

points of view

GM loses sight of its roots

WE WERE DRIVING BACK from "up north" early Monday when we heard the news over the radio.

Relaxed from a weekend of skiing and eating whitefish in a northland still blanketed by more than a foot of snow, it jolted us out of our vacation euphoria and back to reality.

General Motors, that blue-chip giant of American companies... General Motors, tied to Detroit like the film industry is to California... General Motors, once upon a time the staff of life for my grandfather's Cleveland, Ohio, die casting plant

General Motors did what we had hoped was unthinkable. It included the historic Willow Run Assembly Plant with its more than 4,000 employees in its previously announced commitment to close and scale back its production sites.

It selected the Ypsilanti facility over a similar plant in Arlington, Texas, after first pitting one against



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the other. It also elected to close three more plants and scale down two others in southeast Michigan, affecting a total of 9,100 employees.

I GUESS THE QUESTION to be asked in all of this is: Why did GM make southeast Michigan bear so large a burden?

Is there no special feeling for the people and area where General Motors grew up and became the No. 1 automaker?

The hurt extends beyond whether you are "auto people," like our busi-

ness reporter Doug Funke of Redford Township. He is the first generation on his dad's side of the family which hasn't made a living in an auto plant.

His grandfather, his father, his uncles all were skilled workers — tool and die makers on the line.

You share the hurt simply because you grew up in Detroit — where even "girls" could sit cross-legged on the curb and call out the makes of the cars that went by.

You share the hurt because you still look up at the Uniroyal billboard, remembering how as a youngster you were proud and fascinated as the numbers changed while you drove by, reflecting the cars coming off the production line. (They change too slowly these days to see in a drive by.)

And you share the hurt because you too felt forced into buying a Japanese car after the last three GM cars had went downhill.

YOU THINK THIS WAY about Ypsilanti, a town you only know because it's adjacent to Ann Arbor.

It's a town which can't afford to lose a Chinese restaurant, much less its biggest taxpayer.

General Motors said it made the decision despite its roots — ignoring the plight of the already reeling motor city and its people.

But it's also clear that GM made the decision despite its roots — ignoring the plight of the already reeling motor city and its people.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric.

This mentality hurts democracy

RECENTLY I read an excellent editorial in an Eccentric newspaper analyzing Southfield's rich multicultural makeup and speculating on that city's chances for safeguarding its harmonious heterogeneity. To run commentaries of this nature requires a certain courage, because I can cite personal evidence that portions of our mostly suburban readerships are less than receptive to this subject.

Yet it's a dilemma that every American must dutifully help to solve, and the solution depends on whether the powers that be will stop hoarding their power and instead democratically share leadership responsibilities and control.

Last year I was an applicant for the school superintendencies in Southfield and Oak Park — a community adjacent to Southfield which is at a similar cultural crossroad. I was granted interviews for neither post, which wasn't entirely surprising. There probably were hundreds of applicants for both jobs, and I never made contact with the Lansing agency they retained to screen can-

didates. Both districts found fine superintendents.

STILL, THE comment of a board member from one of those districts continues to trouble me. Responding to the query of a member of my former Rochester board as to why I hadn't been interviewed, that person said, "Oh, we wouldn't hire him — he's uncontrollable."

This curious adjective pinned on me by someone I never met has also appeared in the media to describe me, and I suppose that whenever this happens I should take it as a compliment. If I was "uncontrollable" in the Rochester assistant superintendency, it was only because there were forces influenced by bigotry and fear that were trying to crush both my multicultural initiatives and me as we well.

I'm not really an unreasonable man. We've got to get rid of this need-to-control mentality that's pervasive among some people in positions of influence. I've encountered that kind of mentality too many times, and it's symptomatic of everything



John Telford

that's counterproductive to the democratic process.

Ironically I doubt that they would have needed to "control" me in Southfield or Oak Park, anyway. Given the diverse nature of their student clientele, their goals for multicultural understanding must surely be identical to my own lavishly publicized objectives. This was one reason I applied in the first place.

