

Opinion

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Pitch in

Rouge Rescue must be year-round effort

"The river glideth at his own sweet will." — Wordsworth

IT'S TOO polluted for swimming. But by 2006, that could change if the Friends of the Rouge reach their 20-year goal.

The Rouge has the potential to become one of metro Detroit's top recreational waterways.

"It's one of the prettiest streams in the lower part of Michigan," says Fred Harrison of Farmington Hills.

At 77, Harrison is still one of the river's best friends. "I don't think you'll be able to swim in it during my lifetime. But you will in yours."

Gazing at the log-choked riverway from the banks of the Farmington Hills cleanup site off Tuck Road during Rouge Rescue '87 Saturday morning, Harrison mused: "It could be a real pleasure to so many people. If people would only do their part..."

HARRISON, WHO has lived on a branch of the mighty Rouge since 1939, unwittingly pinpointed why the volunteer-based Rouge Rescue is so vital.

It's people who polluted the winding, 125-mile waterway. It's people, particularly nearby residents, who must pitch in to clean it and keep it clean.

Thanks to the undying work of the Friends, the river's water quality has improved measurably. But you wouldn't



Bob Sklar

want to bare your skin to it just yet.

Even after two Rouge Rescues during the '80s, it's hard to gauge how many people care if the river survives anyway.

Signup sheets at the Farmington cleanup site in Shiloh Park Saturday showed 26 names. But you'd have been hard-pressed to count 26 workers even if you included the city employees.

In Farmington Hills, 85 volunteers registered. But you had to hunt to find a volunteer who wasn't also a city employee.

SURE, A steady rain muddled the banks. But getting wet and dirty is part of clearing a water course. Sure, there were other things to do. But there's always something else to do, somewhere else to go.

Hearing chain saws slice through logjams and seeing human chains move debris into trucks, you could appreciate exactly why the Rouge should be saved.

Trees can be leveled in the name of "progress." But streams don't succumb so easily. They can heal wounds inflicted by humans. But their waters have to flow.

Upstream in Farmington and Farmington Hills, the Rouge is plagued more by logjams, debris, back flow and raw sewage than by the industrial wastes and drums so prevalent farther from the headwaters.

PART OF the problem in rallying support is the Rouge's reputation as a cesspool. Says Farmington resident Don Hadley: "We're only beginning to realize just how lucky we are to have the river."

Don't feel you have to be a Friend or an environmentalist to care. Anyone can lend a hand during the Rouge Rescue each June.

But don't limit your concern to once a year. Maintaining the river is a year-round job.

So adopt a stretch. Then after each heavy rain, clear logjams, build up eroding banks, pluck debris and report pollutants.

As Fred Harrison, ever the inspiration, put it: "You see how easy it is to keep it clean once you get it clean."

Put more bluntly, the Rouge will cleanse itself if you don't stifle it.



Exhibit needs home; maybe your town?

A COMMUNITY AT war with its soul is the saddest crisis of all.

Community crises do come in many forms.

Often it's crime. At other times it's housing, taxes or roads.

But when a city is faced with looking in the mirror of social conscience and baring its malice and fear, the scars last forever.

That's the crisis faced by your neighbors in Southfield. You should care about this crisis because the way it's resolved will have a telling impact on suburban Detroit, your community, for many years to come.

Southfield, one of Detroit's most cosmopolitan suburbs, is a city in transformation. It suffers many of the problems that growing cities do — including being the victim of a monumental whispering campaign among the lesser lights of suburbia.

YOU SEE, Southfield is an integrated community. For many who live in fear and/or ignorance, that's a negative aspect over which to gloat with some amount of glee.

Let's face it, we've all been at gatherings where people from other communities snicker, shake their heads and say something like, "better not buy a house in Southfield. Property values won't be worth a damn in 10 years."

And indeed, vultures seeking to make a profit off fear and prejudice, do sweep down on integrated cities to make some quick money.

That's why Southfield civic leaders find themselves in a terribly awkward situation. A group hopes that Southfield will become the home base for a travel, exhibition and sculpture in memory



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr.

Lots of excuses are being bandied about concerning storage space and travel logistics. But all that rings pretty hollow.

THE TRUTH is that many in Southfield fear their city is already labeled a black city, even though its black population still is a minority of the total population. To become the home of a memorial to the most famous black civil rights leader in our history, they fear, would foster the impression.

Southfield, much to its credit, has worked hard at being an integrated, rather than a racially changing community. And in many ways it has succeeded where other communities have failed.

Because of its successes, Southfield should be considered a jewel for other suburbs around the nation to look at and say, "see integration does work."

And those of us living in other Detroit suburban communities should join in on that pride. Frankly, any city should be proud to house a memorial to a man who deserves everyone's admiration.

How about your city? Sure would take the heat off Southfield.

