

MET marketing

State steps up efforts to sell tuition plan

By Wayne Peel
staff writer

Fran Gursky and Denise Sigworth are among those who say they rest easily knowing their children will someday go to college through the Michigan Education Trust.

"You could never save the money on your own," said Gursky, an Oakland County mother of two.

But Livonia state Rep. Lyn Bankes and her husband have chosen another college payment plan on behalf of their unborn grandchild.

Rising state tuition and rival plans have clouded MET's future since the college tuition program was introduced last year, leading some to wonder whether potential consumers would lose faith in MET.

On the basis of a recent metropolitan-area MET forum, however, interest apparently remains high.

More than 1,000 people, some from as far away as Flint, braved heavy rains and flooded roads to attend last week's forum in the Royal Oak Kimball High School gymnasium.

"If WE could get that many people out in a heavy rain storm, I think it shows what kind of interest there is in MET," state treasury department spokesman Robert Kolt said.

Metro area residents, especially those from Oakland County, formed the backbone of last year's crop of MET enrollees.

More than 40,000 youngsters were enrolled last year, with little state promotion.

This year, the state is spending \$250,000 to promote MET. The Royal Oak forum was part of a state-wide series preceding this year's Oct. 2-6 sign-up period.

A MET video is available at area video stores. State officials have asked store owners to provide free rentals.

Treasury department officials are aware alternative programs, both public and private, have emerged in the past year.

"We've told people that if they can make investments that would outstrip MET then that's what they should do," Kolt said.

That's what Bankes did, opting for a U.S. Savings Bond program. But the Republican state representative said a potentially higher rate of re-

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turn wasn't the major reason.

"MET GUARANTEES tuition, but it's room and board that's the big college cost," Bankes said. "The way we look at it, our grandchild will probably be able to afford college, but our investment in Savings Bonds could well determine whether he or she goes away to college or stays home."

In contrast, Sigworth and her husband decided to stick with MET after reviewing other plans with a financial planner.

"We're really glad we did it," said Sigworth, grants coordinator for Schoolcraft College, Livonia. "We tell people we're already sending her to college."

State officials said they won't know how many people will sign up for MET this year until results are tallied.

"Last year, we predicted 5,000 and

got eight times that," Kolt said. "It's hard to tell."

MET supporters and detractors agree on one point — college is becoming increasingly expensive.

State Treasurer Robert Bowman said four-year tuition at a state university currently averages \$10,000. By the time today's newborns have graduated from high school, Bowman said, that cost will should increase to at least \$35,000.

MET is also becoming more expensive. This year's enrollment cost averages 13 percent more than last year.

Peace of mind, Kolt said, is MET's chief selling point.

"Most people, we believe, will choose MET because of its tuition guarantee," he said. "People can make money through a variety of investments, but MET guarantees tuition and that's important."

Saturday Fun Day aimed at disabled

Disabled people and their guests can have a day of Indian summer fun at the Oakland County Fun Day set for noon to 4 p.m. Saturday, Sept. 16, at the Southfield Civic Center.

It includes:

- Recreational activities such as tennis, shuffleboard, softball, golf putting and volleyball.
- Live entertainment every half hour. Groups and individuals with disabilities will perform.
- Lunch — noon to 2:30 p.m.
- Appearances by Channel 4 personalities Mort Crim, Mal Silars and Mike Lewis.
- Door prizes.

Purpose is to provide an opportunity for mentally impaired and physically disabled people to try a variety of recreational activities.

For more information, call Jackie McParlane, recreation-

al supervisor for Oakland County Parks and Recreation.

"We encourage family and friends to join in to show that the disabled don't have to participate in recreational activities independent of their families," she said.

Sponsors are: WDIV Channel 4; Southfield Parks and Recreation; Easter Seals; Oak Park Recreation Department; Association for Retarded Citizens of Oakland County; Waterford Parks and Recreation department; Birmingham YMCA; city of Clawson; Oakland County Library for the Blind; Oakland Community Mental Health; the Genesis Group; Oakland County Parks and Recreation; Beaumont Hospital and Farmington Parks and Recreation.

For more information, call McParlane at 858-0906.

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