

# Opinion

21898 Farmington Road/Farmington, MI 48336

Tom Baer editor/477-5450

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O&amp;E Thursday, December 27, 1990

## Our beliefs

### Speaking out on 1990 issues

**I**T WAS supposed to be the year of the environment — and it was — but 1990 was a year of many, varied issues. Nationally, it was a year of unprecedented attacks on free speech and battles over the limits of police power. On the state level, the year brought bat-

ties over abortion rights, taxes and school financing. A host of regional issues, from controlling urban sprawl to picking the site for a new Tiger Stadium, also surfaced. Here's where the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers stood on the major issues of 1990:



#### FREE SPEECH

Despite the importance of other issues, intrusions on the right to free speech filled Observer & Eccentric editorial pages more than any other topic.

- We warned against the dangers of labeling record albums, as had occurred in Florida, and local leaders apparently heeded our warning. Record labeling has not occurred in Michigan by year's end and its future here remains doubtful.
- In a related matter, Oakland County Prosecutor Richard Thompson drew our praise for not prosecuting a suburban record store owner whose front window displayed a controversial but clearly non-obscene record album cover.

- When it came to other forms of expression, we encouraged school boards and parents to review classroom films — such as the one unfortunately linked to the possible suicide of an area boy.

- At the same time, we had no kind words for the new NC-17 rating system that would govern what students — and adults — could see at their local movie house. Movie ratings, we argued, are too restrictive and are driven by economics, not any concern for free thought and debate.

- Congress surprised and pleased us, however, by rejecting a Constitutional amendment that would have banned flag burning. Patriotism, we argued, cannot be legislated, while a true democracy clears the way even for unpopular forms of expression.

- Last we be accused of leaning too far to the left, we also argued in favor of anti-abortion activists who picketed outside local doctor's homes. Streets and sidewalks are public property, we argued, in urging local communities to avoid drafting anti-picketing ordinances.



#### ENVIRONMENT

The 20th anniversary of Earth Day this spring provided the rallying cry for environmentalists throughout the nation and region. We're happy to report the Earth Day spirit carried well into the year.

- We encouraged local communities to begin recycling and many have already responded. Birmingham, Livonia, Plymouth Township, Plymouth and Southfield were but three of the area communities that began recycling programs in the past year.

- In addition, we encouraged the state Department of Natural Resources to stop delaying and approve county waste disposal master plans — in part to help speed up recycling efforts. Happily, they responded.

- At the same time, we halted the East Michigan Environmental Action Council on its 20th anniversary. We praised the group, an outgrowth of the first Earth Day, for pressing environmental issues during the hostile climate for the 1980s.



#### CRIME & PUNISHMENT

The war on drugs brought a slew of proposals to increase police powers, most of them ill-advised. While we stood solidly behind such anti-substance abuse groups as Mothers Against Drunk Driving, we also stood up for civil liberties.

- Michigan's proposed "no knock" law, allowing police to enter homes, without warrant, on the mere suspicion drugs were present, was bad law, we argued, such a move would shred civil liberties. Then, as now, we don't want fewer rights and a drug free society, we want more rights and a drug free society. While anti-drug hysteria seems to have subsided, attacks on civil liberties continue.

- In a similar vein, we argued against driver check lanes. Despite a U.S. Supreme Court ruling in support of drunk driving check lanes, we argued the move not only intruded on drivers' civil liberties but was also a colossal waste of police time. We note few local police departments, if any, are using check lanes.

- One aspect of the drug war we support —

forfeiture of drug dealer assets — nonetheless needs tightening. We argued police departments should work more closely to assure each participating department received an equitable share of the confiscated assets. At the same time, we argued that proper care should be taken to assure assets of non-related parties — including relatives of the accused — were included in the haul.

- We used our Easter Week editorial to argue against restoring the death penalty in Michigan — the timing was not lost on perceptive readers.



#### HEALTH ISSUES

Abortion, the most controversial health issue, remained hot in 1990 and shows no signs of cooling off in the coming year.

