

Opinion

33203 Grand River / Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor / 477-5450

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It's pivotal We all must show openness

COLOR IT VIOLETS. But consider it ironic. The vandals who spray-painted obscenities and racial slurs on the Shawawasee Road home of a biracial couple two days before Christmas surfaced within three months of the Farmington-area organizing a cultural awareness group to stem discrimination and prejudice.

Bigotry isn't rampant in the Farmington area. But it exists. The vandals who peppered the home of Dianna and Derwin Success with hate messages like "nigger," "KKK" and swastikas underscored that.

Because the incident was the first blatantly racist act in years, some might consider it isolated, even though a public embarrassment.

But don't be fooled. The Successes, who have lived on Shawawasee for two years, have had to endure name-calling. Anti-Semitism is alive in some parts of our community. And Chaldeans, Arabs and Asians have shouldered their share of ethnic taunts.

It's disgraceful that our community, in which more than 60 languages are spoken in the public schools, has to fall victim to ethnic hatred — brazen or subtle.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR Gary Goss of the Farmington Department of Public Safety said there's "more than reasonable suspicion to believe contacts were involved" in the racially motivated vandalism at the Successes.

The vandals seemed to attract few supporters. As Derwin Success put it, "The community rallied behind me. That was rewarding for me. I feel that it was just one or two people. I don't feel it's the entire community."

What would possess someone to commit such maliciousness? Cheap thrills? A drunken party? A twisted mind?

Were the vandals seeking adventure? Were the acts establishing a common purpose while extending status?

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hatred — brazen or subtle.**

Bigotry has lessened since the civil rights breakthroughs a generation ago. But as Cultural Awareness Committee chairman Jim Agnew asked, "Have we plateaued and are we now going backward?"

Clearly, minorities remain a ready target when pangs of superiority strike.

Dianna Success, who is white, said she "wasn't conscious of the hate." She thought "we were past that point."

Obviously, we're not.

THE SUCCESSSES, who work together in teaching inner-city children to develop self-esteem and self-image, agree the vandals probably were "kids calling for help."

A Cultural Awareness Day would help. But it's not the sole answer to changing long-harbored attitudes.

Whatever the community reaction, the schools must play a key role. Kids have to be reached during their formative years to counteract any prejudices they might pick up at home or with friends.

Still fledgling, the Cultural Awareness Committee already faces a stunning challenge. Says Agnew: "This was our whole emphasis, to try to provide an atmosphere so something like that would not happen."

Unmistakably, the community must rededicate itself to turning the bricks hurled through the Successes' garage windows into building blocks for ethnic harmony.

We've got to do a better job in showing the world our community is not rooted in ethnic hostilities.

Race relations King's words can't be ignored

A RECENT REPORT on race relations says it best: "Detroit and the suburbs can no longer survive as separate societies, practicing a peculiarly American brand of apartheid."

"The social evils created by racism will spread out of control so long as the disease is allowed to exist."

That was the conclusion of the Detroit Strategic Planning Project.

And indeed, racism, like a cancerous growth, hurts and even kills — both people and cities.

It affects us in our pocketbooks, in the work place and in our hearts.

And because the Detroit metropolitan area is one of the most segregated in America, we all stand to suffer.

As we prepare to honor the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. on Monday, we must realize that with eight out of nine blacks living in the inner city and eight out of nine whites living in the suburbs, integration as a path to racial harmony has failed in our communities.

The awareness of our race problem will be heightened next week as schools and some community leaders plan Martin Luther King Day observances.

It took too long, but some suburban schools are finally taking concrete steps to recognize the importance of the day. Others are still practicing benign neglect.

There are obvious signs that King's dream has not been fulfilled: a cross-burned in Redford Township, racial epithets painted on stores and homes in Southfield and Farmington, charges of racial slurs that turned into a nasty confrontation at a Cranbrook Kingswood-Harper Woods basketball game.

As distasteful as these incidents are, the more subtle examples of racism could be an even greater threat to the dream. If mostly white schools ignore or downgrade King's birthday, it's not hard for students to get the simple black-and-white message: racial harmony deserves no more than lip service, if that.

