

Opinion

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(B&F)

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It's party time!

But booze shouldn't be there

HERE IT IS late March and spring is truly in the air. But even if there were 12 feet of snow on the ground and the mercury plunged below zero, we'd still know that spring was on its way. How? One day this week there were two sure signs:

• A newspaper advertisement appeared about the very latest in frocks and tuxedos for the upcoming high school proms.

• A telephone call came from a Farmington-area parent who wanted to know about publicity for the all-night parties, which are now as much a part of the graduation scene as caps and gowns.

Ah, yes, if this is late March, can the high school proms and graduation parties be far down the road? No indeed, 'tis almost the season for these annual "rites of passage."

Very soon, newspaper stories will appear (if they haven't already) about how the fancy hotels in our area won't be allowing young revelers to party down in their establishments after the prom or graduation.

One of the more trendy hostelierys in Oakland County started getting tough a few springs ago, and others have followed suit, pledging not to rent to teens on a toot. It's getting to be a perennial story.

NOISY YOUNGSTERS sometimes bother the "corporate" customers, the inkeepers have said. And besides, it seems to have dawned on them that cities like Farmington Hills have laws and they can be held responsible if drugs or alcohol are consumed on their property.

Apparently the good publicity about not contributing to the downfall of our youth is worth much more to our hoteliers than the revenue to be gained by renting rooms.

Now, we'd like to think that things are changing for the better on the prom and party scene.

Long and always, we applaud the parents who plan and carry out the all-night parties for high

school seniors. We know that tons of work goes into these affairs. The booze-and-dope-free affairs seem to have caught on big with the graduates.

But let's be honest about it: There's often some serious drinking at some of these less-official parties — and often it's done with the full consent of the parents or other so-called responsible adults.

Several springs ago, one of our newspapers did a big spread on proms (before, after and during), and some images have remained in our minds.

BOTTLES OF champagne, or some other intoxicant, were in the back of the limousines that transported the tuxedo- and gown-clad youngsters to some fancy hotel or swanky country club.

And we recall the carefully-coiffed girl who walked from her house to the limo, her shoes in one hand, a bottle of booze in the other... her mother at the ready with a camera.

And we overheard an excited young man say he couldn't wait to get to a post-prom bash because "I need some alcohol in my body."

Sure, these images are from several years ago, but anyone who thinks such scenes aren't repeated every spring after spring is just fooling himself. There is a huge problem here for people who care or say they care about their children.

We'd like to hear some parents say that it's not OK for their teens to drink. It's not OK at home with the parents, in a restaurant, at a post-prom party or in the back seat of a limousine.

If that attitude seems a bit on the grinchy side, teens and their parents should remember something a police officer told a group of high school students one recent spring.

"Not a graduation has gone by since I've been with the department that I haven't buried an 18-year-old," the officer said. "I don't want to scrape any of you out of the street this year."

State parks

Engler's latest budget target

IN A DEMONSTRATION of arrogance and impudence, Gov. John Engler has stepped over the line in his quisquillo quest to slay government services.

The state's park system belongs to all of us, for all of us to enjoy. Its use as a political pawn by our rookie governor should disgust and offend even the most stoic-hearted budget slashers.

Ideologically focused administrations can shift and cut funds with little harm to the long range benefit of the state's residents. After all, the natural course of American politics dictates that the pendulum of funding priorities swings to accommodate those in power.

But a chief executive who resolves to harter off state land is selling his constituents down a river in a journey that would take decades to make the return trip.

ENGLE'S BUDGET proposes turning over four state parks to local governments, private companies or organizations. As many as 18 state parks could be victimized by Engler's petard, according to Department of Natural Resources officials who are justifiably appalled at this reckless and irresponsible behavior.

Closest to home is the Rochester Utopia state facilities which is lingering in Engler's sights. Other targets include Ortonville, the upper peninsula's Lake Gogebic and Twin Lakes, as well as Michigan's vacation jewel, Mackinac Island.

Engler's formula for providing recreation was revealed recently when he came out in favor of destroying wetlands for the enrichment of a northern Michigan resort which plans to build a

Our archaic-minded leader should heed the wisdom of David Stead, director of the Michigan Environmental Council: 'The state parks belong to the people of Michigan and we ought to take care of them... We should be figuring a way to help that system instead of hurting it.'

golf course on the banks of the Crystal River. Such crass disregard of our environment for profit combined with the trashing of our state park's system marks Engler as the governor of the privileged.

Our archaic-minded leader should heed the wisdom of David Stead, director of the Michigan Environmental Council.

"The state parks belong to the people of Michigan and we ought to take care of them... We should be figuring a way to help that system instead of hurting it."

Last year 2.5 million visitors contributed \$100 million to the Michigan economy by visiting the finest state parks system in the country. Admission fees paid for more than 70 percent of park operations.

Those faithful supporters don't deserve the shiv from a state employee who has spent a lifetime drawing a paycheck from taxpayers' pockets.

Absentee ballots

Mail them to senior citizens

SCHOOL DISTRICTS must step up to the mark and make sure senior citizens are mailed absentee ballots.

With the disappointing election turnout, issues are being decided by a minority of voters. This is democracy at its poorest.

The complaint by some school officials that mailing out ballots is expensive for already financially strapped districts is hypocritical.

