

points of view

School dropouts

Just studying it won't solve problem

SEVERAL YEARS ago, a Farmington administrator said he was frustrated with a truancy problem at his high school. How can I help, he asked, if the students aren't coming to school?

It's a good question, especially when students decide to leave school permanently.

Although trends may have improved since the "turn on, tune in, drop out" generation, there is still a concern with students choosing to stop their educations in midstream. In the past 25 years, 802,000 students have dropped out of high schools in Michigan.

When you start looking at increasing crime statistics and the overcrowding of our prison system, those numbers take on significance. According to state corrections officials, 70 percent of first-time inmates are high school dropouts.

At last count, 147 of 3,500 students in Farmington's three high schools were logged as dropouts, according to state education department statistics. That's a little more than 4 percent of the district's high school population and about average for Oakland County.

Another 176 were logged as dropouts in Walled Lake schools and 28 dropped out in Clarencville — both districts that touch our community.



Casey Hans

WE CERTAINLY don't have the dropout problem at some urban high school campuses. Local numbers are tiny compared with thousands throughout the state, but there is still room for concern.

"We're not at the point we want to be," said Farmington assistant superintendent Lynn Nutter, although he said the district is making efforts to help.

The Farmington High School will incorporate its truancy problem into an ongoing Effective Schools program this fall. And at East Middle School this fall, a "support room" will offer high-risk students the help they need at an earlier age.

At the high school level in Farmington, general counselors meet once each month to identify students having problems so they can be helped.

James Phelps of the state Department of Education collects these "dropout" numbers from school districts every two years. The dropout

dilemma "is very difficult to influence," he said. "It's a combination of what the school does and what the student brings to school."

In his opinion, kids drop out because of alienation.

"The kids feel they don't belong. It's appearance, how you dress, how other kids treat you and how well you do in school."

ARAM VOSGERCHIAN, guidance consultant for Oakland Schools, participated in a task force that studied the dropout problem over the past several years.

He suggests districts take a serious look at long-term solutions to hidden, self-esteem problems that may cause a student to drop out.

"It's not enough to study it," he said. "Once you do that, you just can't stop."

Vosgerchian advocates intervention not only in middle school but in elementary school for high-risk students who may drop out.

We all need to help and be concerned with this dropout problem. Today's school dropouts could turn into tomorrow's suicides or drug addicts or part of our societal problems, which are already too large to handle.

Mobility crucial issue to senior citizen driver

SOMETHING keeps coming up in conversations that really bothers me. It should bother you, too.

You've probably heard it. "They're just too old to drive. Somebody should take their license away."

Sounds innocent enough, even caring.

But this concern is an example of an attitude that goes far beyond whether a person can drive.

Certainly, we all worry about our parents or grandparents, especially when the reality of mortality rears its ugly head. We reluctantly notice the halted speech, the stumbling walk that "just yesterday" wasn't there.

BUT OUR caring attitude often times turns to resentment and a peculiar type of anger that turns us against the people who took care of us until we could manage on our own.

And our anger dictates to us that these very same people should no longer have the same freedoms accorded to younger people. We want to control their homes, their bank accounts, their freedom of mobility and sometimes even the decision on whether they live or die.

And too few times do we compen-



Steve Barnaby

sate their years of dedication to us with adequate housing, health care or the ability to maintain their dignity.

It's tough to figure out what this society means by "too old." We sort of bob and weave on this one. A person can be as young as 50 years old and qualify for some senior citizens programs.

Yet few, if any, people that age would stake a claim to the designation elderly.

But that's true of people in their 60s, 70s and even their 80s. You just never feel as old as everyone else thinks you should.

I ONCE had an 85-year-old landlord who was about as robust a person as I've ever known. He proudly did all the maintenance on the rental unit, including tarring the roof and digging a 6-foot ditch to fix a sewer pipe.

During one of his infrequent breaks he said to me:

"Steve, I know I'm getting old. But it's hard for me to imagine that I'm going to die. I don't feel any different than I did when I was 40."

