

Opinion

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Curtains up! Value our community theater

IT'S CLEAR in the reopening of the Fox Theatre and the addition of the Palace to the entertainment and sports scene that Detroit and its suburbs are performance-oriented.

Pine Knob, Meadow Brook, the Silverdome, the Birmingham and Fisher theaters, the Music Hall, Masonic Temple, Cobo and the Joe all stage productions that attract hundreds of thousands of metro Detroiters.

The Attie, the Hilberry and other repertory theater groups also play their part.

But not to be forgotten in the glare of the bigger stages and brighter footlights are the less expensive, grassroots entertainment and creative and social opportunities offered by community theater.

For those involved, community theater provides a vehicle for expressing creativity. It provides a sociable setting where people can get to know others in the community in various professions and jobs and from all walks of life. In our very transient suburbs, it also provides a vehicle for becoming part of the community — a way of getting to know some neighbors.

BY WORKING together toward a production, each person shares in the project and all its aspects — from ticket selling to ushering, from backstage to on stage. The experience can help develop teamwork, leadership, group spirit, self-confidence and new abilities. Or it can just be plain fun.

Of course, for the actors, being on stage is an opportunity to experience the thrill of being a star, of transporting one's self into the world of make-believe. Where else can a carpenter play the part of a doctor, or a doctor turn carpenter to work on sets?

But community theater is not a selfish experience. It requires an investment of time and dedication, and, often, money. The result is a production that may introduce a young person to theater for the first time, provide a night's

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entertainment at reasonable prices, give an opportunity for the audience to see a new play or musical or re-experience one seen or read.

Beyond that, many community theater groups perform benefits, donating their time and effort for local charities.

THE FARMINGTON area is fortunate to have a long-established community theater within its borders and several more within easy reach.

In the areas covered by the Observer papers, there are the Farmington Players, Farmington Hills; Plymouth Theatre Guild, Plymouth; Spotlight Players, Westland; Theatre Guild of Livonia-Redford; and Trinity House Theatre, Livonia.

In the areas covered by the Eccentric newspapers, there are the Avon Players and the Avon Players Youth Theatre, Rochester Hills; Birmingham Village Players, First Theatre Guild of Birmingham; and St. Dunstan's Guild of Granbrook, Birmingham-Bloomfield; Ridgeway Players and the Troy Players, Troy; and St. Bede's Players and Lathrup Village Players, out of the Southfield area.

In their 37th season, the Farmington Players will next stage "The Butler Did It" Jan. 27-29, Feb. 2-5, 9-12 and 16-18 in the Farmington Players Barn, 32332 12 Mile.

As we approach the beginning of winter, we often look toward the stage lights to brighten our spirits or inspire us — through musicals, comedy or drama. Thanks to community theater, those lights may only be blocks away.

Deposit law Earmark funds for conservation

MICHIGAN RESIDENTS have been paying nickel and dime deposits on beverage bottles and cans for 10 years now. The successful practice contributes to cleaner roadways and also provides a major message: Despite big money attempts to deceive and distort, the public is willing to put up with minor costs and inconvenience in order to protect the environment.

Think back to the campaign to put a deposit on Michigan cans and bottles. From the reaction of some union and manufacturing spokesmen, you would have thought that environmentalists had conspired to ruin the state's economy for all future generations.

Even though 400,000 voters in only six weeks signed a petition to put the question on the ballot, bottle bill opponents asked the courts to keep the issue away from voters.

When that failed, bottle bill opponents swung into overdrive with an expensive, distorted and misleading campaign. Opponents said the deposits would cost jobs, increase the cost of beverages and limit the variety of beverages available to Michigan consumers.

They also said such a deposit would make life miserable for Michigan consumers who would have to drag cans and bottles back to the store and, finally, they concluded that a bottle deposit would have little effect on roadside litter.

THE ARGUMENTS were patently ridiculous. But there was some concern that the onslaught of publicity churned out by a \$1.3 million campaign might carry the day. Supporters were spending only \$130,000.

