

Basics battle?

A challenge should be met

A back-to-basics battle is brewing in the Farmington School District these days. Well, maybe "battle" isn't the word we're looking for. How about skirmish... border incident... dust up?

Anyway, you can add Farmington to the list of school districts where some parents wish the schools would dump some of these highfalutin, newfangled educational concepts and just get back to teaching their kids how to read, write and do arithmetic.

The so-called basics were good enough for the parents in the 1950s and '60s, by god, and they should be good enough for the youngsters of the 1990s, they argue.

The story of some Farmington-area folks who say they are part of the back-to-basics movement was told on page 1 of the July 5 Farmington Observer.

Now, we're not sure just how large the movement is or how many are involved or how serious they are (thus our uncertainty about the word to describe what's happening), but we do know they are out there.

They say they wonder if teaching the basic skills of math, reading and writing is being compromised in the district's quest for an innovative curriculum.

A Farmington educator countered: "For every parent who is basic, traditional-oriented in Farmington, I have 50 parents that want us to do something in a different way. They want us to be on the cutting edge, to use technology and

push us to move forward."

Well, we've heard both sides, but we're taking neither. We are saying, however, that there has to be a middle ground here, a compromise of sorts, and it's up to school officials to find it.

It's our thinking that the back-to-basics people have made some excellent points and asked some good questions. It's up to the school establishment to answer and explain.

It wouldn't do for the educators to turtle up, surrounding themselves with the 5 percent of the district's population who are their usual rah-rah supporters. It also wouldn't do to characterize the complaints as coming from religious or right-wing nuts.

Actually, if the educators wish to institute new methods of teaching, they shouldn't be afraid to go out there and sell them to the very parents who seem to be so wary.

We understand that times are changing and that the schools have to keep up. But, again, the schools must sell their new concepts. And, before they can sell them, they have to explain them in everyday words that even a parent who went to school in the 1950s can understand.

If the educators take the "This-is-the-way-it'll-be-because-I'm-a-school-official-and-you're-not" attitude, there will be trouble with the people. What elected or appointed official needs that kind of woe?

We hope Farmington school officials will consider the Basics Battle (or whatever it should be called) a challenge rather than an affront.

State produce is real tastefest

Remember when you were a kid and your parents would drive down a country road and see a sign that said "Fresh sweet corn"?

They'd pull over and buy a few ears, then see those juicy peaches that looked so inviting and, before you'd know it, they'd "bought the farm." Fresh fruits and vegetables grown in this area are not only a treat at this time of year, but they are probably better for you than produce grown anywhere else.

Michigan has some of the toughest food-safety standards in the nation, thanks to a 25-year effort to control pesticides in the state's food supply, according to Michigan Department of Agriculture Director Bill Schuette.

That should be food for thought when you



Out shopping: A shopper fills her bag with produce at an area farm market.

check out the Farmington Farmer's Market or the farmers' markets in Livonia, Canton or Plymouth on a Saturday morning.

While it's nice to have the choice of fruit and vegetables from sunny California or Texas when you can't get them here, Michigan has the most variety of any state its size, and at this time of year, those fresh beans, tomatoes, corn and cucumbers are plentiful and inexpensive.

Because farmers truck in their own produce, consumers save a lot of money on high-quality fruits and vegetables while supporting the area's agriculture.

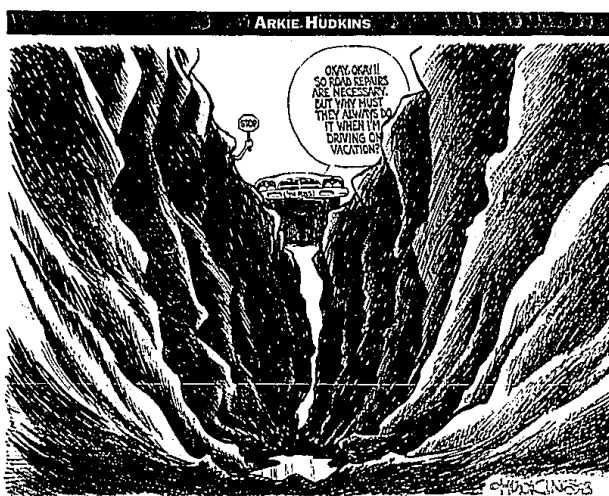
And according to results of testing by the state's department of agriculture in 1992, 100 percent of Michigan fruit and vegetable samples had no or very low detectable pesticide residue levels. That puts Michigan at the head of the class when it comes to consumer protection, a goal the National Academy of Sciences targeted in a recent study.