Now that conversation took place some 17 years ago and more than likely the energetic landlord has met his maker.

But his attitude and lifestyle taught an important lesson and put me on guard against one of the major social problems facing our country — age discrimination.

Increasingly, we harbor an attitude of no compromise when it comes to the elderly.

While driving is something that most people take for granted, to an elderly person it is a mark of independence. Instead of trying to barricade this avenue of freedom, we should clear the way.

The American Association of Retired Persons sponsors a program, "55 Alive/Mature Driving" that aims to teach older people contemporary driving survival techniques.

And they do need to learn how to survive in a world of younger drivers who pride themselves on violating the speed limit and showing little regard for the person in the next lane.

Oakland and Wayne — 2 counties really aren't so different

HUBERT PRICE could make the complaint out loud. Suzie Heintz or Mary Dumas wouldn't dare. That's the way politics is.

Price, D-Pontiac, is an Oakland County commissioner, and last week he blistered his brethren and sisters on the county board for using his turf as a "dumping ground."

Specifically, the board majority is lining up in support of making the state Department of Corrections an offer it can't refuse — 22 acres of county land for \$1 for 99 years. It would be for a prison.

Price had other objections to the way his Oakland County neighbors have been treating his beloved Pontiac.

For one thing, the county is locating a resource recovery facility adjacent to the county service center in Pontiac. In street language, that's a trash incinerator.

For another, Pontiac is home to lots of half-way houses. (To give county officials credit, they have loudly proclaimed that half-way houses stink. See prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson for the colorful details.)

The more he talked, the more Hubert Price got wound up until finally, at the top of his lungs, he said, "There's a 28th commissioner in this room...racism."

The audience groaned when Price used that term, but he probably felt

hills of Wayne County being a social "dumping ground."

Currently, three state prisons are located there, the biggest concentration, to my knowledge, of any place this side of Iowa.

Over the years, their district, including the townships of Northville and Plymouth, has hosted a Detroit prison, a county home for troubled youth, a state hospital with some pretty tough cases, a kids' psychiatric center, a place for mentally retarded kids and a TB facility that is now a state park. I may have skipped a few, but you get the general picture.

In addition, that area got a royal

shaft from Lansing and Washington when it didn't get "super sewer" funding.

But Heintz and Dumas don't dare cry "racism." Very unfashionable for white suburban matrons to say something like that.

UNDER MY government, the next time we have one of those Michigan Week exchange days, instead of sending mayors and county executives off to other corners of the state, we'll do it differently.

We'll send Hubert Price down to the Wayne County Board of Commissioners to butt heads with Art Carter and the gang.

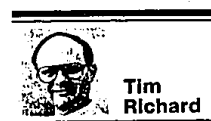
And we'll send Suzie Heintz up to the Oakland County Board of Com-

missioners to butt heads with the Republican establishment.

Price probably would be killed for using the "racism" issue on behalf of his district-for-a-day, so he would have to drop that line.

I mentioned retired commissioner Dumas, and I have a similar job for her. She and Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park, would swap places and try to convince their new colleagues to set up satellite clerk and treasurer offices in the "south end" of Oakland and western suburbs of Wayne.

People sometimes think Oakland and Wayne counties are different worlds. Heck, they're not so different.



Tim Richard

It was true.

SUZIE HEINTZ is Wayne County's only Republican commissioner, and she is a former supervisor and clerk of Northville Township.

She succeeded Mary Dumas, R-Livonia, in the county post, and they have often made the same kind of complaint about the northwestern

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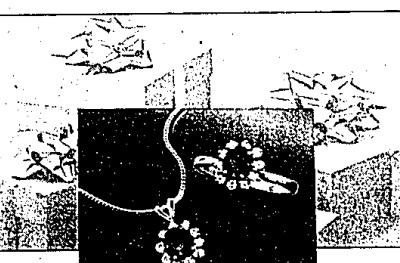
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