- Michigan's new parental consent law drew our editorial fire. Even though 330,000 Michigan residents signed petitions making parental consent law, we believe that merely represents a small, narrow, viewpoint. Despite presence of a new, pro-life governor, we continue to urge pro-choice legislators to roll back abortion restrictions. At the same time, we also support increasing sex education programs as a method of curbing unwanted pregnancies.

- More education was also our strong recommendation on smoking, another major health care issue. Looking at the Michigan Tobacco Reduction Task Force's recent report, we concluded our schools should do more to educate youngsters on the dangers of smoking. At least one local community, however, took a more radical task force recommendation to heart. Rochester Hills is, at this moment, trying to ban cigarette vending machines in areas frequented by minors.



#### TAX & SPENDING ISSUES

Several tax-and-spend issues came our way in 1990. Some looked ineffectual, others too confusing. New Gov. John Engler is promising substantial property tax savings in 1991. We'll see.

- On school aid, we sharply criticized the rob-from-the-rich-give-to-the-poor approach, calling for more school spending all around. We blasted Gov. Blanchard's plan to take categorical state aid from wealthier districts and give them to poorer districts (and look what happened to him). By year's end, however, Lansing's Robin Hood was floating a new proposal, one that calls for a "sharing" of district tax bases. Again, we say down with it.

- We weren't too big on the state's major tax cut initiative, the so-called Patterson/Anderson proposal. We found it too complicated and confusing to make the ballot. Apparently, state voters agreed. Petition gatherers failed to gain enough signatures to force a vote on the issue.



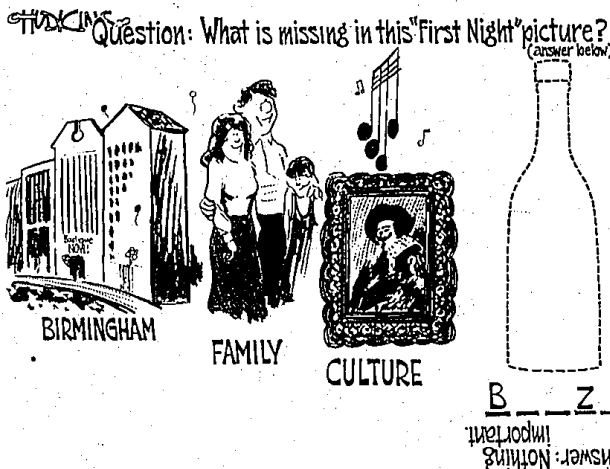
#### AROUND OUR REGION

Development, whether of a new Tiger Stadium or a suburban "megamall," was still a hot issue this year. Whether it will remain so depends on whether we have a recession — as predicted — and how long it lasts. As for this year:

- As Cecil Fielder was just embarking on his home run binge, we called for a new Tiger Stadium to be built near the old. While Allen Park has emerged as a leading contender, with Plymouth Township a viable alternative, we continue to call for a centrally located ballpark, built with private — not public — money.

- With development sprawling throughout our region, we called for stricter controls on growth. We argued for a regional planning authority to prevent unnecessary development. We still think it's a good idea regardless of whether recession makes development a moot issue in 1991.

- Stating our long-held belief that Detroit's revitalization is key to our area as a whole, we praised Detroiters who patrolled their streets on Devil's Night — and called on suburbanites to help them next year.



## Community still is main focus of this newspaper

EXACTLY 25 years ago this week I bought the six Observer Newspapers.

A lot has happened since then:

- The company has grown considerably. It now publishes 53 community newspapers, including this one.

- Our company name is now Suburban Communications Corp., reflecting our interest in providing news and information of all sorts to a wide variety of markets.

- Our technology — modern, computerized data bases and laser typesetters — is light years away from the clanking Linotype machine on which I used to set this column.

But looking back over 25 years in the newspaper business, what strikes me is how closely we have clung to our fundamental focus of publishing community newspapers.

