

Opinion

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Felines

Pet owners need rules

CATS ARE a lot of what people sometimes wish they were. Independent, mysterious, sleek. Not to mention the nine lives.

But in the real world where people still rule the lair, cats are taking a lot of criticism from their human counterparts — especially those counterparts who don't have cats as pets or are irritated with neighbors' roaming cats.

A handful of complaints have been made to both the Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils. Some people are angry about roaming felines that kill birds, leave footprints on cars, trudge through gardens and a host of other complaints that generally have to do with the free-roaming nature of cats.

You can't blame the cats. But you can blame cat owners. The cats are just being what they are. It's time irresponsible owners of cats face the music and take responsibility.

But people are people. And short of just hoping people will change, something has to happen to force them to change. That's why it's time for some very basic rules to be set down by both city councils.

IT WOULD BE nice to believe that people will take good care of their cats. That they will be sure their cats are immunized against diseases such as rabies.

It would be nice to believe people will consider their neighbors — and their cats' safety — when they open the door and let their pets roam freely.

But from neighbors' complaints and the number of cats roaming freely as strays or lying on the roadside dead — hoping for responsible pet owners is a pipe dream.

It's time to make cat owners responsible. Cat owners should have no less responsibility than dog owners. Ordinances have long been in place governing dogs and their owners.

True, those rules aren't perfect. But there's at least a measure of control over dogs and their owners, when necessary. Cats and their owners should live under similar rules.

Farmington and Farmington Hills must require licensing for cats. Licensing would ensure immunization. Immunization is important to protect cats, as well as people who come in con-

tact with cats that may be infected.

THE MICHIGAN Humane Society also has a good idea. Society officials suggest that cities offer different licensing fees to encourage sterilization. Sterilized cats are less of a problem because they are less aggressive in hunting and roaming from their homes.

The nature of cats, of course, must be recognized within any rules set down by the councils. Cats are not quite like dogs.

True, cat owners — like dog owners — should be required to supervise their pets outdoors. But unlike dogs, cats should not be tied up to a tree or gate post, for example. Cats run the risk of hanging themselves and of being unable to protect themselves against attack from other cats and dogs.

Not too long ago, a Farmington Hills resident called police because the cat she left tied up to her porch all night was injured after someone came along and put a rubber band around its paw, which was bleeding when the owner retrieved the cat.

And true, putting a leash on a cat is no easy feat. But the cities must insist that cat owners either leash their pet or supervise their pet while outside.

IT'S UNDERSTANDABLE that police wouldn't want to devote their day to hunting down stray cats. Yet for many neighbors, the problem is stray cats that cause havoc on their property.

The cities must provide annoyed residents with the ability to file a misdemeanor complaint against an irresponsible cat owner who allows his pet to stray where it doesn't belong.

That would address neighbors who have consistent problems with cat owners and their pets. As it is now, problems with cats are treated under nuisance ordinances. And that drags into cumbersome and timely legalities.

But, more important, an ordinance would protect cats that, through their owners' negligence, are roaming free in a world that is full of danger to small animals.

In suburbia

Tax plan may cost Engler in '92

JOHAN ENGLER is in danger of being a one-term governor. He could lose it in 1992 over the issue of tax base sharing.

Engler stirred up a ruckus over eliminating general assistance welfare payments to childless, able-bodied adults. But his position didn't cost him any votes, because the welfare lobby never supported him in the first place.

And Engler wisely tempered his position on eliminating arts money under pressure from the silk-stocking lobby that funded his campaign as well as the arts. He opted last week for a three-year phaseout instead of an immediate end to operating money, offering other kinds of help meanwhile.

BUT ON THE ISSUE of property tax base sharing, the governor is turning his back on many rank-and-file suburbanites who helped give him a razor-thin 30,000-vote margin in 1990.

The plan, which probably will be adopted by the Legislature, calls for the poorer districts of the state to gang up on those with growing business tax bases and steal half the latter's growth in commercial and industrial base.

