

Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48024

Robert Sklar editor/477-5450

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Botsford Inn

It's part of our area's fabric

"And the innkeeper speaks to all of us, in the accents of today, over the decades of our past."

— Jean Fox, Botsford Inn historian

IT OPENED in 1836, when Andrew Jackson was president and Michigan was the West.

Today, the Botsford Inn is one of the oldest hosteries in the state. The national historic site retains much of its rustic charm.

Still, we weren't surprised to learn last week that innkeeper John Anhut had decided to try to sell the former stagecoach stop — richly symbolic of our community's hospitality and heritage.

Since his father, John Nicholson Anhut, bought the landmark from the estate of auto pioneer Henry Ford in 1951, the lodging market and the Farmington area have changed dramatically.

But Anhut, pledged to making the inn "a human establishment serving people and not solely a moneymaking operation," has never gone hog-wild with modern luxuries.

His challenge has been to preserve a slice of America's past while trying to protect his family's investment.

Having TVs in guest rooms was one of his few concessions. "That's just good business. We've got to mix the old with the new," said Anhut, ever the entrepreneur.

IN THE days of the Melody Circus in a green-striped theater tent behind the inn — when much of Farmington Township was farmland and Grand River was the main drag to Lansing — Anhut Hotels Co. enjoyed a healthy occupancy rate at the Botsford.

But I-696, booming area growth and an influx of chain hotels have stunted that key barometer of profitability and have sapped Anhut of the necessary gusto to duke it out with the big boys.

Sure, the inn remains an oasis for travelers hooked on the ambience of an earlier time. But there's only so much nostalgia it can offer to

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counter the amenities of a Clarion Hotel or a Holiday Inn.

He has made 13 major additions to the original structure. But Anhut — a conservative businessman active in the state chamber of commerce and the local Economic Development Corporation — has never slighted the inn's role as a mini-museum of living history.

For example, touches of Americana and five wood-burning fireplaces spice the guest areas. And much of the furniture came from Henry Ford's Fairlane mansion in Dearborn.

FORD, WHO met his wife, Clara, at a square dance there, bought the Botsford Inn in 1924 as a romantic gesture and to save it from demolition during Grand River's widening.

Ford once said "history is more or less bunk" but the old man's love for the inn was undying.

"With Henry's drive and enthusiasm as a spur, the family decided it was more important to find people, like the Anhuts, who would keep the inn in the spirit of my great-grandfather," said William Clay Ford Jr.

Chances are, Allen and Orrin Weston, who built the original structure as Orrin's home, would beam with pride at what the state Legislature proclaimed during the inn's sesquicentennial in 1986:

"It stands as a beautiful window to a bygone age, with changes and improvements unable to obscure the feeling of history."

It's tattered around the edges. But the hostelry is an enduring beacon of history. We trust that whoever buys it from John Anhut understands the Botsford Inn, in a very real sense, belongs to all Farmingtonians.

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such

things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

Local news you can use Local news you can use Local news you can use

We shouldn't feel guilty asking cops for reports

COPS WORK like ethereal mothers. They try to make you feel guilt. Garrison Kellor, the sage of Lake Webagon, chronicled the machinations of the Minnesota mother, who, faced with the tiniest disagreement, responds: "Is this the thanks we get?"

Mothers of many ethnic groups use the same technique, and they have been especially adept at passing it on to the children who became cops.

Detroit Sgt. Reginal Dozer, speaking to newsmen at a forum on deteriorating police-media relations last month, tried the guilt trick.

"Currently we have three full-time police officers to handle Freedom of Information Act requests," said Dozer, who heads the FOI response section. "Each takes five to eight hours."

Cops on the line must provide reports to the FOI section "along with their regular duties — chasing down murderers."

His intuition was clear: If the public didn't demand to know how governmental agencies operate, cops would have more time to catch murderers and bust drug dealers.

DOZER WAS less than complimentary to newsmen and civic leaders who make so much work for cops by holding seminars on how to request public documents under the Freedom of Information Act. "And I think the inmates might hold seminars, too," he said, lumping us with the drug dealers and murderers.

A Livonia cop, Tim Larson, wrote a letter to the editor on this topic, closing with "Get off their (police) backs" and reminding us: "We should never forget, in our dealing with a police officer, that he/she may have just spent an eight-hour day or more confronting drunks, thieves, drug users, suicide and accident victims."

Southfield city administrator Robert R. Block gave the Observer & Eccentric staff the benefit of his thinking at an in-house seminar last week. "I've got a \$6,000 officer lined up... to be a news reporter's

assistant," he said. "It stands as a great window to a bygone age, with changes and improvements unable to obscure the feeling of history."

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AS I interpret these amazingly similar remarks, we're all people making trouble for our "men in blue" when we seek access to public records.

If a drug-demented, lust-crazed rapist killer goes free, it's our fault for tying up cops with our desire to know what our most expensive municipal agency is doing.

Phooey!

It wasn't civic groups and the news media that made Detroit — and many suburban — police departments decide to scrutinize every FOI

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THE FOI law opens with this basic principle:

"It is the public policy of this state that all persons are entitled to full and complete information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those who represent them as public officials and public employees, consistent with this act. The people shall be informed so that they may fully participate in the democratic process."

A reporter, lawyer, claims investigator, civic activist or interested citizen should never — ever — feel guilty when requesting a public record.

It's a lot of cities and townships that should feel guilty about the time, talent and tax dollars they squander hiding their papers and then trying to blame us for "lying them up."

Tim Richard is news director of Suburban Communications News Service, SCC is the parent company of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.


Tim
Richard

request to see if they could concoct an alibi for denying it.

All over the state, bureaucrats are holding seminars, consulting "risk managers" and heeding the advice of attorneys like Tim Cronin.

"My strong recommendation is that those reports be reviewed prior to release by the designee (in the police department) or that the news people be required to file a Freedom of Information Act request before the information is released to them," said Cronin, a member of a law firm advising the townships of Canton, Plymouth, Northville and West Bloomfield.

from our readers

Pole debate ridiculous

To the editor:

As I sit with my morning coffee scanning the front page of the Observer, I came across: "Hills Studies Plan to Ease Backboard Ban" (March 23).

At first, I became a bit confused as it wasn't April Fool's day yet, could they be serious?

It's hard to imagine that the council of such a rapidly growing area with such a diverse population associated with such rapid growth can even take the time to hem and haw over such a ridiculous ordinance.

I also find it a bit sobering to realize that these people have such biased opinions — next they'll pass an ordinance based on their opinions as to what color my house should be.

People have got to realize that living together in a community, just like in any relationship, requires a little give and take.

Everyone will always have an opinion, and that's all right, but you've got to be aware of them and not let them interfere with our judgment.

There's got to be a balance that's fair to the majority, I still feel it was a great loss to the community to lose the "Concerts in the Park," but that's another issue.

People have got to realize that living together in a community, just like in any relationship, requires a little give and take.

They'll simply look on their own: it's unfortunate that so many people believe that bright students get bored and eventually lose interest in school if they're not challenged appropriately.

Paula Kaberline,
Farmington Hills

Bright kids like others

To the editor:

Congratulations to Bev Schmitz, High School Teacher of the Year, who was featured in the April 9 Observer.

However, I must disagree with one thing she said in the article — bright kids, they're going to make it no matter what." I don't believe that is true.

Bright kids need what all kids need — challenge and stimulation at a level appropriate to them.

They don't simply look on their own: it's unfortunate that so many people believe that bright students get bored and eventually lose interest in school if they're not challenged appropriately.

JoAnn K. Phelps,
Farmington Hills

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