DEMOGRAPHIC projections beyond the year 2000 dictate that cities like Southfield and Oak Park are multicultural harbingers of Oakland County's future, Michigan's future and America's future. How well these two cities can maintain cross-cultural cooperation will presage the chances for others' success in this vi-

tal arena that everyone will be entering inevitably and soon.

There will be no exceptions, no homogenous havens remaining for racists and other xenophobes to hide out in, nor will there be any rightful place for fearful and undemocratic "controllers," either.

We have to teach our children — and our adults — that there is no need to hide, hoard power or be afraid. As we Americans approach the 21st Century, we're on the glorious brink of fulfilling the harmonious hopes laid down for us by our founding fathers more than 200 years ago. E pluribus unum — out of many, one.

John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton district. He has been controversial for his programs involving diverse religions and alternative history courses.

Going my way? Better signal!

TELL ME QUICKLY. I have to know now! What is it about metro Detroit drivers anyway? Why in the name of all that is rational do the majority of motorists refuse to use their turn signals?

The circumstances don't seem to matter. Lane changes, right turns, highway merges, U-turns, break-downs or slow-downs. The people who drive this region's freeways at one of two speeds (rubberneck or breakneck) appear more willing to share a prize ring or hotel room with Mike Tyson than to lift their finger to push the turn indicator.

From what I can see, age, sex, race or appearance don't seem to be factors. Sixteen to 86; boys to men, teenage lovers in each others' laps, fuzz buster phone jockeys and blue-haired, bridge-playing grandmas all share the same space aloof, in another world, determined never to signal their intentions as to where they plan to steer their 3,000 pounds of freedom.

IN THE COURSE of a week producing Transition, I average 90 miles a day on this area's highways. It's a rare day that doesn't have me driving the Lodge, I-696, I-75 or the Jeffries Freeway, sometimes all in the same day. That amount of time in a car can cause your mind to wander about a lot of things. Lately, I've been wondering — after dodging yet another car whose driver didn't signal the car was coming my way — just what is behind this peculiar Detroit regional affliction of refusing to drive with common sense.

The other day the light bulb came on: Maybe I'd hit on the answer. Could it be that metro Detroit drivers don't want to give anything away? Play it close to the vest? Could it be just another Detroit survival tactic? If no one knows what you're liable to do next, won't they have to give you a wider berth? You know what I mean, like when you're walking down the street and see an obviously different-looking individual act-



Jeffrey Miller

ing erratically, you give him space, right? You move over.

If my theory doesn't grab you, then think of the alternatives. Indifference, apathy, laziness, ignorance. Which would you prefer, perhaps apathetic indifference? Do you think the Detroit area driver cares so little for his own life, let alone that of his fellow driver, that it matters not one whit if they kill someone by their negligence?

"Laziness?" Are the drivers in southeast Michigan so unmotivated and shiftless that they can't be bothered to lift that lever?

"Ignorance?" Is it possible that they don't know what the signal is for?

IT'S GETTING to the point that on the rare occasion a driver actually uses a turn signal, I don't trust it. I hang back like a scared rabbit or punch the accelerator and zoom past the point of uncertainty.

No, I think the theory holds merit. Maybe it is fear that drives them to drive in this way. Maybe it is a curious Detroit survival tactic. Perhaps it is this population's fear of crack, crime and carjackings and the growing legions of those who would "work for food" that forces these motorists to erect a wall of unpredictability. Keep it all at bay.

I'd like to get these thoughts out of my head. I have to know now! Tell me quick. What is it about metro Detroit drivers anyway?

Jeff Miller, a Southfield resident, is executive producer and host of Transition, airing at 8:30 a.m. Saturdays on WXON-TV-20 and at 7 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays on Continental Cable.

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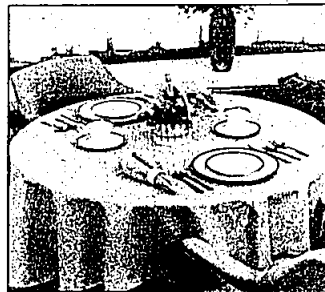
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