OPINION



River requires major surgery

THIS PAST weekend, thousands of people lined the banks of the Rouge to help clean the river of logjams and other obstructions.

The effort certainly was an important step in the Save the Rouge campaign. Pulling the obstructions out of the Rouge speeds up the flow of the water, allowing the river to cleanse itself.

Getting rid of stagnant pools of water in a river is almost like performing artificial resuscitation on a human being. It's a life-saving step.

After being performed, however, there still may be a need for surgery. But life must be revived before the surgeons can take over.

So it is with the Rouge. Saturday's effort was a life-saving resuscitation. Now for the surgery.

The Rouge is being contaminated by some pretty heavy pollutants. There are two major sources: industrial/commercial pollutants, and people — like you and me.

THE DEPARTMENT of Natural Resources has a long list of points along the Rouge River where industrial/commercial pollutants are entering the Rouge River. The state knows the points where the pollutants are entering



daniels' den
Emory Daniels

the river and, in many cases, knows the source.

The list of discharges (sanitary, combined sanitary and storm water, and industrial) into the Rouge River in Oakland and Wayne counties is five pages single-spaced. The list specifies points along the Rouge where the DNR has issued permits allowing discharges into the river.

The list contains 13 sites in the Farmington area.

Of course, the solution is not easy. Finding alternative ways of dumping the pollutants would cost billions of dollars and swell the ranks of the unemployed to unwanted levels.

That's why surgery is required.

THE MAJOR pollutant besides industrial discharges is human waste.

Human waste products do not go directly from the toilet into the river. For the most part, the waste enters "combined" sanitary and storm systems.

During periods of heavy rains, the storm water backs up and takes human waste with it — into the Rouge.

During periods of flooding, water will back up from downriver communities and cause sanitary sewer systems upstream to overflow into the Rouge.

Water naturally flows down hill, so the problem of storm water involves upstream communities as well as those to the south where backups occur. With development to the north (Livonia, Farmington Hills, Novi) the volume of water running downstream is increasing rapidly.

Whenever the storm sewers cannot handle the upstream flow, there's danger of human waste entering our river.

MILLIONS OF dollars would have to be invested to enlarge the north-to-south storm drain system and to separate the old combined sanitary/storm sewers. That means large bonded debts which translates to millage increases for all communities along the Rouge.

Surgery on a river is costly, just like human surgery.

Do we want to save the Rouge?

Do we want to pay the price?

We have given the Rouge a breath of life; now shall we call in the surgeons?

Weighty matter

Could parents be bringing up a generation of 'butterballs'?

BUTTERBALLS.

That's what type of children we are raising.

Butterballs.

Guy Reiff says so. He hails from lakeside property northwest of Ann Arbor where he toils for the University of Michigan Fitness Research Center. Recently, he has been spending time in West Bloomfield schools, one of 16 in the state that has adopted a Fitness for Youth program, paid for by a \$262,000 grant from Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Reiff helped develop the program. Its premise is simple. Traditional physical education classes fall short in both the "physical" and "education" departments.

TOO MANY classes, at least when you and I were young, consisted of a football coach tossing a dodge ball into the court and saying, "Have at it, boys, I've got films to watch." And that's for only one year out of four.

In earlier grades, students had a hodgepodge of gym sessions, often consisting of one or two 15-minute sessions a week.

One result is that the kids likely to get the most out of gym classes need it the least: they are already proficient in the skill sports.

Reiff has nothing against the skill sports, except they benefit the few, not the masses. Even for the few, it's hard for a 35-year-old to rustle up 10 other guys to play a little tackle football after work.

THAT'S WHY people like Reiff decry the lack of education in the little physical training that youngsters receive. Instead of learning to make exercise as regular a part of their lives as brushing



Rich Perlberg

their teeth, youngsters are barely touched by exertion or, if they are, they are taught that it is drudgery. You goof up on the playing field, you run two laps as punishment.

Those lessons stick. Neither are such attitudes helped by a fast-food lifestyle. A quarter of today's kids have at least two of the big three cardiac threats — obesity, high blood pressure and high cholesterol — says Reiff. Forty percent have at least one.

"Cardiac disease is not an adult disease," he says.

THE NATION'S billion-dollar-a-day health care costs are only going higher if we are raising a generation programmed for heart disease. That's why Blue Cross has entered the picture. "We can't turn back the clock on health care costs," says Blue Cross spokesman Rude Difazio, "but we can try to contain them."

The nourishment problems faced by our youth that are traced to poverty are difficult and expensive to solve. But it's ironic that in a world where many children hurt from their hunger, our affluent, image-conscious nation is raising butterballs. For those children, the solution isn't expensive. It does require restructuring and emphasizing the so-called physical education programs now in place.

It's easy to do. Just ask Guy Reiff. He's waiting for someone to call him.