

Opinion

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

18A(F)

O&E Thursday, June 15, 1989

Alcohol sweeps

They serve a useful purpose

ENTRAPMENT it wasn't.

The teenaged undercover decoy who the Farmington Hills Police Department sent into the city's 33 stores licensed to sell liquor or beer and wine during an alcohol sweep June 2 didn't pressure anyone to sell him anything.

Is it legal to use a teenager, under a sworn officer's supervision, to enforce laws governing the furnishing or sale of alcohol to minors? Michigan judges repeatedly have said yes.

Under state law, the burden falls on store clerks to demand identification. Patrons are obligated to provide it only on demand.

Given the growing public wrath toward underage drinking, we're a bit stunned to learn 11 stores — a third of the total holding liquor licenses in the city — sold beer to a minor in the latest sweep.

In each case, the 18-year-old decoy — an aspiring cadet — bought beer without having to show identification proving he was at least 21, police said.

UNDER CITY ordinance, store clerks convicted of the misdemeanor offense face up to 90 days in jail and a \$500 fine. The Michigan Liquor Control Commission is empowered to fine convicted licensees up to \$1,000 and suspend or revoke their licenses.

Amazingly, Farmington Hills police Chief William Dwyer preceded the June 2 sweep with a public announcement that brought a front-page story in the Observer five days before. The only fact missing was the date of the sweep. Equally amazing, most of the stores cited were cited in previous sweeps.

The sweep, the city's fifth since 1986, coincided with the high school graduation season — when a dare from a peer can make the lure of alcohol too tempting to resist.

The decoy was neatly dressed, acted mature and looked older, said one ticketed store clerk. She unwittingly underscored why every patron who walks through the door in search of alcohol must be carded.

Under state law, the burden falls on store clerks to demand identification.

MANY KEY factors are obscured by the store owners' furor over the use of minors as undercover decoys. For starters, if a decoy who's 18 looks 21, so can other teenagers.

What would prevent a mature-looking teenager from momentarily adopting an older sibling's style of dress and mannerisms, then walking into the corner party store for a six-pack?

You can't be certain of a person's age. But there's a simple solution. Don't sell to patrons who refuse to show identification or say they don't have any. Liquor law violations are harsher than insulted patrons. Besides, patrons will adapt when carding becomes routine.

A simple request for identification should quickly seal a legal sale or mix an illegal one. If use of minors as undercover decoys sets a trap, what's the bait? The potential sale?

No sale is worth the risk of violating liquor laws and putting a sales-generating license in jeopardy. No sale is worth the risk of matching a potentially deadly bottle of beer with a highly impressionable teenager.

STRIP AWAY the secondary debate over law enforcement tactics and the problem of teenage drinking shines through. Upwards of 75 percent of this area's senior high students drink on weekends, police say.

Studies show a drunken person is 100 times more likely to die in a car crash. The likelihood is even higher for teenagers, not only less experienced behind the wheel but also less aware of just how much alcohol they can safely drink.

One teenager is killed in a drunk-driving accident every hour, according to Students Against Driving Drunk.

That's the sobering reality. That's what these alcohol sweeps are really all about.

Report card

Legislature: mediocre results

MICHIGAN'S Legislature is like a college student who goofed off all semester and then, just before a final exam, studies all night. Maybe he passes, but the overall result is likely to be mediocre.

This week the Legislature has major pieces of school quality reform and the budget in conference committees. It means that in five months the two chambers have passed two different versions of each topic, and this week they're "cranking" to reach last-minute compromises.

CONSIDER:

- Core curriculum, with \$2.4 million in incentive funds — The Senate bill mandates core subjects; the House makes it permissive. No conclusion.

- School improvement planning, a requirement that school districts map out five-year plans — Different versions in each chamber.

- Statewide accreditation plan for elementary schools — Different versions in each chamber, although a conference committee was due to meet yesterday morning.

- Employability skills test, based on a profile compiled by employers of what they need in future workers — The Senate passed a bill, and a House committee is pondering a second substitute. No conclusion.

- GAIN, the Governor's Achievement Incentive plan to reward individual school buildings that raise performance levels — It's still in a House committee.

- Schools of choice, the plan born in the Bronx and implemented in Minnesota to break up government's monopoly by letting parents choose which public school their kids will attend — The Senate passed a bill; a House committee ran out of time and will take it up in fall.

