

Gridlock got you down? Try Sewer Fest

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

What do you do when you've got road construction that ties up traffic for hours, turns little-known streets into major detours and has drivers howling for the head of the jerk who planned it all?

Sounds like the situation on I-690 or Woodward near 10 mile, doesn't it?

It isn't. It's in Oberlin, Ohio, and they've hit on a solution to the problem — a party and parade called Sewer Fest '89.

A spokeswoman for Michigan's Department of Transportation

thinks Oberlin may be onto something, the Oakland County Road Commission isn't so sure.

Oberlin has been having problems with its sewers lately. Karen Smith, assistant to the director of public works, said it got to bad that the system wasn't meeting Environmental Protection Agency requirements for waste water treatment.

Smith said Oberlin already had three projects planned to replace and update the sewer system. However, the situation got so bad that the Ohio attorney general ordered Oberlin to speed up the process and complete all projects way ahead of schedule.

"THEY SAID we must complete all sewer work by Aug. 31, hence the necessity to do everything at the same time," Smith said.

"At the same time" is the key phrase here. To meet the attorney general's deadline, Oberlin, population 5,600, had to rip apart its only two major east-west traffic arteries. Both roads are closed until construction is complete.

"You wouldn't believe the calls we've gotten complaining about the construction, detours, traffic and just general malaise," Smith said. Construction has been going on for about four weeks now. "I got sick of it (the complaints) at first, but now, with Sewer Fest, everything's gotten a whole lot better."

Sewer Fest was a party given for steamed commuters by Oberlin's Downtown Merchants Association, with the approval of the city's government. It eventually turned into a street dance, but it started with a parade Friday night.

The day before the parade, MaryAnn Cochran, spokeswoman for the merchants association, ran the list of parade entries.

"We're EXPECTING children dressed as sewer rats and detour signs," Cochran said. The parade didn't require advance registration, so Cochran wasn't sure who would show up.

"We'll also have an outhouse for a float, and I'm sure we'll be virtually the only parade in the nation featuring a sewer-cleaning machine, back hoe and a dump truck."

Other expected parade entries, Cochran said, included majorettes twirling plungers and an all-kazoo band playing "There's a Muddy Road Ahead" and "I Can't Get No Satisfaction."

The parade was scheduled to start and finish at city hall. "But we'll have to go down a little street (Willow Court) — we can't find a more direct route," Cochran said of the parade route.

Just the idea of Sewer Fest has done wonders for morale, Cochran and Smith said. Even the local paper is sponsoring a contest, asking drivers to recount their worst traffic experiences in 50 words or less. The five best responses will win front-end alignments.

Their parade mascot is a rat wearing a party hat. The rat is everywhere — on T-shirts, bumper stickers and all official Sewer Fest material, Smith said.

"We are absolutely amazed. It's really helping city hall. People are starting to realize they can't do anything about it, so why not have fun with it?" Cochran said.

"I have no idea if this will fly on the fourth floor, but I'll suggest it. We do to rather unusual things around here," said Janet Foran of the MDOT public affairs department.

FORAN SAID they just started a large road construction project near Grand Rapids with a starting gun and orange racing flags, largely because the contractor has just 24 days to complete the work.

They also are having a contest near Flint. One contractor is paving northbound I-75; another is taking the southbound lanes. The contractor who produces the smoothest finish will be awarded \$5,000, Foran said.

"A detour party — now that's a suggestion," she said.

Measles target group is shifting

By Philip A. Sherman
staff writer

With the target group for measles infection shifting, an epidemiologist with Oakland County's Health Department is suggesting vaccinations for those who haven't had or can't document immunization against the disease.

Joe Blotstein said the disease is moving into two populations that had been thought immune — preschool children and college students.

Blotstein said children should be vaccinated against measles when they are 15 months old, a rule that had been strictly followed when the vaccine first was introduced. However, he added the vaccine is so effective that in the mid-'70s, cases of infection had dropped so significantly that people started to relax the strict vaccination requirements.

"Now, (some) kids of preschool age aren't getting the vaccine until they actually enter school," Blotstein said. "And in college, we're seeing those who slipped through — never infected, never vaccinated."

"It's one of the most communica-

ble diseases. We should be able to greatly control and perhaps eliminate it. However, it's a goal we haven't reached," he added.

Oakland County has about 20 reported cases of measles to date this year, Blotstein said, although he doesn't necessarily consider that an accurate count.

"Measles is kind of a tricky thing, especially with respect to trying to get an accurate count. Those are the reported cases. I don't know if that accurately reflects the county," he said.

Measles is highly communicable because it is an airborne disease, Blotstein said. "Given that we're a highly mobile society, it could spread very quickly," he added.

Michigan has more than 450 cases of measles documented this year, compared to 31 cases last year. That rate of increase in this state and others has prompted the Centers for Disease Control to recommend that anyone born in or after 1957 consider getting revaccinated.

Even though the infection count has increased, it is small compared to 1963, when 48,000 cases nationwide were reported.

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