HOPEFULLY, white America will be more conscious of what the Rev. King stood for — the worth of each human being, freedom for all, and

the ability to live by the spirit and the letter of the U.S. Constitution.

Hopefully, all schools will have a visible and active program next Monday to highlight the contributions of Rev. King and his role in the civil rights movement.

While some progress in race relations in the two decades since King's death can be noted, certainly plenty of room for improvement remains.

Federal and state open housing laws exist that prohibit discrimination — but our communities are virtually segregated by race.

Detroit bashing is a popular sport at suburban social or political gatherings.

Rev. King's words themselves are a beacon to help guide us to a better neighborhood, region and society.

"The racial issue that we confront in America is not a sectional but a national problem," King said. "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. Therefore, no American can afford to be apathetic about the problem of racial justice."

But after the Rev. King ceremonies and speeches are concluded, we can take action to make sure that his goals and dreams are carried out.

● Schools must be more active in designing curriculums to correct racial myths and stereotypes.

● Individuals and groups must speak out and react quickly to events or proposed programs on the local, state or national levels that affect race relations.

● A regional conference should be convened by community leaders that would report on the annual state of race relations.

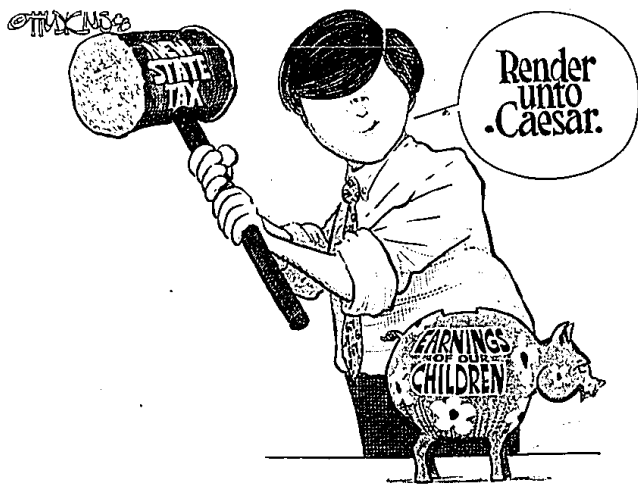
● The real estate industry should be monitored more closely so agents and salespersons comply with the state and federal open housing laws.

● A study of the effect of corporate decisions on race relations and economics should be made — such as moving plants from the city or nearby suburbs to more distant locations.

● Insurance red-lining practices should be stamped out.

● On an individual basis, we can stop quietly accepting the telling of racial jokes in social or job situations. We can tell the story teller we resent that type of joke.

Some solutions are complex, others are simple, but one truth rings clear: the solutions exist to solve the social ills that cripple the communities in which we live.



Yes, Mayor Marks served the Hills well

HE CALLED it "probably the most extraordinary and fulfilling year of my life."

So said councilman Ben Marks before turning over Farmington Hills' mayoral gavel to Jody Soronen at the city's employee recognition night Jan. 4.

But that upbeat response from a man who helped nurture Farmington Township into Farmington Hills should surprise no one.

As councilwoman and former mayor Jan Dolan put it, "Ben has had at least as much fun, if not more fun, than any mayor we've had."

"He was at every groundbreaking, every ribbon-cutting, every dedication, every open house that he was invited to — and probably some that he wasn't."

Well, not quite. He did miss four of the 50 events he was invited to during the year.

But by any measuring stick, Marks earned the plaque he received from Soronen on behalf of the city. It cited his "dedication, leadership and devotion to duty."

Under Marks' stewardship, the city paved 11 miles of roads and five miles of sidewalks, began developing Heritage Park, finished developing Pioneer Park, joined a six-city consortium to examine options for solid



Bob Sklar

waste disposal in the face of ever-increasing landfill costs, lowered the operating tax rate by 1 mill and hosted an "ice breaker" between the city council and the school board.

The council also committed itself to fighting further encroachment of commercial development into residential areas, something we'll monitor closely this year under Mayor Soronen.

A SPIRITED ambassador for the city, Marks never lost his cool nor his sense of humor as mayor. He was sensitive and attentive. And he got along with all of his fellow council members, no matter what their political leanings.

