industries, from apples and cherries to sugar beets and navy beans. This day's activities will feature farmers and businesses contributing to the state's agricultural products.

Aviation contributions also will be celebrated at airports throughout the state as balloonists, crop dusters and parachutists take to the skies.

Make sure that you get out and enjoy many of the activities in your community.

Hart coverage prompts scrutiny of media attitudes

Editor's Note: Philip H. Power is chairman of Suburban Communications Corp., the company that owns this newspaper. He is a journalist of 25 years' experience and has engaged the press as a political candidate when he ran for nomination to the U.S. Senate.

THE WAY Gary Hart's political career was ended by the news media calls for some tough questions and straight answers, and it calls for better focus on the differences in attitude and operations between the big time national news media and your local hometown newspaper.

Should reporters skulk around staking out private homes of people (including candidates for office)?

No. Newspapers are not society's censors nor should reporters set themselves up as a modern day thought police. Except for suspicion of criminal acts and on very good basis, I've never done it and I do not expect ever to ask any of our staff to do it.

Is private morality an accurate predictor of competence in holding high public office?

No. If it were, there would have been something very odd about presidents Roosevelt, Eisenhower and Kennedy. In fact, if the editors of the Miami Herald had had their way these great presi-

dents might have been lost to the nation before they had ever taken office.

Can overly aggressive and unchecked news media drive able people out of public life and prevent others from ever becoming candidates?

Yes. Many headlines last week said that the Miami Herald had blazed a new standard in political reporting: Henceforth, every candidate for high public office will have some reporter asking him/her if they have committed adultery or some such. This is silly. People in public life have an ordinary range of moral standards (i.e. about like the range of most reporters). These usually have very little to do with their performance when in office. Several able people in office and out told me last week that if the cost of running was accepting risk of being trashed by the press, it wasn't worth it.

Is the press getting too arrogant, too unchecked, too big for its collective britches?

Yes, if reporters figure they have the right to run around asking candidates what their sex life is like or how they spent the past evening. Worse, if the press thinks it has the right to act like that, the rights of the press will be sharply curtailed, First Amendment or no.

In his press conference last week Sen. Hart portrayed the press as hunt-



Philip Power

ers and presidential candidates as the hunted.

IT WAS A challenging metaphor, especially to us who try to make this paper a hometown newspaper and not part of the national media establishment.

Unlike the Miami Herald or the national TV networks, this newspaper is part of this community.

Our purpose is not to be the hunter against people in this community. We are part of the community and by being a part of it we portray the community to itself as it is.

We will not whitewash. We will not ignore doings, and we will not set ourselves as something outside of and superior to the people in this community.

We respect you. We value your respect for us. This mutual trust will endure so long as we maintain respect for truthfulness, fairness, privacy, relevancy and responsibility. And as long as we don't get too big for our britches.