

points of view

We do care

Reporters have feelings, too

SOMEHOW, I don't think Matthew Leiter would mind if I called him Matt. He could put anyone at ease with his special brand of wit, said his friends and family.

And Tracy Conroy, a retired Farmington entrepreneur, might have welcomed an amateur pool shark, like me, to his weekly games downtown.

Unfortunately, we'll never know how either man feels.

I met both the 17-year-old North Farmington student and the 68-year-old lifelong Farmington resident last week for the first time while writing their obituaries.

Both were loved in their respective communities. Matt Leiter's friends look forward to many years of living. Tracy Conroy's list of well-wishers are friends who visited his meat market in the early days, or spent hours socializing with this very special man in later years.

I am an outsider of sorts, never meeting either man while alive, but having to piece together remnants of their lives for a newspaper story.

CAPSULIZING A person's life in an obituary always makes me stop and reflect. Those of us who cover the news for a living are often stereotyped as callous and non-feeling types, but even the most hard-core reporter gets teary talking with family members and friends. Despite the ever-present deadline, feelings stand at the forefront.

There's always a lesson to be learned, whether someone has lived a short life, or a longer, more fulfilling one. Relatives and friends who haven't taken the time to visit in years are suddenly thrust into comforting each other and learning how to cope.

Jim Wechsler put it best while reflecting on his nephew Matt's death last week after a varsity basketball game. "As I told his sister today, you just have to try to excel in life so you can be the best each day," he said.

Another lesson came from Rabbi Lane Steinger, who gave Matt's eulogy: "If we do not become more empathetic, more understanding, then his life will have diminished in meaning."

Perhaps Matt received more satisfaction in his short life than some get from years of living. He made great strides, personally, socially and aca-



Casey Hans

demically during the past year, everyone said. The first step toward his goal of a professional basketball career — making his first varsity basket — was experienced shortly before his death.

OLDTIMER TRACY Conroy's life was filled with a multitude of experiences from which we can all learn a lesson.

"He was someone that was part of history," said funeral director Bob

Rock. Others called the former councilman and civic leader a "founding father" for Farmington.

His son recalled the hardships his father endured as a small businessman, and how he influenced the young people in his life, especially his five grandchildren. "He was not just your average grandfather," Bill Conroy said.

Of the many we meet in this business during a year, there are still hundreds of special people whose paths we will never cross. It appears both Matt Leiter and Tracy Conroy are two of those special souls.

May they rest in peace, and may we all learn the lessons offered through their lives.



Tim Richard

REFLECTIONS On last week-end's Republican State Convention:

NO, it wasn't a bloodbath. And I was outside the credentials committee room in the Grand Rapids hotel where there was supposed to have been a fistfight, and I sure didn't see any violence.

For a Republican fistfight, you'd have to attend the 1988 Bay City convention where the William Howard Taft delegates successfully bare-knuckled the Teddy Roosevelt delegates.

Bliteness? That's another matter. Republicans admire lawyers the way Catholics admire saints. Republicans conduct committee debates like lawyers in court.

This was an amazingly well-run convention, given the advance knowledge that the group loyal to former evangelist Pat Robertson would take a walk and be joined by many of Congressman Jack Kemp's loyalists.

Security was super-extremely tight. No one was going to let any

(hrrumph) outsider into the Grand Central meeting hall. That was because there were so many challenged delegations.

Usually, I don't bother getting press credentials for the GOP state conventions — just flash my state Capitol card or a business card. Not this time. No press got no place, no how, without a green credential. It seemed bureaucratic, but in practice we newfolks weren't hassled by the tall boys in the plastrine suits or anyone else. Very civilized.

STRANGEST incident occurred Friday night in the 2nd Congressional District caucus, where Wayne County Commissioner Susan Heintz

Drug combat team needs more funds

WE ALL ARE about to get a lesson in what happens when you have a flyswatter to ward off an elephant. The sweat you work up doesn't do much to fend off the pain when the elephant steps on you.

In short, suburban Detroit's version of how to fight a losing battle against the nation's drug czars is about to be launched.

Called the Southeast Michigan Conspiracy Investigative Organization (SEMCO), this group will dedicate its time to going after the big shots in the drug business, the powerbrokers who manage to elude the otherwise fragmented police community.

Sounds like a great idea. Tastes like a great idea. Feels like a great idea. After all, we'll never get much of any place if all we do is arrest and rearrest the street addicts and pushers.



Steve Barnaby

Unfortunately, the chances of this being very successful are about as good as your odds of winning the Michigan State Lottery. You've almost got to feel sorry for the 12-member force whose responsibility it will be to fight the drug war in the six-county metropolitan area.

THE NUMBERS alone are mind-boggling. Twelve cops from the state police, local and county departments

banding together in a war in which the other side has thousands of troops at its disposal.

Even more disheartening is the funding. A meager \$750,000 in federal funds will support this project.

What a joke, a very bad joke. This funding comes from a national administration that is willing to spend tens of millions of dollars to fight an imaginary danger in Central America but is unwilling or unable to combat the real enemy within the borders of our own country.

Naturally, local law enforcement officials publicly express enthusiasm about the new venture. They know the problem is getting worse every day as the drug use continues to rise and the profits continue to increase.

Anything is better than nothing. And a dozen cops dedicated time to fighting the drug war is better than nothing — but not much.

GOP conclave: well-run, very civilized

Bliteness? That's another matter. Republicans admire lawyers the way Catholics admire saints. Republicans conduct committee debates like lawyers in court.

So they went to U.S. Rep. Carl Pursell of Plymouth. Now, Pursell is a George Bush buddy since 1978, at least. But surprise! He agreed to perform the ceremonial chore.

"Suze and Bob had a problem, coming from the part of the district they're from," he told me afterwards, "but I run districtwide. I've done this lots of times."

Heintz and Geake were vindicated when the credentials committee tossed out the disputed Kemp-Robertson delegates.

IF GEORGE Bush becomes president, my money isn't in the State Lottery. It's on Carl Pursell to join the Bush administration as budget director.

That's not an inside scoop — just logic. Years ago Pursell told me the only reason he would leave Congress voluntarily would be to work for Bush.

A LOT OF Republicans were wondering where U.S. Rep. Bill Broom-

field of Birmingham was last week-end. He wasn't at the convention, as he usually is.

A lot are wondering whom he's for. Broomfield is the senior member of the delegation and senior member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. Folks were expecting a little leadership.

IT'S DIFFICULT to feel sorry for Michigan Republicans and the national embarrassment they suffered over split delegations and the near-takeover by the Robertson zealots.

Democrats learned their lesson in the 1970s after the McGovern fiasco. Democrats decided that no delegation could be chosen by a process beginning earlier than the election.

The Michigan Republican process began literally in May of 1986, some 2½ years before the presidential election date.

It is written: Those who fail to learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.

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