- Math and science centers, a system of challenge grants to stimulate innovation — Separate versions are in conference committee. No conclusion.

- Dropout drivers, bills to allow the suspension of driver's licenses of kids who quit school or are truant — Vigorously supported and just as vigorously attacked, these bills couldn't be completed in committee in time for a vote this spring.

And so on. If the lawmakers weren't being forced out of the Capitol for six months of renovations, they might have made even less progress.

SOME BAD IDEAS have been put to sleep. The Senate rejected a bill designed to permit casino gambling in the western Upper Peninsula. That's good — gambling is an unproductive activity that scoops money from poor suckers' pockets.

Michigan's Legislature is like a college student who goofed off all semester and then, just before a final exam, studies all night. Maybe he passes, but the overall result is likely to be mediocre.

The elderly in our population are interested in "living will" or "right to die" laws that will allow their wishes to be carried out if they become incapacitated. There is wide agreement in Lansing, but the debate is gummed up by arguments over fetal rights. No conclusion.

After a debate both technical and emotional, the Legislature passed bills to ease landfill requirements for toxic incinerator ash. Opponents believe any incinerator is a detriment to the environment. Others believe they have worked out an honorable compromise that will allow trash reduction plans to move forward in Detroit, the suburbs and across the state.

After another donnybrook, the House passed a bill acceptable to environmentalists to allow the state to keep most of the unclaimed deposits on beer, pop and wine cooler cans and bottles. The cash can go to environmental cleanup. If the compromise sticks, Michigan United Conservation Clubs won't have to go through with a costly, 300,000-signature petition campaign to rescue that money from the industry wholesalers.

Gov. James Blanchard correctly vetoed a bill that would have let alcohol retailers off the legal hook unless kids to whom they sold also were prosecuted. But the retailers have a point: Kids who buy booze shouldn't get off too easily.

KEEP YOUR EYES on two lawsuits that really shouldn't be in court because the problems should have been solved in the Legislature.

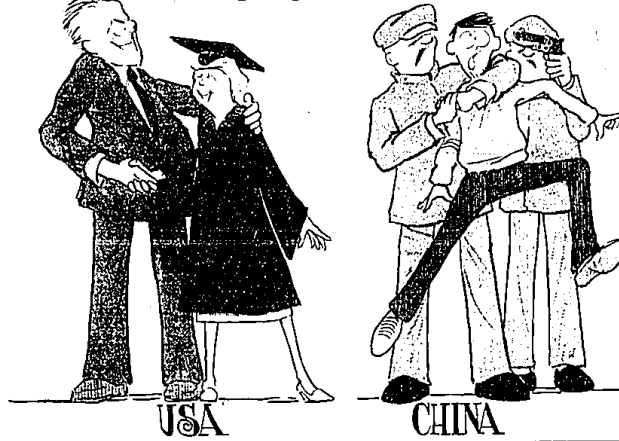
One is the effort by poorer school districts to get a better cut of Michigan's educational assets. The schools are buoyed by a Kentucky court decision saying the Bluegrass State's school funding is inequitable.

The second suit is by counties and cities to get state funding of trial courts. Michigan has a double standard — one for Wayne County and Detroit (full state takeover), another for the rest of the state (local subsidies).

The student who goofs off all semester and then "crams" for one night might squeak by with a C-minus, but he doesn't learn much. A legislature that operates the same way warrants a similar mediocre grade.

STICKS

ARMS AT GRADUATION



Schools indeed should bolster communication

NEWSBEAT NIBBLES:

Trustee Janice Rolnick may not agree with Farmington Hills resident Lorne Leon, who suggested several ways the Farmington school board could better communicate with the public.

But I do. "I've never seen a board more accessible than this board," Rolnick said to Leon June 8. "We respond to any question asked of this board . . . every day of the week."

In the past two years, the board at times has shown a real desire to listen and respond to public queries.

But make no mistake: It still hasn't shaken the hostile air it too often portrays toward the public.

Taking measurable strides to improve communication could go a long way toward changing that perception.

One such stride would be adopting Leon's suggestion to put copies of Farmington Public Schools board minutes, public policies and financial documents in the Farmington Community Library.