Big losers would be the high-tech belt — the school districts along the freeways of Oakland, Wayne and Washtenaw counties. In the near future, western Oakland and Livingston also would be losers. One legislator tells us 40 percent of the "sharing" would be done by Oakland County alone.

Republican Engler should know better than to turn his back on that potent contingent. His

predecessor, Democrat James Blanchard, concentrated a lot of attention on this area with his campaign swings and his attention to such issues as college tuitions and drunk driving.

IT WOULD BE ironic if Engler, who wants to be known as a property tax cutter, were to sign a bill taking property taxes away from this vote-rich area. We wouldn't be able to spend the taxes we generate, and we might have to raise millage rates because of suburbia's propensity to indulge its schools.

The cunning legislators behind tax base sharing — Sen. Dan DeGrow of Port Huron, and Reps. James O'Neill of Saginaw — are sweating mightily to disguise their deed. Their final version probably will seek to soften the stab wound by restoring some of the \$72 million in "categorical" aid for special education they took away last year.

Some deal. In 1990 they steal categorical money from our right pocket, and in 1991 they propose using it to pay for the business taxes they want to steal from our left pocket.

Engler, unfortunately, is endorsing this plot. Moreover, he is playing to the irresponsible galleries by not supporting efforts to consolidate many rinky-dink districts into economically viable units.

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The authors of those amendments may not have been able to help William Penn, but they tried their best to keep the rest of us from being subjected to such judicial injustice.

This is another in a continuing series of articles marking the anniversary of the Bill of Rights.



Amendments protect against abuses of jury trial system

SUPPOSE YOU'RE hauled into court on a questionable charge.

You remove your hat when you enter the room. The judge orders the bailiff to place it back on your head, then declares you in contempt for wearing it. When the jury finds you not guilty, the judge orders them locked up without food or water until they change their minds.

They refuse, but the judge jails you anyway on the contempt charge and imposes a fine that you cannot pay.

Sound unreasonable? It was, but that's exactly what happened to William Penn back in 1670, and it's one of the reasons the Framers of the Bill



Mourning Moslems

Some say that Plymouth art festival officials response to this painting of Kuwaiti women depicting the anguish of war was a clear

form of censorship. For his opinion on the issue, see Steve Barnaby's column below.

Censorship can't mask real tragedies of war

LIVONIA ARTIST Judy Gibbs recently found that censorship comes in many hues.

We Americans pride ourselves on our freedoms. But those of us involved in transmitting messages are finding increased resistance. Opposition comes from the growing number of people who believe they have a constitutional right not to be offended, the truth be damned.

In a controversial painting, Gibbs' interprets the pain and suffering of war. The scene makes you grimace, for sure. You feel the pain, share the mental anguish.

Entitled "Mourning Moslems," the painting was inspired by a photograph taken during the U.S. military incursion into Iraq and Kuwait.

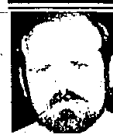
No yellow ribbons in this painting. No smiling soldiers with happy little kids. Some would say this painting depicts war's devastation, which was masked during the frenzied jingoism this country experienced at the war's conclusion.

During the recent Plymouth Art in the Park festival, Gibbs' painting drew complaints. Some viewers expressed discomfort at being made to feel sad on a beautiful day. Festival officials "suggested" Gibbs remove it from the front of the booth and make it less conspicuous.

Festival official Jim Miller was even more blatant.

"My concern is to have every artist sell," he recently said. In short, he was concerned that

We Americans pride ourselves on our freedoms. But those of us involved in transmitting messages are finding increased resistance.



Steve Barnaby

Gibbs' display of "Mourning Moslems" would hurt the good old American bottom line.

HOW SAD, how utterly pitiful. It's frightening to think our values of freedom have become so distorted. Read the Constitution, folks. Nowhere does it prescribe the bottom line as a basic right. Nowhere does it say the profit motive outweighs freedom of expression.