That helped ease pent-up tensions during some particularly friction-ridden council debates.

Marks presided over some oppressively long council meetings. But he let audience members make their point. He never cut off anyone with a

fresh thought.

To his credit, he didn't tolerate personal attacks between council members.

Marks erred in sometimes letting council debate drone on when all salient points had been made and it was time to vote and move along.

He also didn't come out against city-related telephone calls between council members as strongly as I would have liked.

To protect the Open Meetings Act, the mayor should speak out against any council member who conducts city business anywhere but at a properly announced public meeting.

OVERALL, EVEN a staff publicist could have provided better PR for the city than Marks. "I've made an awful lot of new friends," he said, "I've been to every corner of this city and have loved every moment of it."

As Mayor Soronen moves into the hot seat, she'd do well to make visits "to every corner" in pursuit of encouraging and fostering "new ideas that will improve the quality of life in Farmington Hills."

Ordinary folks like to know their mayor isn't an ivory-tower type, but instead a grass-roots type who's truly people oriented.

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.

Open parks to pet dogs

To the editor:

I was appalled by the article "Hills introduces park regulations" in the Dec. 24 issue of the Observer. Specifically, the "no animals" clause is an outrage!

I am a dog owner, and that dog happens to be of the larger, outdoor type, requiring plenty of outdoor exercise and recreation. Due to neighborhood association restrictions, my pet is not allowed to wander the subdivision freely; nor is he allowed to "dirty" or damage anyone's property without my being held responsible.

These requests are very reasonable because everyone has a right to preserve their personal property. I have no difficulties in upholding these regulations.

In order to expand my dog's play area beyond his own property lines, I needed to find some public property somewhere nearby.

Just what is it that these animals are doing that are so detrimental to the park grounds or to other patrons that they are being chastised? If the "dirty" piles are an issue, I pick up after my dog if he chooses a spot not in the woods. What about the non-biodegradable "dirty" of polystyrene burger containers, aluminum cans, and plastic picnic utensils?

And a word about destruction. When was the last time an animal chopped down a tree or polluted a

stream? or carved its initials in a tree trunk? or spray painted obscenities on a picnic table?

Where do I take my dog on blistering summer days where he can take a dip in the stream? Animals suffer from heat exhaustion and exposure just like us. Not everyone can afford air conditioning.

Pet owners have trusted their animals with their homes, personal possessions, and even their children; and you don't trust them with public property that exists for the pleasure of their owners and is paid for by their owners' tax dollars? Maybe some of us enjoy our park visits more when accompanied by our four-legged friends instead of our two-legged ones.

Susan J. Haight
Farmington Hills

Rally against bodily abuse

To the editor:

There is a very big social problem in our society. It's physical abuse.

I'm willing to bare a portion of my body to you so you can see just what it is the physical abusers beat.

I have no ugly black scars or marks on my skin. Victims do. The victims range from children to teenage girls to women to all types of people.

The time has come for our society to make physical abuse a moral issue.

My skin is not made of a canvas material. Nor are the skins of chil-

dren and women.

If my appearance offends you, I'm sorry. I hope physical abuse offends you more.

We are not human punching bags.
Vernon C. Kieplinski
Farmington Hills

Help retain Free Press

To the editor:

We have lived in Farmington just one year, and a consistent and pleasant companion throughout that time has been our Observer. We came from the Big City, and I have been delighted to read, literally, what is happening down the street.

I was also pleased to find an editorial policy usually in tune with my own feelings, rather than the Detroit-bashing I half expected and had seen in other suburban papers. The Observer, like any good paper, has worked its way into my life.

But it could never replace my Free Press, and that is why I am writing. I see no reason to believe that Knight-Ridder is bluffing about shutting the Free Press down if the Joint Operating Agreement is rejected. But I, and I'm sure many, many Observer subscribers, would find the loss of the Free Press devastating.

Please write to your representative and Attorney General Meese to see if there is any way to salvage the JOA. We are fortunate that our representative is well-connected in the White House. Perhaps he can help.

Mary Power
Farmington

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