

POINTS OF VIEW

Buying power of moguls quashes small stores

I had picked out two pieces of luggage, a briefcase, a zippered portfolio and a datebook — all for holiday gifts.

I was about to pull out the old credit card, when I heard:

"You really should wait until tomorrow to buy these. We're having a one-day special — an additional 10-percent-off sale. I'll put these away for you — and have them ready when you come back."

"I'd give it (the discount) to you today, but I can't."

I was surprised. I was in a small, off-price luggage and purse store called Baggit Inc., in Southfield's Applegate Square.

The saleswoman had been helpful as I selected my purchases, and not pushy.

I thanked her for informing me. "I would definitely go back there," I said to my daughter as we left the store. "She didn't have to tell me about the

sale."

The other side is that I probably would have been furious if I'd ever found out. However, that's doubtful. Much to my husband's chagrin, I'm not an ad scanner or coupon cutter.

He always jokes that I feel better when I'm paying more. That's only partly true. For instance, I've been going to Baggit for years, because they have service, quality and value.

However, I must say I'm usually much more excited about finding the unusual and establishing a relationship at a small shop which carries what I like, than I am about getting a bargain.

That's why I was saddened by the passing of two of these small stores which I have enjoyed over the years. In West Bloomfield, it's the Downing Pharmacy on Walnut Lake Road near Inkster.

In Birmingham, it's the Birmingham Bookstore, on Pierce.



JUDITH DONER BERNE

They are small, Mom and Pop stores, which their owners say have been forced out of business because they can't compete with the big chain stores.

"People tend to go to big bookstores," says Bonnie Weinstein, owner of the small bookstore which has been part of Birmingham for 17 years.

Her loyal clientele is upset. "I really feel bad," said Susan Barnowski of

Troy. "It's a unique bookstore. I used to bring my kids in here for books. They're in college now."

In West Bloomfield, where the Downing store has been an intrinsic part of the small Walnut Lake community for 35 years, pharmacist Sheldon Levin said the major chains are chewing up the independent stores and spitting them out.

The independents can't compete because of insurance plans and because they don't have the same buying power, he said.

Levin and his wife, Judy, are the second owners of the pharmacy. When Ed Downing founded and ran it, he hosted a daily round table of neighborhood personalities who would gather around for coffee and conversation.

But that table disappeared some time ago.

Wonder if it was the atmosphere that disappeared with that table, rather than the insurance plans or the buying

power that actually prescribed the end. Wonder if the small bookstore consistently offered the service that was necessary to lure people from Borders or Waldenbooks. Or perhaps it needed to specialize when the book business changed.

Just as the November election clearly taught us there is no more politics as usual, so the recession is teaching us that about business.

In the face of the economies of size and scale offered by the large chains, Mom and Pop must re-evaluate the role of their stores and make changes.

Those who can't or don't close their doors. And we have lost a little bit more of our small town past in which we did business with our neighbors.

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LETTERS

Legislature needs reform

Now that the issue of term limitations seems to be behind us, our focus must change to reducing the size of government. Term limits will reduce the length of stay of each legislator, but will do nothing to reduce the number of legislators. The cost of Michigan's legislative body is overwhelming. In fact, the cost of the Legislature is only exceeded by the cost of ineffective legislation and wasted time spent accomplishing the business of the state.

The fact is, the Legislature spends more time worrying about taking care of themselves than they do about the condition of the state. A case in point is the recent attempt to give the outgoing Speaker of the House a retirement bonus of several thousand dollars per year. The arrogance of our elected officials must stop.

One way to stop the arrogance is to eliminate the two house system and adopt a unicameral Legislature. This would eliminate one legislative body and begin returning the state to the people. Michigan does not need more legislators, it needs better representation and less political rhetoric. A single legislative body would reduce the cost of government and the political

gridlock between the House and Senate.

The adoption of a unicameral Legislature merits discussion and public debate.

Ronald W. Chapman, Troy

Poverty due to fathers

To the editor:

In the above cited column, Mr. (Tim) Richard seems to feel he is doing a public service by correctly, so he feels, pointing a finger at the cause of the rising poverty rates — births to never-married women. He does so by way of several ignorant assumptions: 1. the belief that many people hold about women/children on welfare — that they not only desire to be in that position, but that they deliberately set out to achieve that position by bringing children into the world as a means of supplementing an already impoverished income; 2. the idea that these children/welfare mothers somehow just sprang full-form from the dark depths of society without benefit of a MALE who is renitent in his parental/financial responsibilities; 3. that "saying no" to premarital sex is the answer to curbing the rising poverty rates amongst women as it will, so his logic seems to imply, remedy the

number of children on welfare. I wonder if Mr. Richards know how many children born out of marital sex are products of the welfare system because their fathers financially abandoned their mothers after divorce by not paying their child support payments, or just plain took off without benefit of a formal divorce?

Mr. Richard then goes on to indict the Children's Defense Fund because they do not discriminate against or punish an innocent child for their mother's lack of financial resources in supporting them, and, like other welfare professionals, put the issue in terms of children instead of "deadbeat" parents.

The issue is children, Mr. Richard. And the issue is several other factors as well: a) fathers, whether married or unmarried to their child's mother, who neglect and ignore their financial responsibilities to their children. b) the socioeconomic system in America which dictates that a working woman still makes approximately 40-50 percent less than a working male, even a woman who has more education and experience.

When an already impoverished mother's income becomes more impoverished by having to pay childcare, auto expenses to and from work, clothes, etc., a woman frequently (unless she

has very high income, which the majority of women do not) is farther ahead financially to stay home and at least be able to raise her children. At least one worry about whether their child is going to be abused by child care center workers or other strangers taking care of their child is taken care of.

Yes, there is a rising poverty rate in this country and women are at the helm of it, but the reason is not because they are never-married, or single, or divorced, mothers who are trying to take care of their children the best, and usually only way, they can, which often times includes making use of their state's welfare system. The real reason, Mr. Richard, is the lack of male honor in this country which allows a man to abandon his children and their mother, go off and live his life without the day-to-day responsibility of raising/supporting a child, and keeping a roof over their head, the illnesses, the emotional problems, the home repairs, etc., and keep all of his 50 percent higher income all to himself while he drives a new car, and lives in a new home.

M-Erminia Cassani, Livonia

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