

points of view

Here's a vote to continue electing judges

MONDAY NIGHT, NOW president Molly Yard told an audience at Birmingham Temple in Farmington Hills she had no faith at all in our court system.

She was mainly referring to last summer's Supreme Court decision on abortion that invited state legislatures to pass laws attacking Roe vs. Wade.

The high court is packed with Reagan appointees, with whom we will probably be stuck for their lifetimes.

But it made me think of our own local courts, some of which have judges up for election this year, and the old debate about appointed versus elected judgeships.

Perhaps it's a coincidence, but the judge-propelled programs coming out of our courts go above and beyond what we expected of our legal system in the past.

HERE ARE SOME examples.

• Judge Bryan Levy of the 46th District Court, based in Southfield, is about to bring out a new weapon in the campaign to get and keep drunk

drivers off the road — the victim impact panel. Beginning in June, most first-time drunk driving offenders, and some repeat offenders, will be required to sit silently in a courtroom and listen while people who have been injured or had loved ones killed in a drunk-driving crash tell their stories. It came about when the Oakland County chapter of MADD approached Judge Levy a year ago.

• Judge Stephen Cooper, also of the 46th District Court, initiated two major substance abuse programs over the past two years directed at specific ethnic groups. He convinced leaders in both the Chaldean and Jewish communities that they needed to address substance abuse among their young people and put together programs for them.

• Then we have the district courts that have responded to Michigan drug czar Donald Reisig's call. They are acting as a catalyst for mobilizing all areas of the community to come together to work on alcohol and drug abuse problems. Cooper of the 46th, Judge Thomas Brookover



Judith Doner Berne

of the 48th and Judge Ralph Nelson of Rochester's division of the 52nd have taken lead roles.

• Beyond that, there's the new SMILE (Start Making It Liveable for Everyone) program, spearheaded by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Edward Sosnick. The program, which has just finished its pilot phase, hopes to reduce the trauma of divorce for children by educating their parents. A two-hour workshop is being held monthly for divorced parents with minor children in Oakland County. Together with Birmingham attorney Richard Victor, Sosnick formed a steering committee of divorce counselors, psychologists and representatives of Friends of the Court. And through its pilot

program, they found parents wanted to go into the program as soon as they file, not after the divorce has been granted.

WHAT IS CLEAR is that at least in our nook and cranny of the world,

some of our elected judges are getting out from behind the bench. They're taking note of what they see in the courtroom and reaching out to help design some solutions.

When the old argument about elected versus appointed judges rolls

around again, I'll stick with the elected system.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Future sure to be bright with a new generation

FACING THE FUTURE — it can be poignant, it can be rewarding, it can be frustrating. But one thing is for sure, we should reserve it for the symbol of hope it represents for us all.

It's a good feeling to see it happen. The phone rings and a friend is at the other end. Usually we do business but today he calls just to talk. He talks of his son, an obvious source of pride. For my friend, his son represents the future. He is a symbol of that hope for a better world.

His son, a college student, recently donned the school colors to work out for the football team. College teams do that, you know, practice in the spring for fall football. Beats me why, but they do.

"You know, Steve, it was fun watching him out there after practice, talking with the little kids who were asking him for his autograph. My wife and I just stood for a moment and took it all in," he said.

THE SON took a lot of time with each starry-eyed kid. As he signed autographs he would have each young fan hold his helmet.

"Why'd you have the kids hold your helmet?" asked the father.

The son replied, "I remember when you used to take me to these



Steve Barnaby

games and the players would let me hold their helmets. I never forgot it."

A few weeks before the son had been rummaging through some old memorabilia and found the autograph of former University of Michigan quarterback Rick Leach. He remembered the thrill and wanted to share that same feeling with the next generation, the future.

But the son also brought home some disturbing news. Having forged some close friendships with minority students, he was faced with the personal tragedy of a society which prefers to keep cultures separate.

He was upset that his minority friend dropped out from pledging for a fraternity. But he was confused at the reason. His friend dropped out not because the fraternity turned away minorities, but because other

minorities put pressure on him not to associate with whites.

Nothing's simple when you're growing up. Just when you think you've figured out the world, something else comes up to confuse the situation — even when you have a friendship with someone who happens to be black.

My friend finished his stories and I told him about my secretary, a very talented young woman. A few weeks ago she walked into the office and announced she had found another job. She was moving on to follow her career path.

Smart move, I told her. Of course, she already knew that. But young people are amazingly tolerant of old farts who insist on passing on their bits of wisdom.

I shut up after that, well for the most part, and thought about how excited I am for her. It's wonderful to watch the future happen right before your eyes.

My friend and I hung up feeling better about the world. After all, we should. We know the place is going to be in good hands.

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

Hey, council: Let's not level a mature woodlot

The writer, Kurt Yockey, is committee chairman for Concerned Citizens of Quaker Valley in Farmington Hills.

Recently, the Farmington Hills City Council approved an application for a grant to develop the Pelts property (I-696 and Farmington Road). This is the last area of mature forest of any useful size remaining within the city.

Clearly, this is a piece of property to be enjoyed by all the citizens of the community, not simply those interested in youth sports activities.

The proposal calls for multiple ball fields and soccer fields, all of which will require clearing of a beautifully wooded, rolling area for a use that has not been demonstrated to be necessary, when alternatives have not been thoroughly considered, public input has not been obtained, and the impact of the proposed use upon the surrounding area has sim-

guest column

ply not been addressed.

This is the same city council that enacted an ordinance requiring residents to acquire approval from the city council before cutting down trees on private property.

THE OBVIOUS intent of this ordinance was to reduce developer's wholesale destruction of wooded areas. Notwithstanding this expressed, enacted intent, the city council has now applied for a grant, the purpose of which would be to facilitate the wholesale destruction of this beautifully wooded section.

While this paradox is sufficiently disconcerting in and of itself, of greater concern is the failure on the

part of the recreation department, or perhaps, the city council to appreciate the obvious increased recreational areas within the city is a desirable goal; clearing the only remaining rolling woodlot is simply not the answer to the perceived need for additional playground space.

Assuring the availability of this property to all in the community is in everyone's interest, imposing bulldozer alterations to make flat what is rolling, when there is a relative abundance of flat land, shows a misapprehension of the logic necessary to match use with resource.

THE CONCERNED Citizens of Quaker Valley object to the lack of study and analysis of alternatives and to the hasty atmosphere in which this grant application was approved.

We look forward to a full, open, thoroughly researched study of this parcel and the suggested uses.

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