

A real jewel

Park needs special care

Dogs, drunks, bikers and roller-bladers, crumb-burn vandals and people out for an "amorous encounter" after dark... these are a few of the complaints Farmington Hills officials are hearing about Heritage Park these days.

Now, we understand that parks and these kinds of problems go together, and an official like Bill Costick, Hills city manager, is realistic about it.

"The park is getting more use," said a candid Costick recently, "and with use you're going to have abuse. The park's really caught on... and we're going through a period of maturation."

For the record, Costick and other officials are very concerned about the recent parks problems, and we appreciate their response, which has been to "double the guard," so to speak.

Also for the record, Heritage Park is far from being under attack from undisciplined. But Heritage is special, not some weedy corner with rusty playground equipment on it. It's truly the jewel of the Farmington-area recreation scene, and maybe it needs special care — by officials and residents.

The park stretches west off Farmington Road just north of the Community Center and it covers 212 acres, one huge hunk of real estate, even by suburban standards.

You can stand in back of the former Spicer home (the land was purchased from the promi-

nent Spicer family about nine years ago) and look across the valleys and meadows and woodlands. As far as the eye can see, it's Heritage Park.

It's been described as "the Hills of Farmington Hills," gently rolling with a tributary of the Rouge flowing through. All sorts of wildlife — deer, raccoon, fox — live in those woods.

For humans, there are wilderness trails, sand volleyball pits, picnic areas and comfort stations.

So, it is a special place. People who use it should take special care. The rules are simple and posted: No alcoholic beverages; no pets or horses; only foot traffic on trails; park closes at dusk; no golf practice; no littering; no bikes or roller blades; no cutting, removing, or destroying trees, flowers bushes or shrubs; and no feeding the wildlife.

While we ask park users to be more considerate, we also have a request for officials. We ask once again that there be better communication, cooperation and coordination between the Department of Special Services, which runs the parks, and other city departments.

Sometimes it's difficult to know just what goes and what doesn't in Heritage. For example: Should little kids be playing around that pond? Is that gazebo really rented out for private parties, and is that a good idea?

Remember, the parkland's heritage continues with today's use.

2 anti-drug plans miss mark

Of two anti-drug plans supported by Gov. Engler's administration, one is patently unconstitutional and the other equals the distance gained running on ice. The Legislature shouldn't waste its time on either proposal.

The first plan, backed by Engler's drug czar, would eliminate the right to automatic appeals if a convict pleads guilty to a crime. Czar Robert Peterson, Engler's coordinator of drug programs, basically says automatic appeals clog the courts and are costly.

He estimates a savings of \$400,000 in attorney fees and a \$2 million savings at the Supreme Court level if automatic appeals were abolished.

George Ward, chief assistant Wayne County prosecutor, agrees, particularly on the backlog argument. "Under the Michigan Constitution, a defendant has rights... the effect of a guilty plea is to waive those rights."

What's forgotten here is that the right to appeal, under any circumstances, is guaranteed by the Constitution. That right is not to be meddled with; it exists for a reason.

The purpose is to guard against incorrect accusations that result in unjust prison and/or death sentences. One cannot put a price tag on an appeals process because that could rob an individual of the only avenue legally available to prove his or her innocence.

And with some factions in Michigan still

pushing for the death penalty, the spectre of mistakenly executing innocent people just because they were denied appeals looms large and is frightening.

The other proposal, Senate Bill 1034, again according to Peterson, would allow citizens to sue drug dealers, allegedly to drive them out of business.

This sounds a bit like suing the Mafia, or any other enterprise that operates outside the law. By definition, these people operate illegally. Why does Peterson think they would submit themselves to, and abide by, a legal proceeding?

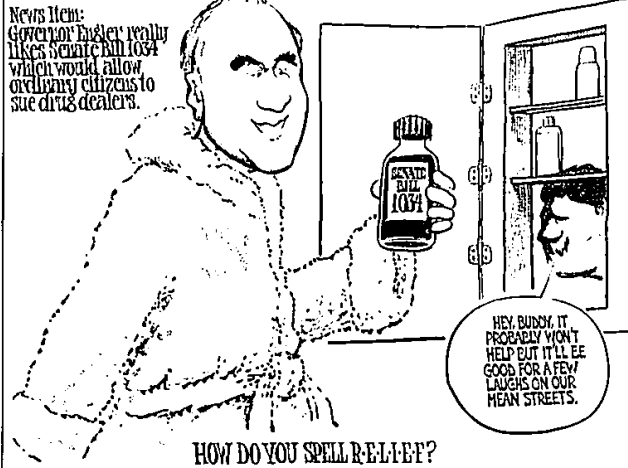
Peterson's idea also allows the government to absolve itself of the responsibility of governing. We elect leaders to make and enforce laws. What Peterson appears to be saying, though, is that in this age of getting government off the our backs, here's something the government used to do that you can now do for yourself.

