

# Opinion

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

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## Good intentions Call for equality on the mark

**H**ARRISON HIGH isn't inferior to North Farmington or Farmington. Dispelling that belief was trustee James Abernethy's intent in calling for equal learning opportunities for all senior high students.

He made the call before the Farmington Board of Education voted March 1 to adopt superintendent Graham Lewis' choices approach to helping relieve overcrowded classrooms.

The first-term trustee wanted the school board to underscore its commitment "to a quality, comprehensive program at all high schools."

But other trustees correctly questioned whether a boundary and facilities proposal was the right place to address curriculum.

Abernethy reminded that "the reason we were concerned about boundaries is that it affected the quality of what we were going to have in the buildings."

No argument there.

The more students in a senior high, the greater chance that a limited-interest course could be offered there.

So since Harrison has 350 fewer students than North, students at North theoretically could have more courses to choose from.

BUT IT'S not that simple because when a limited-interest course is offered at only one senior high, it's open to students from the other schools, too.

Students who must be bused from another school arrive a few minutes late for class. But students who truly want to study, say, Latin can do so at Farmington High, the only school that offers it.

We echo trustee Jack Inch, who said the size of a school doesn't dictate the quality of its programming. As he put it, "I have never felt that Harrison has any reason to apologize to any school in this district or surrounding districts."

Still, as long as the district is dedicated to three senior highs of equal purpose, their core

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curricula should be as similar as practical.

It's not far-fetched to think that Harrison's core curriculum could suffer if enrollment continued to drop.

Its image also could be tarnished in the wake of declining enrollment. As one parent put it, rumors could perpetuate an image among some community members "that Harrison might be a second- or third-rate school."

**HER IDEA** of letting a senior high with an enrollment below a certain level accept student transfers from the other high schools is one possible solution.

A districtwide booster club raising and administering money to promote enrichment projects developed outside the regular curriculum also would go a long way toward encouraging students and parents from all of the senior highs to mingle and shatter false impressions of each other. Parents in the newly formed School/Community Forum could help in this pursuit.

Granted, the administration has built maintenance of equal educational opportunities for every student into its curriculum review and its long-term plans to stabilize senior high curriculum and enrollment.

But it certainly was appropriate for Abernethy to raise the issue of equal educational opportunity, the discussion about boundaries and facilities notwithstanding.

He picked debate on the school board and in the audience, keeping the issue right where it belonged — at the forefront.

There's never a need to apologize for that.

## Race relations History is key to understanding

WHITE SUBURBAN children have far too limited access to the black community and its culture. Black History Month is important in bridging that gap.

But it's not enough.

As Black History Month began, we called on suburban schools to become more active in designing curricula to emphasize minority achievement while dispelling destructive racial myths and stereotypes.

In short, we called on our schools to incorporate a more balanced view of history into the classroom. We repeat that charge.

We believe this to be particularly important because white suburban children are often misled into adopting the stereotype beliefs of previous generations.

Through the February event, we learned plenty about the often-overlooked black men and women who have helped shape the metropolitan area.

**WE LEARNED** of Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable, an educated, urbane fur trader who explored territory stretching as far north as Mackinac Island, and as far west as Chicago, during the early 1800s — with danger at the hands of slave traders and British soldiers lurking at every turn.

We learned of "militant" William Lambert, a firebrand who formed anti-slavery organizations and helped operate the area's Underground Railroad in the two decades leading up to the Civil

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War. His interest in equality didn't slacken after the war, either. As early as 1869, he argued before the Michigan Supreme Court for the right of black children to attend school within their local districts.

In addition, we learned of Benjamin Pelham, newspaperman, politician, namesake of Pelham Road and, for 36 years, Wayne County accountant — the first black person to rise so high in county government.

We also learned of bridge-builder Frederick Pelham, top of his engineering class at the University of Michigan a century ago, and the man responsible for designing nearly 20 railroad bridges throughout the state in the early part of this century.

We learned, too, of Cornelius Henderson, a successor of Pelham's at the U-M engineering school who later assisted in the design and construction of the Ambassador Bridge.

We also learned of national leaders such as W.E.B. Dubois, a founding father of the NAACP, journalist and intellectual.

**ALL THESE** figures achieved great success in the face of long odds. Some, like Baptiste Pointe du Sable, led particularly exciting lives. Most are little known outside the black community.

In fact, most of the information about their lives and careers was provided by a group of college students who, themselves, are probably learning about these historic figures for the first time.

But that should only whet the appetite for more information about these figures — about the "history we don't know" as former President Harry Truman would call it.

It's important that we learn the basics, that we learn of Washington and Lincoln, of Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt. But our education shouldn't end there.

With knowledge being the key to understanding, we long for the day when history is no longer segregated by race or sex. We long for the day when the contributions of all Americans are given the full credit they deserve.

Sadly, that day is still a long way off. But there's hope — if we keep learning.



W.E.B. DuBois



## Hills council expense estimates are merited

**I CAN'T** buy Joe Alkateeb's argument for why the Farmington Hills City Council should abandon use of a pre-conference expense approval form.