As a matter of fact, profit is never mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. Neither is defense against being offended.

That's why those of us who were offended by the U.S. military adventure in Iraq were willing to put up with yellow ribbons, the symbol of a war which had nothing to do with protecting anybody's freedom.

At every turn we were faced with yellow ribbons. A company, of which I sit on the board of directors, actually had yellow ribbons painted on

their vehicles. Because of a deep belief in speech freedoms I felt obliged to grit my teeth, mumble under my breath and let it pass.

For weeks this newspaper's headquarters were festooned with yellow ribbons. I said little, believing that others' freedom to express their feelings about the war outweighed my distaste.

My personal abhorrence of war comes from the experience of having killed others during combat and living with the lifelong pain it inflicted on the survivors. I've never been particularly good at expressing those feelings.

Judy Gibbs' painting goes a long way in doing just that for me and a whole lot of others. We would appreciate it if those who are offended would simply go off and tie another yellow ribbon and leave reality alone.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor of the 12 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

from our readers

Stadium plan is 'strange'

To the editor:

The story of a new Tiger vs. the old Tiger stadium keeps getting more and more interesting. The latest wrinkle in this fiasco is that Tom Monaghan, after trying to sell his pizza empire and failing to find a buyer is now rumored to be interested in selling the Tiger franchise. Well this news is noteworthy based on the fact that Tom Monaghan and Bo Schmechel are trying to maneuver a multi-million dollar "sweetheart" tax bailout deal with Wayne County executive Ed McNamara.

It's even more interesting by the fact that one of the rumored Tiger buyers is none other than another member of Michigan's Billionaire Boys Club, namely Alfred Taubman. The same Alfred Taubman who is to be one of the representatives of the county in determining the feasibility of the Tiger Stadium enterprise zone.

It looks like, being an enterprising billionaire himself, Mr. Taubman decided that the near \$100 million gift of tax revenue vis-a-vis a new hotel tax that the county was willing to give Tom Monaghan was enough sweetener in the deal so as to entice Al Taubman to purchase the Tigers. With all of this going on it might well be time to ponder the basic question which is:

"Why should a private business

receive a near hundred million dollar government subsidy?"

Clearly, it is ironic that we are talking about almost a \$100 million in tax subsidies for two billionaires while we cut welfare aid for many deserving and destitute people. What an interesting set of events and a strange world we live in where welfare benefits are cut for the poor while the billionaires receive \$100 million tax handouts. Strange indeed, strange indeed.

Mark D. Scully
Mt. Clemens

Thanks to firefighters

To the editor:

Today I went to the West River Theater and viewed the movie "Backdraft." Afterwards I gained a respect for America's firefighters that I don't think I had when I entered the theater.

Almost daily I work side-by-side with the firefighters in whom we at the Farmington Hills Department and the Farmington Public Safety Department. I must admit, I take them for granted.

I strongly urge all the good people of the cities of Farmington Hills and Farmington to go and see "Backdraft." It's too bad we generally only think of those that protect and serve us when watching a funeral on the nightly newscasts. Writing this letter is my way of saying "Thank You."

Next Founders Parade, traffic accident, medical emergency, or (God forbid) fire, please take time out and say thank you to those who are working for our fire department. I believe it's deserving and way past due.

Ofe. James Skrzycki,
Farmington Hills

Thoughts on wires, children

To the editor:

As a grandparent, my heart goes out to the families of little children who are killed by electric wires that have fallen from poles.

But why were children that age left running in alleys and streets unattended?

Secondly, the blame is not theirs alone. Since Desert Storm started, yellow ribbons were everywhere. The little ones got to believing they were like flags to touch and hold.

I always thought skull and crossbones were on poison bottles and red flags meant danger — "Stay away."

It seems that ever since I was in World War II, most of the ones who are hurt or killed by human errors and mistakes are the little ones.

What more can be said but "Bless their souls."

R. J. Hines,
Farmington Hills

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