If we have to do things such as suing drug dealers ourselves, then we question why we need the leaders we have.

Finally, citizens already have the right to sue anyone they wish.

If the governor really wants to govern, instead of tampering with the Constitution or abdication responsibility in favor of letting the public do its own fighting, then more tangible, realistic solutions to the drug problem — instead of these hollow proposals — are welcome.

ARKIE HUDKINS



HOW DO YOU SPELL RELIEF?

LETTERS

More on sled hill

I wish that I did live in a community in which a hill in winter could be a natural place to sled, a hill in winter where it is natural, reasonable, and fair to expect to slip and fall if you attempt to walk up or down it. But no, lawyers had a better idea. They created the concept of "strict liability."

No one is responsible for their own actions and nothing is a simple accident. All that matters to determine liability is who has the most insurance that they can get their hands on — the source of that wonderful phrase "deep pock-ets."

And no one is penalized. After all, it's the insurance company's money. Gee, I wonder where insurance companies get their money.

And what is the owner of the property to do? The moment the owner modifies the hill, they have willfully precipitated with malicious intent the next person to fall.

I question your editorial position to keep the sled hill open. Where is your editorial calling for the courts to dismiss this case and to fine both the plaintiff and their lawyer for filing a frivolous lawsuit?

Where is your editorial suggesting that anyone who thinks they have been wronged by slipping and falling down a hill in winter should do society a favor and stay home?

Address the real problem.

Dave York, Farmington Hills

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Alter board selection process

Michigan Democrats and Republicans will gather this weekend at their respective conventions.

Among other things, delegates will nominate candidates for the boards of the University of Michigan, Michigan State University and Wayne State University.

The Michigan Constitution requires our three flagship universities to have governing boards elected by the people. Only 12 percent of the boards for public, multi-campus universities nationwide are elected; most are appointed by governors or legislatures.

Whether our system works well is a currently relevant question.

MSU, for example, recently was torn and badly damaged by a savage power struggle between members of its board, football coach George Perles and president John DiBiaggio. DiBiaggio resigned this summer to become president at a smaller private school. Rumor has it that past board disunity is hindering the search for a successor.

I happen to know something about this, as I ran (successfully) for election to the UM board in 1990.

The system is bizarre. Nobody knows who you are or what office you are running for, let alone what your credentials are or what your views on higher education might be.

Media coverage is almost entirely lacking. Radio and TV totally ignore the races. Newspapers seldom cover what the candidates say. Excepting the Detroit News and Free Press and the Booth Newspapers, editorial analysis and endorsements are perfunctory.

And because candidates and their positions are unknown, few people bother to vote for the education posts. In 1990 the average falloff from the vote for governor to university boards was 18.4 percent.

Should the system be changed? Attempts have been made. The arguments for appointment sound pretty good.

The election turns into a popularity contest, often determined by presidential or gubernatorial coalitions. The political process at state con-



PHILIP POWER

ventions often is erratic, selecting candidates who are sometimes good and sometimes not so good. Many able and qualified people decline to submit to the nonsense or scrutiny (you pick) which inevitably accompanies a partisan race.

But no system is perfect.

Appointing governors can be inattentive or swayed by favoritism or big contributions, or even corrupt. A 1991 survey taken by the Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities found that two-thirds of presidents were not consulted by appointing governors and that 25 percent thought appointments were made with "little or no care."

In my view, there are real advantages to electing boards. Candidates must campaign, which is an eye-opening reality test for many. And electing board members confers legitimacy on their functions, a standing that in Michigan has produced considerable independence for universities against the whims of the Legislature.

Maybe a good solution would be to return to the system used before the 1963 Constitution was adopted, in which school elections — both local and statewide — took place in the spring of odd-numbered years. With no big races on for president, governor, Congress or the state Legislature, the news media paid close attention to candidates. Voters were informed.

And, most observers say, the overall quality of university governing boards was better than it is today.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

How will Harrison High School — a perennial football powerhouse — do this season?

We asked this question at Harrison High.



'Better than most people expect.' Mark Gloetzer Farmington Hills



'Most people don't expect a whole lot. But I believe we can win state championship with this team.' Jack Delfino Farmington Hills



'Pretty good. They have a lot of skilled players who work well together.' Jeni Rosa Farmington Hills



'Good... In the scrimmage, we did pretty good, scored a few touchdowns.' Tony Mitchell Farmington Hills

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