For decades school officials have been playing hide and seek with senior citizens; a group not always friendly to district requests. Educators have depended on a small, pro-administration electorate to decide the fate of school millage issues that involve millions of dollars.

But that strategy has run its course. In an era of declining support for new local tax dollars, it would behoove districts to seek out senior citizen support. Building an alliance with seniors, rather than hiding behind a wall of avoidance, is the wiser course.

Some cities have put their money where their mouths are by sending out absentee ballots to senior citizens — automatically — for every election.

School districts should follow suit. The reluctance of districts is the only factor stopping seniors from being full participants in the system.

If school districts mailed the ballots to seniors, without "pamphleting" for a given school tax, it would add credibility to a district's request to the voters by affirming the suspicion that districts don't want a group they consider "no voters" rejecting their millage.

THINKING



Engler's job training cuts are shortsighted

I WAS IN New York City last week attending a meeting of the Commission on Skills in the American Workplace, the national panel that has attracted a lot of attention by proposing, among other things, a national skills assessment for every kid leaving school. I got a ton of questions about what Gov. John Engler was up to.

"Michigan used to be the national leader in job training," a school superintendent from California said, "but the word we get is that your new governor is tearing that all apart. Has he got rocks in his head?"

Michigan's widely admired Opportunity Card program, through which people gained efficient access to a wide variety of job training programs, was among the first programs eliminated by the new administration.

Two people recalled asking Engler's chief of staff, Dan Pero, about the cuts in job training in Michigan. "Job training is not something government should be involved with," Pero is reported to have said. "We'll let the private sector worry about job training all that human investment stuff."

I'M CONFUSED. I thought the main priority of the new administration was education. Up to now I had thought that job training was education for adults to do their jobs better and to be more competitive. Why, then, is job training something to be left entirely to the private sector?

Engler himself added to my confusion in an exclusive interview with this newspaper. In it he suggested that job training money was badly spent in the Blanchard administration. The phrase "political cronyism" came up.

Michigan's widely admired Opportunity Card program, through which people gained efficient access to a wide variety of job training programs, was among the first programs eliminated by the new administration.

He also argued that Michigan still will be getting \$168 million in job training money from the federal government, but that his administration will spend it in a better targeted way.

"We don't feel the reduction of a modest amount of general fund support, which is a percentage of the total program, is not something we can't overcome by doing a better job targeting the federal dollars," he said. "We think we'll get more job training, not less, out of the smaller investment."

Less is more, I gather.

WHAT IS SADDEST about the whole mess is that Engler is in the process of throwing out the baby (the most advanced job training and human investment initiative in America) with the bathwater (the debris of the old Blanchard administration).

In part, what's going on here is the "not invented here" syndrome. If Blanchard's administration liked something, Engler's won't, by definition.



Phillip Power

But surely, at the end of the day, that's a lousy way to run a state. After the initial rush of partisanship, most governors discover that good ideas, regardless of origin, are scarce and important.

MORE THAN that, the Opportunity Card system fits perfectly the empowerment theme now being developed by conservative theoreticians.

In providing people who want job training services ("customers") a card to provide access to all government job training programs ("choice"), the system was designed to empower people. Its purpose was to turn the entire system of government upside down, from supply-driven to demand-driven, from bureaucrat-controlled to customer-controlled.

I cannot imagine an initiative better suited to a radically conservative administration which has run into trouble by appearing to be callous and mean spirited in cutting out human services programs.

But then I've never been able to figure out why less is more. Except in political speeches.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. He is former chair of the state Job Training Council.

from our readers

The real meaning of Easter

To the editor:

An open letter to Mr. Easter Bunny. I know that you love children and that they love you. But someone wants me to tell them that He loves them even more.

His name is Jesus — and He wants children everywhere to know Him and to understand what He did for them. This is the real meaning of Easter.

Harriet Emmert, Farmington Hills

Edit was a 'put-down'

To the editor:

In reference to your editorial on March 14... Indeed, we are an organization that counts among its members those with the "corporate

image" who wear pin stripes, wingtips, power suits and pumps.

We also represent many businesses whose owners have the luxury of wearing flannel shirts and no ties.

I will be glad to send you a copy of our mission, goals and philosophy which contain the word "communities" throughout.

As far as I am aware, the businesses in our two towns have chosen to locate here because they like the communities, support them and are concerned about what happens in them. Many live here as well, whether or not they travel in BMWs.

I am surprised at your apparent put-down of our really fine business people. Certainly the Farmington Observer is one of our important businesses. Two former Farmington editors have been members of our board of directors and your chairman did an outstanding job when speaking at our annual dinner as one corporate business to others regarding education.

The gentleman to whom you refer in the editorial has other opportunities to know what goes on in town. He may read the Farmington Observer, attend city council meetings or school board meetings in person,

watch the Hills council on cable or watch the State of the Cities breakfast on cable when it is shown as a public service.

Many membership organizations operate as we do, holding functions which are open only to members and excluding the public.

A State of the Cities breakfast at no charge is one of the perks of chamber membership and hardly seems worthy of editorial comment.

Jody Soronen, executive director, Chamber of Commerce

Opinions are to be shared

The Farmington Observer is pleased to share the opinions of its readers. We encourage you to write to the editor.

Opinions expressed in this column are those of the writer and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Farmington Observer.

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