Not to worry. Michigan voters, many of whom had grown up in an era when all cans and bottles had deposits, easily recognized the fraudulent nature of the opposition arguments.



Groups such as the Michigan United Conservation Clubs say unclaimed deposits should be earmarked for conservation and environmental protection projects. We agree, and we support the petition drive to this effect planned for this summer.

On Nov. 2, 1976, voters approved the deposit — 2.1 million in favor to 1.2 million against. The law went into effect two years later.

Since then the Michigan Department of Transportation estimates that roadside litter has decreased by 41 percent, largely due to more than 90 percent drops of cans and bottles.

"Problems caused by the random throwaway of these containers have virtually disappeared," said Al Alm, director of public affairs for the Michigan Farm Bureau.

Equally important is the fact that bottles and cans returned for deposits do not get thrown into trash bags destined for increasingly rare landfill space. It is estimated that each year the deposit bill is responsible for removing 600,000 tons of bottle and can litter from Michigan's waste stream.

"The Legislature shouldn't be so reluctant to ask Michigan citizens to do their part in addressing environmental problems," added Alex Sagady, former executive director of the Michigan Student Environmental Coalition.

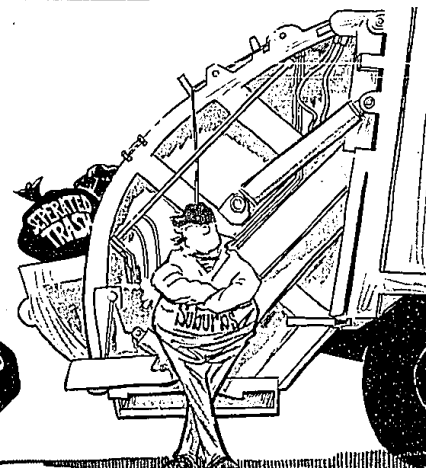
That's a lesson that lawmakers seem loathe to hear. It took another petition drive to browbeat Lansing lawmakers into requiring deposits for containers for wine coolers and so-called cocktails in a can. That goes into effect June 1 of this year.

Next on the agenda is an apparently sizable amount of money representing cans and bottles that consumers never return for the deposit. The figure is estimated to be as high as \$48 million, although bottling spokespeople say the amount is considerably less.

Groups such as the Michigan United Conservation Clubs say these unclaimed deposits should be earmarked for conservation and environmental protection projects. We couldn't agree more. And we support the petition drive to this effect planned for this summer.

The environment, a big issue of the '60s, has taken a back seat for too long. Belatedly, our beleaguered ecology is coming to the attention of public policy makers. When gauging public interest, they should look first at the support for and effect of the deposit bill. It works and it was the right thing to do.

THINKING



Live training burn pros outweigh obvious cons

I CAN appreciate councilwoman Jean Fox's concern about the Farmington Hills Fire Department's live training burns at condemned buildings owned by developers.

They create a lot of smoke. They represent a double standard, since residents aren't allowed to burn leaves or have bonfires. And the city lowers the developers' costs by burning down structures that otherwise would have to be torn down.

But, frankly, I think councilwoman Fox is missing the point.

No matter how hard you try to teach firefighting in a classroom or a field, you can't simulate a real fire where lives and property are in danger — and split-second decisions are vital.

Fox criticized live training burns Dec. 19, eight days after the Farmington Hills Fire Department hosted a five-department controlled burn at the former Farmington Hills Country Club clubhouse.

The golf course closed Oct. 2, 1987, to make way for the Country Club Corporate Park. Northern Equities Group of Farmington Hills donated the clubhouse for the burn.

FOX DIDN'T attend the early-



Bob Sklar

morning burn, but spoke on behalf of residents who called her to complain about it. Smoke billowed southward for several hours and the fire smoldered for a day.

Fox said she didn't think the burn "was something we should be involved in."

