

points of view

Amid chill, schools sport plenty of activity

AS THE air takes on a chill and we await our first fresh blanket of snow, a few pieces of fall flutter across my desk.

Fifth graders at Larkshire Elementary will be pleased to know we found their long-lost monarch butterflies.

The group of Farmington Hills students went to Point Pelee in Ontario this fall for the annual butterfly migration but never saw them. We were lucky to find them on our courses of northern Florida during a mid-November trip.

They fluttered amid white shell sand, red clay dirt and cotton fields, which are part of the flavor of north-

ern Florida and Alabama. They flew over the "emerald coast" along the Gulf of Mexico, past back roads places like the Star Dust Grill and among pine trees mixed with the traditional Florida palms.

Perhaps they'll be back again next year, for another group of Larkshire students to visit.

Over at Highmeadow Common Campus School, staffers are happy to have made it past fall parent/teacher conferences. Principal Jan Colliton said the entire school heaved a sigh of relief, feeling they had jumped their first hurdle in the new elementary pilot program, which offers students not just the ba-



Casey Hans

sies but enhanced offerings as part of the school day. "We weren't pulling together just a program but a building and a staff. The dust is settling now," she said. Colliton's putting together a student council, whose members will learn the importance of representing

fellow students. "These kids are so delighted to work with — they're so together," said the former staff development trainer.

"I'm very, very proud. We almost exceeded our expectations — that's my opinion."

And don't forget our friends at O.E. Dunckel Middle School. Sometimes, our middle school students are truly that — left in a void between the "cuteness" of elementary school and the competitiveness of high school academics and sports.

But at Dunckel, staffers offer their students special learning each fall through the school's Career Ex-

ploration Day — when members of the community share their work-a-day experiences.

Funeral director David Bowlin from Heenev-Sundquist talks to students each year about his very different career, plus the very personal topic of death. Pilot Anne Esposito does similar presentations regularly, and wants to encourage students interested in her field. Others in law, medicine, architecture, food preparation, record producing and furnace repair were also there to talk about their occupations.

All the participants had a student guide. Mine was eighth grader Barry Regan, who someday wants to work

at a newspaper — maybe in the sports department. His view of the future was refreshing, and his questions interesting as were many asked throughout the school that day.

Whether on a field trip out of the country with Larkshire students, experiencing new programs that challenge minds at Highmeadow, or at career days that mold the future at Dunckel, students are discovering their lives are their own.

They can travel in whatever direction they choose. They can blossom in one field of endeavor, choose several or change in midstream. In a way, each is a monarch butterfly.

Writing program 'best'

Q: My child's school district has been using a focus writing program. I have been pleased to see my son be so excited about writing especially because of this new grading style. My older child never had this opportunity to write so frequently without having every error bring his grade down. I for one like this method better.



Doc Doyle

A: What you are referring to is the focus correction method, which is part of the Writing Process developed by Dr. Donald Graves of the University of New Hampshire. You are fortunate to be in a district that uses this program because, from my experience, this is the best writing program available. The value in the program is that rather than assigning long papers, there are shorter assignments, more frequently given, with a much quicker process for returning papers to the child and more opportunities to write that can lead to increased fluency. There is a prewriting experience to determine the topic and audience, an initial draft where students write rapidly without worrying about spelling or

punctuation, a revised draft with peers editing the paper, a second draft (if so desired) and finally a sharing (read aloud) activity with classmates.

Anyone who has been published recognizes these steps are inherent in producing a quality product. However, teachers must buy into this method and understand that the focus correction process can address one specific skill such as quotations and/or end punctuation as opposed to multi skills for every paper. A tennis coach will often take a player and "focus" on his/her backhand for a long period of time in a concentrated intensified "focus." The same purpose exists for the focus writing correction. Parents must understand the purpose behind this ap-

proach so as not to become confused if the entire paper isn't corrected for grammatical errors.

It should also be pointed out that language arts or English teachers especially at the middle school and high school level, if they have five classes with 30 children in each class, will have 150 students. If they assign a 10-page term paper they have 1,500 pages to correct and may as well kiss their next couple weekends good-bye. That is why the Writing Process and focus writing makes more sense to me than grading papers for every error recognizing eventually a student will build skills in many areas over the period of a year through this intensified instruction.

I know from experience that a Writing Process program, if started at the elementary level, will result in better prepared students for the more competitive demand of a high school program.

The answers provided here are the opinions of Dr. James Doyle and not the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle c/o the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 38251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150.

Freeway plazas: smart

FLORIDA HAS a better idea. It's called an interchange plaza.

Let's say you're traveling I-75 and need to stop for various purposes. You make one turn off the surface road into the plaza, and everything is there.

A choice of fast-food restaurants. Two or three gasoline stations. Motels. A chamber of commerce station with restrooms and pamphlets on the local attractions, staffed by a couple of people who can answer questions or even chat about Keith, the tropical storm. Michigan and a few other states ought to try the same thing.

FREEWAY INTERCHANGES are a big industry with many kinds of businesses. Back in the '60s, when farmers and others were bemoaning the loss of land to these 300-foot-wide ribbons, John C. Mackie, then state highway commissioner, used to reply that freeway interchanges would be a plus for the economy. Mackie was right.

But the way Michigan and most states manage them, interchanges are a mess to deal with. Every fast-food restaurant has a separate driveway off the surface road. Ditto with every gasoline station. Ditto with every motel. Ditto with every other kind of business.

If you need to eyeball the fuel



Tim Richard

prices, you have to drive up and down the surface road. You have to make left turns and U-turns in unfamiliar and sometimes heavy traffic. If a driver is elderly or a kid on board has a full bladder, it can be tense work. Stop, start, turn. Stop, start, turn.

The interchange plaza gets travelers off the surface road and lets local traffic proceed at something resembling normal speed and safety.

SEVERAL YEARS ago, I saw a Michigan Department of Transportation program on another good travel idea. Nothing ever came of it, at least in Michigan and Ohio.

The idea is to have one large, official green freeway sign saying "Food next exit." On that billboard would be the logos of all the restaurants within a short distance of the interchange — the McDonald arches, the Burger King Whopper, Wendy's, the local restaurants and so on — each a foot or two wide.

Next would be a sign saying "Gas

next exit," with the logos of the stations. Same for motels.

The idea was to get rid of ugly billboards, particularly in beauty areas where you want to attract tourists.

It's also a convenience to the traveler. At one glance, you see all the food choices, all the fuel choices, and so on.

That's the way they do it in the Carolinas and Georgia.

Why Michigan, where tourism is one of our two or three major industries, never adopted that system is a mystery. I plainly recollect Peter Fletcher, then chairman of the state Highway Commission, deploring ugly billboards with his colorful erudition, and I dimly recollect first lady Helen Milliken's involvement in some kind of beautification effort.

TRAFFIC FOOTNOTE: "Intimidation driving" is still largely a phenomenon of the southeastern Michigan vicinity, including Toledo and Windsor.

Intimidation drivers barrel on you at 20 mph above the posted limit, tailgate at less than a car length, dart across lanes without signaling, and even use the shoulder to pass.

With the exception of one Tennessee pickup truck, all the intimidation driving I saw in two weeks was by cars with Michigan, Ohio and Ontario plates.

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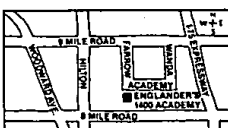
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