THE FIRST front page editorial I wrote as publisher tried to set out what we were about. Among other things, it said:

"We will try to bring to these newspapers an informed and probing curiosity about everything of local interest, from sewage to high school football, from racial discrimination to good recipes, from local politics to neighborhood going on."

"To those who write them (and, hopefully, to some of those who read them), newspapers are alive,

**I believe that good communities and good newspapers go hand in hand, the success of one contributing to the other.**

motivated by a spirit and a commitment, a posture in the world and an ethic. Without these, a newspaper is just another dead piece of paper with print on it.

"It is only in this spirit which permits a newspaper to play its true role: A public conscience."

LAST YEAR, after numerous false starts, I succeeded in getting our company philosophy down on paper for all our staffers to read:

"All journalists share the same obligation to truth, accuracy and fairness. But because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition."

"They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and the communities they cover, swooping in to write of the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else."



**Philip Power**

"We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we both work and live. It's often hard to have both feelings at once, but in the end it makes for fairer and more accurate journalism because it considers the consequences of a news story to the community and to the people involved."

I AM VERY proud of the ways this newspaper and its staffers have contributed to the success of this community. I believe that good communities and good newspapers go hand in hand, the success of one contributing to the other.

And as the New Year comes to mark my 25th anniversary in this business, I look forward with very great excitement and ferocious curiosity to the next 25 years.

Philip Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His award-winning column will appear periodically.

### from our readers

#### Head injury series helpful

To the editor:

The series covering head injuries by Janice Brunson was well-written and very informative.

We wish to thank Botsford Hospital who hosts our chapter's monthly meetings for the families of head injured and survivors of head injuries. The group meets the second Thursday of each month in the Community Room in the Administration Building of the Hospital on Grand River. Those with questions about head injuries can write the Michigan Head Injury Alliance, 8143 W. Grand River Suite 5, Brighton, Mich. 48116 or call 229-5880.

Pat and Helen McEvilly

#### Let's hear both sides on millage

To the editor:

Thank you for your Dec. 20 editorial encouraging the proponents of the 3.7 mill school tax increase to debate Richard DeVries on television.

Hopefully, your urging will cause those in favor of increased school taxes to meet DeVries in televised debate.

As fair and impartial conduct would be assured by the League of Women Voters, declining to debate

would indicate that DeVries' arguments are valid and that increased taxes are not needed.

Won't someone from the pro-tax side take a place on the stage?

If your argument is clear and sound you could inform and influence hundreds of citizens.

Let's hear from both sides.

Robert Ranney, Farmington Hills

#### Answers about dog are needed

To the editor:

We were outraged in reading about the policeman shooting the dog (Dec. 17) and several questions about this incident need answers promptly.

- If the officers did not know the dog lived there, why did they try to lock it in the yard? How did they identify the dog from the description in the complaint?

- Since someone was home, did the officers consider asking them if the dog lived there and if so, for some assistance from the owner in confining the dog to the yard?

- Did the officers consider that pursuit of the dog onto its own property might provoke a reaction from the dog since they were strangers?

• Was the officers' method of handling this matter (concluding with three shots from a deadly weapon witnessed by the dog's owner, area children and neighbors) a good example of police training in

a minor incident?

- Did this handling by the officers set a good example for citizens? Where could it lead?

Again, all we know at this point is what the initial news article said but until facts are shown to the contrary, we are far more concerned now about this police officer being loose than the dog.

We look forward to further information. If none is forthcoming, we will pursue it.

Susan Johnson and family, Farmington Hills

#### Opinions are to be shared

Opinions and ideas are best when shared with others.

That's why the Farmington Observer encourages its readers to share their views with others in the From Our Readers column.

Submitting a letter to the editor for publication is easy. Letters should be typewritten or printed legibly and kept to 300 words. Letters must be signed and include the address of the sender.

Names will be withheld only for the best of reasons, and the decision to do so will be made by the editor.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

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