

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024 Robert Sklar editor / 477-5450

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Liquor laws

City right on in cracking down

WE CAN'T knock Farmington Public Safety Director Frank Laubhoff's reasoning.

Starting May 1, the Farmington Department of Public Safety will encourage liquor licensees to call the emergency telephone number 911 to report people trying to illegally buy alcohol for themselves or others.

Such encouragement will accompany a visit by a detective, who will refresh licensees about liquor laws.

The original department criteria for using 911 included all crimes in progress.

"A minor attempting to purchase alcohol, a minor using false identification or an adult attempting to purchase alcohol for minors are all crimes in progress," said Laubhoff.

He's right. Not only are they crimes in progress, they're serious crimes that too often trigger deadly repercussions for the offender or a bystander.

THE SPIRIT of teamwork the public safety department hopes to build is designed to reduce the availability of spirits to minors.

As city manager Bob Deadman put it, "Hopefully, this will deliver a message to the minors that the department takes this issue seriously."

In October, an undercover sting using a police cadet as a decoy caught 54 percent of the city's 26 licensed locations selling alcohol to a minor. That percentage is down 20 percent from a similar operation in 1986.

Like the city council, we'd love to see a dramatic drop in such violations. But as Laubhoff said, "reducing it at all is an improvement."

Teamwork or not, state law puts the burden squarely on the licensees to assure their employees aren't selling alcohol to minors. It's not the public safety department's responsibility.

THE BOTTOM line in the city's "Double E" effort — education and enforcement — is that the city council vows it won't be timid.

When the situation warrants, it says it'll re-

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commend that the Michigan Liquor Control Commission not renew liquor-by-the-glass licenses and levy severe penalties up to license suspension or revocation for package liquor dealers.

For anyone who wants to call the city's bluff, think back to the 2½-year saga of Bootleggers Bar.

The bar owner fought the city's recommendation to not renew all the way to the state Supreme Court but still lost his liquor license.

Sexual equality: It moves closer

WE WONDER how many folks realize the key role that women play in local government?

In Farmington Hills, Jean Fox is mayor. Kathy Dornan is clerk and Joanne Smith chairs the planning commission. In Farmington, Shirley Richardson is mayor. Jo Bushey is clerk and Patsy Cantrell is treasurer. Two women serve on each city council.

In the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce hierarchy, Mary Bush is president and Jody Soronen is executive director. Wendy Strip Sitsamer directs Farmington's Downtown Development Authority.

Sexual equality is far from complete — American tradition and male chauvinism are tough to overcome — but the shifting balance of power locally is a welcome sign of the times.

Death penalty

Too much power for government

CHRISTIANS observe this Friday as the day when capital punishment was inflicted on Jesus of Nazareth. Biblical accounts indicate Jesus did nothing that we would consider a capital crime. Indeed, the chief Roman official, Pilate, said as much.

"I find no crime deserving of death in him. I will therefore chastise and release him."

Bowing to political pressure, however, Pilate ordered capital punishment, illustrating why the death penalty is too much power to give government.

Michigan got a bad taste in its mouth for the death penalty in its territorial days when a man wrongly convicted in neighboring Ontario was

hanged. We are proud Michigan became the first English-speaking jurisdiction in the world to prohibit the death penalty.

A Macomb County-based group is circulating petitions to amend the Michigan Constitution to allow the death penalty. Their simple faith that government will kill only the right people is touching but naive.

Most judges try to be fair and honest human beings (see editorial below), but they are human, and humans do make mistakes. The death penalty is too much power to give government.

Say no to the petition drive and to the spirit of Pilate.

Press limits

They shouldn't be widely used

IT IS TIME simultaneously to praise 48th District Court Judge Edward Avadenka while cautioning other judges about adopting Avadenka's approach to a recent case.

The robbery and murder case of West Bloomfield resident Ralph Schultz landed in Avadenka's Bloomfield Township courtroom. Avadenka took several steps prior to the preliminary examination that, carried any further, would have looked like prior censorship.

For example, just before a hospital bedside arraignment of one defendant, Avadenka ordered the press to neither take nor print the defendant's picture. He cited two reasons: Schultz's widow had not yet identified the defendant in a lineup, and it would jeopardize the defendant's right to a fair trial.

The First Amendment prohibits prior censorship. However, since we do believe in everyone's right to a fair trial, and since Adell Courts was in custody and not an at-large danger to the public, which would have made the public's right to know paramount, we did not print a picture of Courts.

Likewise, Avadenka called together media representatives two days before the pretrial of Courts and another defendant, William McMichael. Avadenka wanted to establish ground

rules for coverage; he reminded us the law gave him extensive powers about courtroom coverage.

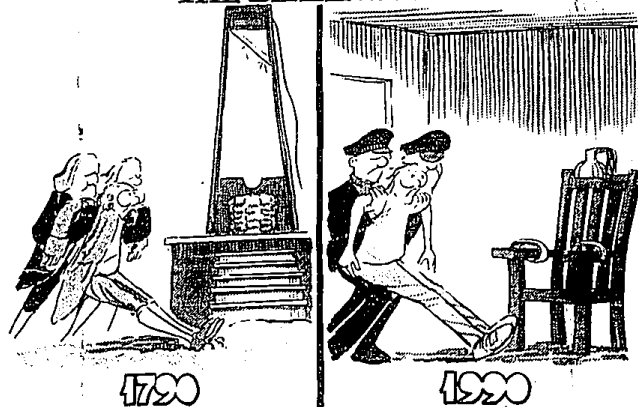
AVADENKA'S MAIN PURPOSE for the meeting was to tell us he would allow no electronic recording, at all, of Angela Schultz or her son, Alan, while they testified. Avadenka warned that criminal contempt charges would result if his order was violated.