In 1984, the veteran councilman supported then-councilwoman Joan Dudley's proposal to adopt the form as a way to ensure public accountability of on-the-job expenses.

On Feb. 22, Alkateeb said he objected to "the rigid, formal procedure that ties you down to a number before you leave" and to "treating the council members like a bunch of kids who are irresponsible."

"I think it is somewhat insulting for members of this council that they have to do this every time they want to go some place," he said. "I think it's OK for them to go before the council and state their desire to go somewhere, and let it go with that."

Even though the council supported Alkateeb's bid to bounce the form by a 4-3 vote, I beg to differ with his assessment that "its use really in the last four years has served a very small, slight purpose and has served as a platform for certain council members to make some noise."

This latest debate arose during a vote on approving two council mem-



Bob Sklar

bers' attendance at the National League of Cities Congressional Cities Conference in Washington, D.C., March 19-22. The estimated cost: \$920 per person. The council's 1987-88 conference budget is \$8,400; to date, more than half has been spent.

**DON'T GET** me wrong. I'm usually quick to leap at a chance to ax needless paperwork. I shuffle enough paper to speak from first-hand experience.

But in this case, I think the on-page cost estimate form has merit.

Simply put, it requires council members to estimate expenses for registration, transportation, lodging and other major costs before receiving council approval to attend. Approval must be granted at a public meeting.

Without the form, the burden of preparing estimates has seemingly been shifted to the city manager.

Frankly, I don't see what the big deal is in taking a few minutes to fill out the form the few times a year a council member might have to.

By submitting their own estimates, the burden of accountability lies squarely where it belongs, with the council member, not the city manager.

**IF, AS** Alkateeb says, a council member's estimate is a "crazy figure" that sometimes is "totally unrealistic," it seems to me the fault lies with the estimator, not the form.

The city manager, who Alkateeb thinks has the best handle on potential costs, surely could help council members make their estimates more accurate.

Granted, each council member must file an expense report with the city's financial staff and account for their expenses every time they go somewhere.

But that's after the fact. At least the now-doomed form forced council members to state, up front, how much taxpayer money they thought they might spend while attending a municipal conference.

If nothing else, it forced them to justify their estimated expenses — publicly.

## 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.

## Belts indeed step forward

To the editor:

Dan McCosh's column, Man Attacked by Passive Restraint Device (Dec. 17), couldn't have been more wrong. Where McCosh got his information I don't know, but here are the facts that set straight his errors:

• McCosh said "not a single individual" with a motorized (or automatic) shoulder belt buckles the manual lap belt. It's true that fewer people use non-motorized lap belts, compared to automatic shoulder belts, but still one-third to one-half of those observed in cars with automatic systems are using their manual lap belts. That's a lot more than "not a single."

• McCosh said that without the lap belt "the (motorized) system is pretty much worthless." Again, this is untrue. Cars with automatic shoulder belts also have knee bolsters to restrain the lower bodies of people who don't use lap belts. This combination provides very good protection in frontal crashes, the kind of crash that accounts for most deaths and serious injuries.

• McCosh said manual safety belts "have been the single greatest addition to passenger car safety ever invented." This might be true if — and only if — more people buckled up. But surveys indicate that manual belt use rates, even under seat belt laws, are only about 50 percent. On the other hand, about 90 percent of

the drivers with motorized safety belts use them. This is, of course, the whole point of automatic belts — they help achieve the very high use rates that eluded us with manual belts, with or without safety belt laws.

Contrary to McCosh's conclusion, automatic belts are an important step forward (not backward) for passenger safety simply because they mean more people are protected in crashes.

Brian O'Neill, president, Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

## Reporting is complimented

To the editor:

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers for its in-depth and objective reporting of the recent Republican presidential process.

Specifically, I was very impressed by the coverage of your staff writer, Mr. Tim Richard. Mr. Richard's commitment to going beyond the normal "headlines only" approach to reporting, paid tremendous dividends to readers such as myself and others. In his coverage, he effectively unveiled the important personal aspect of this process.

Readers of other papers could quickly account for how many delegates went to which presidential candidate. But, in Mr. Richard's re-

porting, readers were able to see that the process involved concerned citizens who were participating in our wonderful democratic process. At this point, those readers who may have not had the opportunity to read Mr. Richard's accounts would be quick to criticize the Republican Party and the presidential campaign.

However, there is a bright spot which Mr. Richard identified in that individuals who actively support different candidates agree with to have the opportunity to be involved and to make an important decision.

Again, compliments to the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers and compliments to Mr. Richard.

Larry D. Dickerson, chair, Oakland County Republican Party

## Strap kids into carts

To the editor:

Let's see safety straps in shopping carts. Reason: So little children won't accidentally fly out of the cart.

I recall a woman looked for a single cart. It was one with a strap. I feel that the consumer should be able to have this request answered. Let's not wait until a child accidentally flies out before we have action. Safety, for our children, should come first. Come on you, big businesses, put them in.

Vernon C. Kielbasinski, Farmington Hills

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