

Book stirs controversy, opinions

By Susan Buck
staff writer

They might not have read the book. But that didn't stop them from forming an opinion about Ze'ev Chafets' controversial book, "Devil's Night: And Other True Tales of Detroit."

About a third of the 350 or so people who turned out in Farmington Hills Monday to see Chafets said they had read the book. He spoke at the Birmingham Temple.

Those who hadn't said they formed their opinions on the basis of excerpts of the book carried in newspapers and critiques on radio and television talk shows.

"I think he gave a very positive, very fair appraisal of a city in trouble," said Charles Benjamin of Bloomfield Hills, who said he read the book. "You have to read the book in its entirety."

Book excerpts were all that Sherell and Sondra Gordon, Southfield residents, needed to become members of the audience. "The excerpt in the New York Times was interesting enough to make us come tonight," said Sondra Gordon.

CHAFETS' BOOK created a firestorm of controversy when it was published last year. His look at the poverty, social problems, violent crime, physical destruction and racial tensions that plague the Motor City angered many, foremost among them Detroit Mayor Coleman A. Young.

That hasn't swayed Chafets, however. He said he sees the activities of Devil's Night — the night before Halloween, when the city is hit by hundreds of arson and nuisance fires — as a symbol of the urban, moral and economic decay he contends is typical of American cities today.

"The book wasn't so detrimental," said Dorothy Rosenberg, who did not read the book. "You can pick out whatever you want and make it whatever you want it to be." Rosenberg said she considers herself a Detroit resident in the metropolitan sense.

Carole Dworkin, of West-Bloomfield was "fascinated by the whole issue."

"I've collected all kinds of newspaper clippings and I read all the rebuttals," Dworkin said. "I have read all the excerpts. The book was more evenhanded."

Her daughter, Rhonda Dworkin, a Long Island, New York, resident

since 1981, said: "You can't deny that Detroit has its problems."

DURING CHAFETS' speech, "Detroit: A City At War," he spoke about the great divide that exists between the city and the suburbs. Young himself drew a dividing line — and added to city-suburban animosity — during his first inaugural speech, when he told criminals to "to hit Eight Mile Road."

One chapter in his book, "The Hostile Suburbs," was named after a

phrase Young once used that some say contributed to tensions between the city and the suburbs.

"I just want to know if he (Chafets) has any solutions," said Marilyn Shorr, a Detroit resident whose family endowed the annual Shorr Memorial Lecture in honor of her brother, Robert and Mickey, who died three years ago.

Chafets' appearance marked the third lecture in the annual series. Shorr continues to live in the Eight

Mile-Schaefer area of Detroit. She said her neighbors, mostly black, want the same things out of life that she does.

Leslee Herschfus, a West Bloomfield resident, wondered why issues supported by Young — like casino gambling or the rezoning of riverfront property — can be turned down by voters while the mayor himself enjoys political invulnerability.

"He's a Teflon mayor," she said.



Israel author Ze'ev Chafets

Adoption panel named

By Tim Richard
staff writer

Two area residents are among a dozen Michiganders on a panel working to knock down barriers to adopting children.

They are Don Marengere, president of Adoption Option, and Oakland Probate Judge Joan E. Young. "We began by looking at the problems of adopting hard-to-place children," Marengere said after Tuesday's first meeting. The Bloomfield Township resident is a sales representative for a Livonia medical supplies firm.

"Hard to place children are those other than healthy infants. They may be older, handicapped or those with a lot of emotional baggage," he explained.

APPOINTED by Gov. John Engler, the panel is headed by Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld.

Binsfeld's panel held its first meeting Tuesday behind closed doors in a Senate caucus room. As an executive office agency, it is not subject to the Open Meetings Act.

The appointment was so sudden that Young, whose probate court handles adoptions, was unsure prior to the meeting what the committee would be asked to do. Engler asked the group to study

barriers to adoption, greater use of adoption, "private" and interstate adoptions, and ways to promote and facilitate adoption.

Michigan records about 4,000 adoptions per year, Marengere. About half are "related" adoptions — for example, where a husband adopts his wife's child by a previous marriage. Half are between unrelated people.

MARENGERE, whose group promotes adoption, said other issues are likely to be:

- How can the state reduce the time a child spends in foster care?
- What can be done to increase the use of adoption for unwed teen mothers? A generation ago, half or more of unwed mothers placed their children for adoption. Today only 35 percent of teen mothers place their children. Fewer than 1 percent of mothers 20 or older place their children.

- Can adoption become an alternative to abortion for the two in five women in Detroit who terminate their pregnancies each year?

Marengere said the panel plans to meet every second week for about a year.

Engler, like President George Bush, is pro-life (anti-abortion). Bush has advocated adoption as an alternative to abortion.

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