At the same meeting, he told the assembled reporters and photographers that he was aware of blocking it. He turned over, to the press, seats in the jury box and the first rows of his courtroom. He could have limited the number of photographers, but instead welcomed all who would abide by his conditions.

Particularly in trials of such emotional magnitude and community impact, but even in smaller cases, we believe the public has a compelling and overriding right to know how the judicial process is working. We will take this opportunity, in this instance, to compliment Avadenka on his approach to media coverage. However, concern about applying these measures in the same even-handed way, and our unwillingness to endorse such precedent, prohibits us from recommending this course of action in other circumstances.

HICKINS

THE DEATH PENALTY



The more times change, the more things stay the same.

Exploiting a tragedy menaces our liberty

THE TARGETS could have been Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Carson McCullers' "The Heart Is A Lonely Hunter," or The Bible.

That's what I thought about after reading of the hysteria which has overtaken one school district, is spreading to others and threatens the intellectual freedom of our educational system.

It's a tragic and frightening tale. A young boy in the Plymouth/Canton School District dies, found hanging from his bunkbed, only 8 years old.

That's tragic. Word gets out that a few days before the boy, along with his classmates, watched a movie entitled "Nobility's Useless," a work distributed by Encyclopaedia Britannica and based on the book "The Great Brain."

Published in 1896, the book revolves around the story of a boy who is depressed after losing his leg and attempts suicide twice. Neither attempt is successful.

It's a classic story, used for years in classrooms, sold in children's bookstores, very likely at your local library. As a child you probably read it. School districts rent the movie and show it as an example of how to cope in adversity.

Now it has become a target of

those who limit our children's educational growth.

A GROWING NUMBER of parents in the district believe the movie may have led to the boy's death. Lurking on the sidelines are the champions of censorship who would love to get all the mileage possible out of this tragedy.

Some educational administrators have shown less than courageous conduct. Oakland County's Farmington District has pulled it off the shelf, "for obvious reasons," according to superintendent Michael Flanagan.

Encyclopaedia Britannica has halted film distribution because of the controversy. But the reason for pulling the film is neither obvious or wise. It's frightening and dangerous.

In the last 94 years, millions of children have read the book. Since distribution in 1980, the movie has been seen by more than 1 million children. Less than a month ago students in the Rochester School District saw the film.

Cooler heads prevailed in that district. Letters were written to parents explaining that students had seen the film. Hopefully it will be shown again.

The pieces mentioned at the beginning of this column all contain sto-



Steve Barnaby

ries of suicide. All are must reading for our children's literary development.

As tragic as is Stephen Nalepa's death, we must not react by withholding the intellectual food which nourishes our children's learning. That would be suicidal to our society.

Those mavens of censorship are having a field day with this issue, all too anxious to ride this tragedy to victory for their cause.

It is time for those to speak out who believe that free expression and intellectual pursuit are inherent to this country's existence as a democratic society. Otherwise the style of Shakespeare, the grace of McCullers and the story of Jesus could very well be lost to the ages.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Farmington readers' forum

Letters must be signed, original copies and 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, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48024.

Tax editorial was on target

To the editor: Congratulations on your analysis of the Patterson-Anderson tax hike plan.

They've made it so complicated, some people have been falsely sold that the Patterson-Anderson proposal will cut their property tax assessments.

It won't — even if it gets enough petition signatures to put the tax shift/increase on the Nov. 6 ballot, and voters are further misled by Messrs. Patterson and Anderson to vote for it.

Peggy McMaster, Birmingham

Write to urge cleanup law

To the editor: I am writing to urge all readers to contact their state senator to express support of state Senate Bill 375, "The Comprehensive Clean-Up Act."

Michigan has a serious, expensive toxic waste disposal problem (2700 toxic waste sites) that won't be solved until those responsible for the problem, not the taxpayers, are forced to pay to clean it up.

Cara McAllister, Bloomfield Hills

Violent teens lack control

To the editor: It seems that a slight punctuation error crept into your opinion page of Thursday, March 29.

Bob Sklar's section was entitled, "Teen Activities Lacking: Control Signs Cautiously." The obvious mistake in punctuation and word order changed the whole meaning.

The title should have read "Teen Lacking Control; . . ."

Some excerpts from Mr. Sklar's "opinion" also indicate his lack of insight into the recent teen violence problem.

He states "There's not much in the way of upbeat entertainment" and "Parents owe it to themselves to work with city leaders to provide our teens with safe, stimulating weekend activities."

The real truth is, as always, there is a minority of troublemakers. The answer to the violence by a few is control. Why do the thousands of "good" teens find something constructive and stimulating to do on the weekends?

The plain truth is that this minority has no self control, no parental control and no moral obligation to their fellow man.

To suggest that we have to enter-

tain kids or they automatically become violence-seeking animals is absurd. The few who meet and plan to meet for violence must be labeled and treated as they ask to be.

These kids are anti-social, anti-rule and anti-responsible living. To give them excuses, especially in a public forum, is giving them license to continue.

The cause is with their lack of self control and with their parent's lack of responsibility.

These kids are out there with no direction except the pack mentality that they breed for themselves. There is nothing normal about their actions. There is nothing moral about their actions. There is nothing responsible about their actions.

"Opinions" such as Bob Sklar's only serve to perpetuate the problem.

The administration and staff (especially coaching staff) at Harrison High School is seeking to remedy the situation through making kids responsible for their actions, both at school and in the community.

Bob Sklar's wishy-washy approach to the problem only provides gasoline for an insane, amoral, immature attitude smoldering among an irresponsible minority of our kids.

Mike Teschman, teacher/coach/parent, Harrison High School, Farmington Hills

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