Ditto for the suggestion to have occasional evening or weekend hours for central office administrators. Going to the Lewis Schulman Administrative Center between 7:30



Bob Sklar

a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays isn't convenient for many families when both parents work.

I also like Leon's call to cablecast board meetings. With family and other demands, parents often can't attend board meetings. But that doesn't mean they don't care what the school board is up to.

Leon also calls for periodic town meetings. To the school board's credit, it used to rotate board meetings among schools. Poor turnout doomed the road show. Open-ended town meetings not bound by routine school board agendas might provide more of a lure, however.

Public support would assure Leon's ideas don't become lost in a dusty book of school board minutes.

Whatever became of then-Mayor or Ben Marks' quest for joint meetings of the Farmington Hills City Council and the Farmington school board?

The two governmental boards, which geographically represent much of the same area, last met in 1987, at Marks' urging.

I left the meeting delighted to learn about how many projects the city and the schools are involved in, and their willingness to build on that cooperative spirit.

I agreed with Marks the meeting should be the first of regular get-togethers. As he put it, "When you come right down to it, we have the same intentions, the same goals. Our services come out of the same taxpayer dollars."

The second meeting, if and when it's ever held, should include the Farmington City Council and tackle more meaty issues — the state of the property tax, Heritage Park as an educational resource, sidewalk and pathway needs, recreational services.

Where's gridlock most apt to occur at rush hour in the Farmington?

I wouldn't argue if you cite 14 Mile and Haggerty or 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road. But my vote goes to Grand River and Halsted — a nightmare any time of the day.

Bob Sklar is editor of the Farmington Observer.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies include the address and telephone number of the writer. Names will be withheld from publication only for sufficient reason. We reserve the right to edit them. Send letters to Readers' Forum, Farmington Observer, 33203 Grand River Ave., Farmington 48024.

Keep school districts apart

To the editor: In response to "Civile parents urge district consolidation" (May 29), why would Sue Gonzales and others not do their homework before they moved into the Clarenceville school district?

When we bought our home, we made sure it was in the Farmington school district. Farmington schools are already overcrowded. Keep the districts separated.

Laura Reynolds, Farmington Hills

staffed and probably underpaid. They consistently start the day early and work well past 4:30 p.m.

I urge the city manager and the city council to help this hard-working, income-producing department by supplying them with additional staff and to give them a raise. They certainly deserve one.

Albert J. Ludwig, Farmington Hills

Drug czar needs help

To the editor: I have just finished reading Judith Berne's column, "Drug Czar lacks tools for the job" (June 1). I have long been concerned about the effects of drugs on people and society, but I have done very little to actively fight their use and distribution.

I certainly feel it is absolutely time ordinary people begin to get involved. Appointment of a state drug czar may be the beginning.

Perhaps, instead of waiting for state funding, a fund might be established, whereby anyone in Michigan who has ever been affected in any way by drug abuse or knows someone who has could contribute \$5 or \$10.

This might at least show community support for such a program and help get everyone involved.

Please keep up your good work of covering this issue — one of vital importance to every person in Michigan whether directly or indirectly.

Judith A. Valent, president, National Association of Career Women, Metro Detroit Chapter

Road plan under fire

To the editor: Living in the area northwest of Haggerty and 12 Mile, we are deeply concerned about the Novi City Council's support of the M-9/Haggerty Road connector plan.

This plan will only benefit other communities and, in the process, destroy several square miles of open spaces and wetlands in Novi. The Environmental Protection Agency and Michigan Department of Natural Resources have indicated other alternatives should be addressed.

We are aware of the traffic congestion, but feel the widening of Haggerty would handle much of the problem.

Loydell Lilly, Joann Trackman, Henry Warren, Novi

Building staff hard-working

To the editor: While living in Farmington Hills, being president of my homeowners association and working in Farmington Hills as a developer, contractor and property manager, I frequently interact with the city's building department.

Heard by John Wade, and including all of the inspectors and especially all of the support personnel in the office, this group is hard-working, cooperative, overworked, under-

Observer & Eccentric Newspapers

Steve Barnaby managing editor
Judith Doner Berne assistant managing editor
Dick Isham general manager
Richard Brady director of advertising
Fred Wright director of circulation

Suburban Communications Corp.
Philip Power chairman of the board
Richard Aglinian president