

POINTS OF VIEW

School boating classes can help channel grief

My heart sank, as I'm sure yours did, as I turned on the 11 p.m. television news last Thursday and heard that two Detroit Country Day students had drowned on an Oakland County lake at a party celebrating the end of school.

As the story unravelled, we learned that Paul Bradley, 15, a DCD sophomore, and Corey Jones, 16, a junior, drowned in Gilbert Lake in Bloomfield Township when their canoe tipped over about 90 feet from shore.

No life preservers or other flotation devices were on board. Two other students in the boat survived.

Youthful high spirits — none of them alcohol-related — apparently caused the accident. Both could swim, with Paul later characterized as a strong swimmer.

So here we have a seemingly innocent situation. Good kids celebrating the end of the school year. Parents willing to host them in their backyards, taking care that no alcohol was available. Parents allowing the use of

their small boats after asking whether the kids could swim, with one saying he couldn't and remaining on shore. — So how could such a thing happen? Why? And how do their families, friends and school cope with the loss of the two promising teenagers from Detroit?

"Tough questions. And a hard answer to swallow. It has to do with respect for the water and two basic elements of water safety."

• For one thing, lake swimming isn't the same as pool swimming. I don't know whether swim instructors stress that fact or whether kids — or most adults — understand it.

Many of our local high schools require a semester of swimming. Others, particularly those which don't have pools, do not.

Different people react differently when they hit the water," explains Lt. Barry Eriksen, of the Oakland County Marine Sheriff's Division.

• For another, the boat wasn't properly equipped with life preservers.



JUDITH DONER BERNE

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Hindsight is just that. But, Eriksen says, the law is specific for all boats — as small as a canoe or kayak up to

elaborate yachts or ocean liners: They don't have to be worn, but "You must have a flotation device to fit each person on board."

Whether or not Paul and Corey could have reached the life jackets, life preservers or other device in time is always a question, keeping in mind what the lieutenant said about people reacting differently when thrust into waters.

Both personal safety and boating laws are covered in the county marine division's six-hour class in boating safety that is required for anyone age 12-16 who operates a boat. The course is part of the general curriculum in many of our Oakland County school districts.

The class is given at either the middle school and/or high school level in Bloomfield Hills, Farmington, Southfield, Rochester, Walled Lake and West Bloomfield school districts.

"It's not in Birmingham, Troy or any of the private schools," Eriksen reports, saying some districts don't want to give up those six hours from their

curriculum. "In districts where we teach it, our drownings have definitely gone down. We don't have enough (classes) in the schools."

Particularly in this land of lakes, such a course should be mandatory. If the public or private school your children attend doesn't require it, you can demand it. How important is the rest of the curriculum if the student isn't there to take it?

Perhaps the grief of those involved in this tragedy — the boys' families, friends and school — could be channeled into making sure boating safety becomes part of the curriculum at Detroit Country Day, even county, state and nationwide.

It won't bring them back. But that kind of constructive action might help those involved one day face the waters with less misery than they are experiencing right now.

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

Signs of hope for future offer peace to city of gloom

The thought of watching the evening news or picking up a newspaper is gut-wrenching. Bad news travels fast and far. In this city bad news — from kidnapped little girls to off-parked sociopaths — is traveling at the speed of light, determined to destroy our peace of mind. To me peace of mind is precious and is being assaulted on all fronts.

In the past two years we've endured a meaningless war, crippling recession, moral decay, the onslaught of AIDS, plant closings and natural disasters and our peace of mind is reeling. On the local scene, we're confronted with a tragic fire that uncovered the smelly underside of indigent mental health care, and we're hit by another example of corrupt Detroit cops on the take.

Our peace of mind, already shellshocked by trying to deal with the deficit, the advance of the savior Perot, the fear caused by racial inequities and the red herring issues like abortion rights, threatens to burn out through

negative input overload.

Where is the good news to balance the bad? wonder — my beleaguered mind.

Amidst all the gloomy doom that has insidiously impaired the mental well-being of our region, three events occurred recently that signal a potential change, a real reason to hope that the uncertain quality of life in metropolitan Detroit has bottomed out, that an upturn in our fortunes has begun. Taken singly, these three happenings would be events worth noting, combined they present powerful evidence that the times are a-changing. They're proof positive that team work and a can-do attitude will revitalize southeast Michigan.

First came the Detroit Homearama. Detroit, a city which over the past decade had issued just 11 construction permits for single-family housing, became the first urban area in the country to ever host a Homearama. A partnership comprising city officials, bank-



JEFFREY MILLER

ing interests, suburban builders and city residents panted up with demand for new housing combined to silence the skeptics.

The city of Detroit gave southeastern Michigan builders an offer they couldn't refuse: It cleared the land on Detroit's east side, built streets, curbs and cul-de-sacs and sold the lots to the builders for \$1. Standard Federal Bank backed the project with construction and mortgage loans. The builders put up 25 different designs rivaling the

best in the suburbs at half the cost, and buyers flocked to the opportunity in droves.

It's a safe bet that once the first two phases of 157 houses have been completed, retail development will follow and a bright Detroit area will be born again.

On the heels of Homearama came the surprising announcement from Michigan Bell. A new president had been named to run the daily operations of one of the largest companies in the world.

His name is Robert Hurst, and his elevation raises eyebrows not just because of the abrupt resignation of his predecessor, but because Hurst is a black man. Hurst's appointment holds both promise and hope — promise that a company with the entrenched old boy mentality of cronyism and protecting the status quo has recognized that skin color is not relevant to competency; hope that the performance of Mr. Hurst at the helm of Bell may inspire

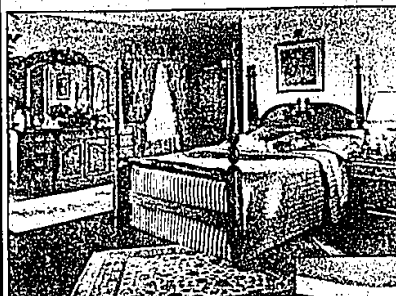
others to achieve their potential and to further shatter the walls of racial mistrust.

Then there's the old Hudson's building. Since 1983, it has sat dormant, a constant reminder of the demise of downtown Detroit, the failure of a once great city. The Defense Department has plans for regional accounting centers throughout the country and Detroit may get one, housed on the Hudson site, providing up to 7,000 new jobs in the heart of downtown. Cooperation between city, county, state and business interests not seen in these parts for 15 years or more has resulted in an excellent opportunity for real change.

No doubt doom and gloom abound. There is reason, however, to hope for the future. I've seen three over the past three weeks. My guess is they are just the tip of the iceberg.

Jeffrey Miller, a Southfield resident, is producer/host of "Transition," seen locally at 8:30 a.m. Saturdays on WXON-TV 20.

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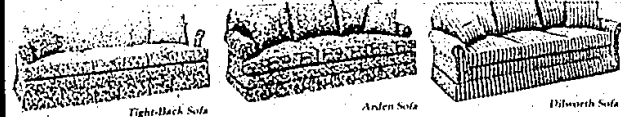


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