

Kiwanians facing a major decision

IT WAS COLD that morning of Dec. 16 in the outskirts of Bastogne in the southern Ardennes Forest. An impossibly dense fog had settled over the area as perfect cover for 38 German divisions whose last-ditch onslaught was unopposed that day by Adolf Hitler in his crazed hope to prevent the Allies from crossing the Rhine. The year was 1944.

You could have had odds of millions to one that it never crossed the mind of a Huntington, Ind., communications corporal named Gene Overholt that 43 years later, if he even survived what would become known as the Battle of the Bulge, one of his main concerns would be whether women should be allowed to join the Kiwanis Clubs.

BUT AS OVERHOLT stands on the threshold of becoming international president of a service organization whose 8,300 clubs have approximately 315,000 members in 70 countries, he says it will be the biggest issue that will come before the international convention when it opens two weeks from now in Washington, D.C.

We'll get back to this feminine activist cause in a minute, but first how did this Plymouth Township resident become only the fourth Michigan man to climb to the top of the Kiwanis structure?

Incidentally, the others were Ben Dean of Grand Rapids nearly 50 years ago, Walter J. L. Ray of Birmingham — now 90 years old — in 1952, and Robert Weber of Grosse Pointe in 1970.

After the war, attending Stanford University and marrying his childhood sweetheart, Gene spent 36 years in the Bell System, most of it in Michigan. When he retired in 1982 it was from an executive position as a senior systems staff adviser, headquartered in Southfield.

Plymouth became the adopted hometown of these transplanted Hoosiers and it wasn't long before Gene's leadership abilities led him more and more often into volunteer community projects. Twenty years ago, helping to organize the Kiwanis Club of Colonial Plymouth was one of the offshoots.

In due time he became its president



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and inevitably his competency led to the governorship of the Michigan district. His accomplishments did not go unnoticed and in 1981 he was elected to the international board of trustees. Now at 63, he holds the office of treasurer. At \$1 per year it is the board's only salaried position.

THE AUTOMATIC line of succession within Kiwanis means Overholt will be designated president-elect at Washington and he will take the reins as international president Oct. 1, 1988. It will be a just reward for dedication, service and leadership.

It also will reflect favorably upon local clubs in this area, which I count as 21 within the Observer & Eccentric circulation area: one each in Troy, Rochester Hills, West Bloomfield, Farmington Hills, Garden City, Westland and Canton, and two clubs in each of Plymouth, Livonia, Farmington, Redford Township, Southfield, Rochester and the Birmingham-Bloomfield Hills combination.

This thing about previously all-male service organizations accepting female members got big headlines recently when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that Rotary International could not oust a California chapter because it admitted women. Now they're all arguing about sex discrimination.

"WE SUPPORTED Rotary in a legal brief submitted to the court, as a number of other private organizations also did," Overholt said. "We've taken a vote in each of our last few annual conventions on the issue of admitting women but it was never given serious consideration as far as the vote goes until last year when we on the international board recommended an amendment to the delegate body to admit them."

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and include the address and telephone number of the writer. None can be returned. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. Letters should be limited to 300 words in most cases. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024. F4463

Liability crisis must be eased

To the editor:

An 80-member law firm in Chicago lost its liability insurance coverage in 1985. The reason: increased legal malpractice suits.

The proprietor of a day care center in Rockland County, N.Y., learned last summer that her liability premium was being increased by 1,000 percent. The center had never filed a claim of any kind. Her insurance agent has advised her to close the center.

These are not isolated incidents. The U.S. is in the middle of a liability insurance crisis, and Congress is saturated with complaints.

Liability insurance reform was the top priority of last year's White House Conference on Small Business because of the great cost and the difficulty small businesses are experiencing. High insurance premiums threaten to damage the American economy seriously by reducing the goods and services available to the American consumer, while increasing their prices. The existence of whole industries and thousands of jobs are at risk because of huge insurance rate increases, mass cancellations of coverage, and entire lines of insurance virtually unavailable at any price.

The American tort system, the process by which injuries inflicted by one person against another are settled through the courts, is largely to blame. The courts have slowly increased the kinds of damages that can be compensated through the system and have chipped away at the defense. This has brought substantially more cases to the courts and has allowed compensation fees to skyrocket.

Many of these changes have been for the good, allowing persons wrongfully harmed to receive just compensation. However, the courts have also allowed compensation to injured plaintiffs even where the defendant's conduct could not

reasonably be called wrongful.

In years past, the sting was felt only by huge corporations and insurance companies who could easily afford to pay the increasingly large and frequent judgments. Recently, however, the costs have begun to affect most segments of our society, including shopkeepers, hospitals, cities, corporate directors, and even day care centers.

For the most part, the tort crisis is a matter of state law, but in some areas, such as product liability and federal court rules, Congress' help is definitely needed. While several bills have been introduced over the past few Congresses to address this serious problem, little progress, unfortunately, has been made.

Some suggested reforms include strengthening the role of fault in determining liability. Other bills introduced this year would create federal product liability standards. Manufacturers are also pressing Congress to allow compliance with government and industry standards to be a defense for product liability actions.

The House Small Business Committee, on which I am one of the senior members, has begun hearings to try to resolve this problem. However, Congress must act quickly before the liability insurance crisis worsens.

William Broomfield
U.S. Representative
18th District

The coverage was thorough

To the editor:

Again this year, I want to thank you for the excellent and complete coverage of our Memorial Day Parade and activities, May 1987.

It is important that we take the time, "To Remember."

Emily Sisson, president
American Legion Auxiliary Unit 346
Groves-Walker Post
Farmington

Detector users' aim — break law

To the editor:

Radar detectors are purchased by individuals so they can exceed the posted speed limits without getting caught and ticketed.

Many people rationalize the use of these detectors by saying things like "it keeps me more aware of my driving speed so I don't drift up."

Cars can come equipped with cruise control devices that can be purchased for less than a radar detector. Also, we should all be aware of our driving when the police are not around us well!

Many other arguments are used to justify their existence.

The most popular is "If the police can hide behind buildings or bushes to ambush me, then it's only fair that I can find them" via the beep from the radar detector. "It's police surveillance, and I have a right to know when they are watching!"

Watching our driving and enforcing traffic law is a high priority of police departments. Priorities are issued by elected officials that represent us. If you do not want your police to enforce traffic laws, or feel the laws should be changed, give your representative that input.

Radar is simply a tool the police use to carry out their assigned enforcement task. If that isn't important eliminate the task, don't make obstacles preventing its completion.

One last thing to consider is radar detectors are one of the most stolen items in our state. This has very real financial implications to us all.

Insurance rates go up to cover the cost of damaged cars and stolen detectors. The police, in turn, spend many hours and dollars investigating their theft.

Let's look at the big picture.
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