

# Well-run PACs can help good candidates

By Alice Collins  
staff writer

Sammy Ruetnik has resigned from more political action committees (PACs) than most people have heard of. But she still views the committees as "more good guys than bad guys."

"I have reservations about PACs and how they're run," she said, "but they've allowed a lot of people to run for office who couldn't afford to do it on their own."

Ruetnik, a representative of the Michigan Education Association and president of the Bloomfield Hills Education Association, was one of three panelists who addressed the pros and cons of PACs Monday before League of Women Voters of Birmingham/Bloomfield and their guests.

Her reservations about PACs are the manner in which they screen the candidates and decide on endorsements.

Other panelists were Chris Thomas, Michigan's director of elections, and league board member Masey Bright, who filled in for Common Cause executive director Karen Merrill, who was ill.

**POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES** — as arms of corporations, labor unions, trade associations, membership organizations and other institutions — donate money to the campaigns of local, state and national election candidates. PACs must be registered and are limited in the amount of money they may give to a specific candidate.

Ruetnik has served on the PACs

of the local, state and national education associations, National Organization For Women and the Democratic Women's Caucus. Some have worked well, some haven't, she said. "When a PAC is democratically based and the process grassroots, it works well. When it's not, it doesn't."

She praised the operation of the National and Bloomfield Hills education associations' PACs. Common Cause charges that the continued growth in the number of PACs has resulted in individuals "being shut out" of the election process, Bright said. She addressed the audience "as Common Cause would speak" and quoted from that organization's published materials.

"MANY CANDIDATES rely so heavily on PACs that they no longer

solicit from individuals." As a result, legislators "are becoming less accessible to the average person."

Michigan currently has almost 1,000 registered PACs "representing labor, business, doctors, lawyers and utilities," continued Bright.

PACs are more likely to support incumbents than challengers and, as a result, legislative races are less competitive, according to Common Cause.

State elections director Thomas told those in the audience, "There's a lot of talk today about PACs being the bad guys." He urged them to consider the alternatives, if more restrictions are placed on PACs.

"To eliminate PACs would be far more detrimental to the system," said Thomas. They brought campaign financing out into the open.

They represent a large number of people. "PAC money replaced money given by very wealthy individuals, \$100,000 and \$200,000 to a candidate."

PACs and current campaign financing laws have made under-the-table donations to candidates illegal and require the publishing of finance statements. In federal races, a PAC is limited to \$5,000 per candidate. For statewide offices in Michigan, the limit is \$17,000. The limit for state Senate candidates is \$4,500 and for House candidates \$2,500. Federal and state laws limit individual donations to one tenth of those maximums.

**LEAGUE MEMBER** Priscilla Chave criticized the enforcement of the laws. "Abuse results in a slap on the wrist in most cases," she said to Thomas. "Fines are laughable. Many PACs abuse all the time, pay the fine and do it again."

"It's not the most beefed-up enforcement act," responded Thomas. "We have no subpoena power, no ability to seize records or do an audit."

State Rep. Judith Miller, R-Birmingham, in the audience Monday, said, "Yes, money is important when running for office, but it's not the only thing. I would not be standing here before you today if I hadn't received PAC money. But I also got out there and worked."

"PAC money is a help and encouragement," continued Miller, "but if a legislator doesn't do his or her job with the constituency, they'll be beaten."

"I learned an awful lot today," said league member Hilda Fletcher on the wrist in most cases," she said to Thomas. "Fines are laughable. Many PACs abuse all the time, pay the fine and do it again."

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## Long Lake Road reopens

Long Lake Road from Middlebelt in West Bloomfield to Franklin North in Bloomfield Township was reopened to traffic this week after a five-month closing for reconstruction.

The \$2.1 million project was completed close to the original target date of Sept. 2.

The work was done in two phases, the first from Middlebelt to Wabek Road and from west of Kirkway to Franklin North. Phase two included work from Wabek Road to east of Pine Tree.

The center portion of Long Lake remained open during the last phase

to allow residents to drive out of their subdivisions.

Bloomfield Township police Lt. James Anas said police "issued tickets to violators who disobeyed road closed devices" throughout the length of the project. "It was fairly consistent," he said.

Long Lake was originally paved in 1918 with concrete. Over the years, it had been repaired and resurfaced with asphalt.

The new road is 22 feet wide with three-foot paved shoulders. There are passing lanes at major intersections and most side streets.

## Retirement, money classes open at OU

Money management courses for retirees will be offered in day and evening courses conducted by Oakland University's Division of Continuing Education beginning Oct. 5.

A three-session class in the early afternoon, "Money Management for Retirees," will be conducted 4-6 p.m. Wednesdays, Oct. 5-19, on campus, directly off I-75 (exit 79).

Topics will include assessing your needs and objectives; dealing with catastrophic health care needs and costs; developing a sensible investment program; and minimizing taxes.

Tuition is \$30 per person or \$35 per couple and includes a reference

workbook for use during and after class.

**IMPORTANT ASPECTS** of retirement will be addressed in the five-session workshop "Retirement — The Golden Years?" 7-9 p.m. Wednesdays, Oct. 5 to Nov. 11. Topics and speakers will be:

• Session I and II, "Developing a Sensible Money Management Program," Janet Krakowiak, MPA, Troy, certified financial planner.

• Session III, Janet Caswell, certified public accountant, Birmingham, Tax Planning and Employer Retirement Plans and Social Security.

• Session IV, Susan K. Crisman,

attorney from Rochester, "Wills and Trusts."

• Session V, Judith Kovach of West Bloomfield, psychologist, and Harold Long of Dearborn, health care specialist, "Lifestyle Planning and Health Care Problems."

Tuition is \$45 per person or \$50 per couple and includes a reference workbook.

For information, call the Oakland University Continuing Education office, 370-3129, between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. weekdays.

### Weight loss program introduced to area women

Area women are invited to try a new program to help them lose weight through a new method using videotapes at home.

In Control — A Home Video Weight Loss Program is used by the American Heart Association in its health promotion program, Heart at Work.

People interested in using the In Control program in their own home may now call the distributor, MHI Video, toll free at 1-800-225-7580. A Program Director will call you back with information and cost.

Call today, between 9 and 6, to start the program by October 3rd.

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