

Opinion

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It's winter! Time to celebrate, not curse

WELL, LOOK at that. Winter has become a casualty of war. The mercury plunged to the single digits Monday night and, lo and behold, the next morning there wasn't a single story on the front pages of the big-town newspapers about how the weather clobbered poor old Michigan.

There were no (or very few) sob stories in Tuesday's editions about the unfortunate homeless huddled in their shelters, or color photos of people doing things like waiting for a bus in the cold.

Oh, well . . . we guess the editors have more compelling fare to dish up now that the United States is at war with Iraq.

But, the war aside, the only thing more predictable than winter in Michigan is the media's reaction to it. Even if not one flake fell this winter, there'd still be a massive snow job blowing in from our daily newspaper front pages and television screens every time a storm threatened from the west.

"Area braced for winter's wrath," the headlines will bellow, as soon as the Persian Gulf situation cools down and the space and time become available. And, of course, the boob tube weather wimps will be all warnings at 6 and 11. Count on it.

SO ENCOURAGED, lots of folks will be content to take part in the three great wintertime pursuits — eating, sleeping and, ah, watching TV. But, come on now, this is winter and we are in Michigan. It's supposed to be cold and it's supposed to be snowy.

In this part of Michigan, there will be, on average, 10-15 times every year where the old mercury sinks below zero and can expect about 36 inches of snow, according to a report prepared a few years ago by the planning director of an Oakland County community.

We've said it before, but it bears repeating

We've said it before, but it bears repeating every January: Winter isn't always well-managed around here.

every January. Winter isn't always well-managed around here. It isn't only the nitty-gritty stuff like attention to snowy highways and sidewalks and cars that won't start.

It's more that winter simply isn't celebrated in most of our communities.

If there's anything going on in, say, Farmington or Farmington Hills to make the dark, cold days of winter a bit easier to take, we've not heard about it.

BUT THERE ARE places in the northern latitudes that do more with winter than just curse it or ignore it if there happens to be a war on. Such places stage huge festivals during which participants lose their wintertime woes with merrymaking, while the cash registers merrily beep away. Plymouth, Mich., to the south and west of us, is one such place.

Plymouth has become known for its ice sculptures and winter festival, which have put January near the top in sales, according to merchants there.

There's no reason why, with the proper coordination and planning, communities like Farmington and Farmington Hills couldn't have the same kind of thing going.

A big winter festival right here . . . maybe on the Orchard Ridge Campus of Oakland Community College, or along Grand River in downtown Farmington. Wow, a winter festival. Now that's something to think about these long, cold winter nights.

Cultural desert Lansing must restore arts cuts

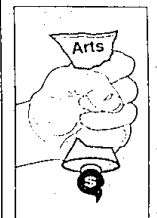
IN TRAUMATIC TIMES, it is critical to keep a grip on our quality of life.

But it appears as if our ability to turn to the arts in Michigan for solace is about to be severely dented.

Gov. John Engler's proposed budget cuts, if allowed to stand, will devastate the local and statewide arts community. The freeze on the current year's arts grants has panicked those groups, some of which have already committed that money.

Unfortunately, the Michigan Council for the Arts has only distributed a little over a third of the \$9 million it had awarded to 465 arts groups.

In the Observer & Eccentric alone, that has an impact on the following organizations: Birmingham Bloomfield Art Association, Birmingham Public Schools "Artists in Schools" program, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Livonia Symphony Orchestra, Oakland Community College Arts Project.



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Also, the Oakland County Cultural Commission, Oakland University's Meadow Brook Music Festival and Theatre, Plymouth Community Arts Council, Southfield Parks and Recreation, Southfield Symphony Orchestra, Troy Schools' "Artist in Residence" program and the Rochester Symphony Orchestra.

And in the metro area, the DIA, DSO, Center for Creative Studies and the Michigan Opera Theatre all will be maimed — not just for the duration of the recession but permanently, according to Engler's office.

THE LEGISLATURE cannot allow these to stand.

Metropolitan Detroit already has an image problem, which deters people and businesses from locating here. A reputation as a cultural desert can only further undermine our competitiveness.

Breaching the wall Interaction bridges prejudice

THE CONSEQUENCES of the Persian Gulf War are being felt in metropolitan Detroit — home to the largest Arab-American community outside the Middle East which could be in for an especially rough ride.

Without immediate intervention, the wall that already separates entrenched Detroiters from many of our newest ethnic immigrants could become an unbreachable schism long before "Operation Desert Storm" subsides.

Anyone who doubts this scenario need only remember Detroit's 1967 riot. The damage that event inflicted on both the black and white communities still ripples more than two decades after its bloody completion.

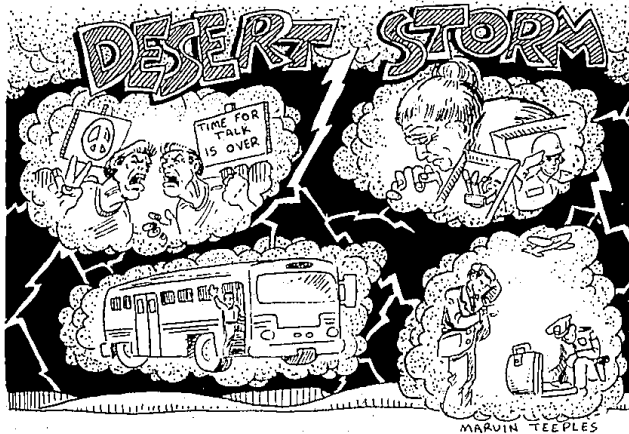
That's why we are encouraged by the effort many public schools in western Wayne and Oakland counties have made in bringing the war,

however scary it may be, into the classroom. Students and teachers have spent countless hours debating the war's merits, voicing their fears about relatives or friends in the military and discussing cultural differences between Arabs, Jews and Americans of other ethnic origin.