"We talk about quality of life. Here we are out polluting the atmosphere 100 million times more than anyone can do on their own," she said.

I respect the councilwoman's environmental concern. But as a Farmington Hills taxpayer, I don't object to live training burns — and not just if they're in someone else's neighborhood. In 1987, an old house was burned to the ground at 14 Mile and Farmington Road — walking dis-

lance from my house.

The clubhouse burn fine-tuned Farmington Hills' evolving emergency command system, which divides an emergency scene into more manageable sectors.

IT ALSO identified problems when several fire departments team up. The need to cooperate increases at natural disasters, like a tornado, a plane crash or a large fire.

Firefighters said the burn not only sharpened on-scene communication, but also their sense of awareness.

Since 1983, Farmington Hills firefighters have held 51 training burns. Why hasn't councilwoman Fox spoken out sooner? As for saving them money, developers still must haul away the charred debris.

In 1987, firefighters burned an old house on Middlebelt. East Middle School students then toured it to witness fire's sweeping power and why fire safety is so darn important.

If my house ever caught fire, I'd be more confident knowing the firefighters responding had looked into the mouth of flame. Occasional smoke is a small price to pay for that sense of confidence.

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.

Christmas is for Christians

To the editor:

I would like to commend you on the editorial, "In school — peace, good will worth celebrating" (Dec. 22). This article demonstrated how the educational system can be used effectively to teach children acceptance and tolerance of others who believe differently than we do.

Only through factual, open, honest discussions of cultural/religious differences can we help our children to outgrow the many myths, stereotypes and prejudices that have plagued our country for years. Professionally, I can attest to the many personal inadequacies, depressions and even suicides that have been born of prejudices and intolerance.

True equality cannot be accomplished by supporting the Bloomfield Hills and Rochester parent groups who advocate the celebration of Christmas in the schools.

The American public, our government and our schools need to be reminded of the tenets of religious freedom upon which this country was founded. Christmas is a Christian holiday, not an American one!

This is exemplified by the many Jews, Hindus, Muslims and Orientals attending the Farmington public schools.

Highmeadow Common Campus incorporated "Holidays Around the

World" as part of the December enrichment classes. The respect shown to all students in the school is one to be emulated. Before the unit began, all parents received a permission slip to return which gave their consent for their child to study other religious beliefs.

The parents and students had a good understanding of the material to be presented. The students learned about African, German, Swedish, Israeli and Mexican holidays, just to name a few. The unit encompassed spelling, art, creative writing, reading and communicating. It culminated in a pinata breaking party.

What a wonderful way to teach children about the beauty of the world we live in, without focusing on religious indoctrination. Thanks to the Highmeadow Common Campus staff, this is the first year we have not been subjected to the "December Dilemma." The students gained respect for others and dignity for themselves in this sharing atmosphere.

Susan Shapiro, president, Highmeadow Common Campus PTA, Farmington Public Schools

Fight evils facing kids

To the editor: Rich Perlberg's editorial on skin-

heads and the controversy over celebrating Christmas in school (Dec. 15) intrigued me.

He quoted (Troy Jewish Congregation president) Irv Wengrow as saying that Christmas cannot be celebrated without celebrating its religious aspects. How I wish that were true.

I have been to homes where there is a tree with a bow on its top, there is no manger or any other religious decorations anywhere, and the children do not know the religious Christmas story but only Santa Claus.

What kind of celebration is farther away from my idea of Christmas than Hanukkah, a feast of courage and prayer, faith and worship.

I would ask Mr. Wengrow not to be upset that we want to celebrate Christmas at school. Let us not separate knowledge and values. Real education must be a combination.

We are raising children who have no value systems and, therefore, no real understanding of or appreciation for life itself. How they suffer because of that.

Let us join together, as many of our schools do now, and celebrate a holiday season in which different peoples learn about each other's customs, recognize and rejoice in the good in each other and fight the terrible, life-matching evils encroaching on our children today.

Bernadette Crawford Farmington

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