The decision by school administrators in Southfield and West Bloomfield to actively promote interaction between ethnically diverse student bodies should be applauded.

But it's also important for other schools, even those with few or no Arab-American students, to incorporate such programs into their classroom sessions on the conflict.

Past mistakes can only be eliminated if the next generation reaches adulthood less ignorant — and therefore less prejudiced — than the current one.



Incomes down while our families struggle

FOR THE past several weeks, I have been writing about what has happened to the American Dream, especially here in Michigan.

The hard, cold numbers are clear. For most Michigan families over the last 15 years, incomes after inflation are going down while costs of middle-class essentials like college tuition and housing have increased sharply.

Most families are pinched, trying to maintain the kind of life predicted by the American Dream (usually at the cost of two wage earners) while struggling to stave off disaster.

POOR PEOPLE, especially, have had a rough time over the past 15 years.

Inflation-adjusted income of the lowest fifth of American families fell by 9 percent from 1973-88, while (perverse) their federal tax bite rose 16 percent over the past 10 years, largely because of increases in Social Security. Such people are not only relatively less well off after inflation, they are absolutely worse off.

Some of these people, not so incidentally, are those who will be the most affected by Gov. John Engler's recently announced budget cuts, which include elimination of General Assistance — welfare for those who are physically able to work but who cannot find a job.

The worst of the worse off are those with no or little education. Median family income for those who dropped out of school fell by an astonishing 25 percent between 1973 and 1989. Such people used to be sustained by well-paying jobs with good benefits in the auto, steel and other manufacturing plants.

But the number of such jobs has dropped as unskilled work has migrated abroad and as such industries

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as autos have shed labor in their drive to reduce costs and increase competitiveness.

IS ANYBODY making it these days?

Sure. The richest fifth of American families saw their adjusted income rise by 25 percent from 1973-88, while the average federal tax bite on such people fell by 5.5 percent from 1980-90. (Federal taxes on the top 1 percent of incomes fell by nearly 15 percent.)

Most political commentators have noted the remarkable redistribution of wealth toward the already wealthy — that took place during the Reagan years.

And the shift may go far in explaining just why the stagnation affecting most middle-class families has not produced the kind of social and political outrage one might expect. By and large, people who are wealthy and well educated are the people who have access to the media. And if wealthy people in the United States have done very well over the past 10 years, why should they be raising a rumpus?

BUT IF YOU think about it for a



Philip Power

moment, we have been in the middle of a rumormongering for the past 10 years, caused in very great part by stagnating incomes of middle Americans.

The tax revolt (and its especially virulent form in Michigan, dating from the 1983 recall of two Democratic state senators from the suburbs). It has been caused in very large part by people who see rising taxes as yet another nail in the coffin of the American Dream.

The case against free trade (and in particular against the Japanese invasion of the U.S. auto market), stemming directly from the migration abroad of good-paying, unskilled manufacturing jobs that used to sustain Michigan's middle class.

The generational conflict between the increasingly pampered elderly (for whom indexed Social Security payments and Medicare programs are now the political equivalent of the Holy Grail) and the increasing desperate workers struggling to support them.

Even the intractable U.S. budget deficit, which stems from the combination of shrinking tax revenues (caused in part by shrinking incomes) and strident demands for maintaining various government programs which sustain the American Way of Life.

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

from our readers

All have right to life

To the editor:

Where are the "Right To Lifers" now that we have troops in Saudi Arabia. Aren't these people entitled to the "Right To Life" also?

Sharon Here,
Farmington Hills

Principal's 'answers' are opinion

To the editor:

I would like to object to the manner in which the school administration is subverting the PTA to lobby for passage of its new millage.

During the January meeting of the Longacre PTA board, a concerned parent asked that the Longacre Language, a PTA operated newsletter, be used by the principal to answer parent questions about the millage.

As another concerned parent, I

voiced my objection to this action on the grounds that without a rebuttal to these "answers" by a less interested party than the principal, this action would both lack propriety and show disrespect for those concerned parents who did not believe that their children would be best served by an increase in the millage.

I was not alone in my objection. A heated discussion followed, and it was decided not to publish these questions and "answers."

Today my son brought home the newsletter, and it contained the principal's answer to parent's questions without rebuttal in direct opposition to the decision made at the PTA board meeting.

Neither I nor any of the other PTA officers who opposed this action, were consulted or advised that the decision made at the board meeting was being reversed or by whom.

The principal's "answers" contain much opinion, omission, and conflicting answers. Is this the arrogance that Richard Headlee refers to? Since millage derived funds pay for the principal's salary, salary increases, and power (people and resources commanded), this use of the PTA to influence voters is an act of supreme impropriety whatever his true motives.

It is also a supreme act of disrespect for Longacre parents who have reservations about this millage to say nothing of the due process of the PTA board meetings.

This demonstrated lack of integrity brings into question how wisely school funds are being used.

Joseph F. Iaquinto,
Farmington

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 the editor, Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

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