Those impressive results include foods frequently eaten by children — baby food, apples, grapes and milk. The state also updates its testing methods to make them even more sensitive to pesticides and other chemicals that can get into the food supply.

New farming practices in Michigan that decrease the need for pesticides were used on 36,000 acres, reducing the use of pesticides by 22,000 pounds.

So your parents were right to shop locally for farm products. Farmers' markets are not only a bargain, they are the right choice to make when the emphasis is on healthy eating.

And the tradition of a car ride in the country is worth preserving not just for families anymore, but for the bumper crop of those singles and young 'uns who suffered through Mother Nature's angst last winter.



LETTERS

They say thanks

A big thank you to all who helped make Harrison High School's all-night party such a success.

Following graduation ceremonies at Crisler Arena in Ann Arbor, senior parents hosted "Beach Bash '93," an alcohol- and drug-free night of fun attended by 150 graduates.

Harrison was transformed into an evening beach scene, and activities included a casino, D.J., moonwalk, handwriting analysis, magician, caricature artist, Fun Flick recording studio, hair braiding, manicurists, swimming, fortune telling, all-night dining and an auction. Every grad went home with a goody bag filled with gifts and prizes.

This evening would not have been possible without the generous contributions made by many of our area businesses. Their support and cooperation in partnership with the volunteer efforts of many senior parents certainly made this final high school activity a night to remember.

Sincere thanks to all who helped make this possible. Best wishes to the class of '93. Kathy Barringer, all night party committee, Harrison High School

About that letter

I read Tim Richard's June 28 column through carefully, looking for the connection between his opening attack on Christians and the remainder of the article concerning Huntington's disease.

What possible link is there between Darwin's theory of evolution and the study of human genetics?

One does not have to embrace the as yet unproven theory of evolution to understand the study of genetics.

This is the second time in recent weeks that your paper has facilitated this columnist's vicious attack on a religious group.

The last attack was as far-fetched and insane as this one — carping about parents who choose to home school and laying at their feet the most outrageous and false charges.

Insulting and belittling other groups is not news reporting and has no place in a quality newspaper.

I will expect a published apology or Mr. Richard's dismissal to be forthcoming.

Jeri Van Houten, Farmington Hills

More on column

I write in response to Tim Richard's Point of View on June 28. Among other things, Richard denounces the "religious right" for not accepting the theory of evolution as scientific fact.

Why should we? After all, the theory of evolution is anything but proven.

As proof of the theory, you cite Mendel's work in genetics. For the record, Mendel demonstrated variability within a species through the genetic code. In other words, each species has the innate ability to adapt to its environment. This is what Darwin observed on Galapagos Island, and this is what you and I observe today

when we look at all the different breeds of dogs.

Mendel proves Darwin only if you limit the discussion to within a species. Darwin, however, did not limit himself. He postulated that man evolved from single-celled animals to his present form through a series of mutations over a long period of time.

Unfortunately for Darwin, mathematicians have stated the improbability of evolution. The earth is simply not old enough for all the necessary mutations to have occurred.

As further evidence against the theory, I cite the lack of evidence in the fossil record. Darwin believed that change occurred gradually. This being the case, one should be able to find evidence of this gradual change in the form of transition beings in fossil record, but they don't exist.

Perhaps most damaging to theory is our ability to trace our ancestry back using mitochondrial DNA. Using this approach, a female can be linked to her mother. Interestingly enough, all females today can trace lineage back to a woman who lived 200,000 years ago, but no further. This alleged ape/man mutation was supposed to have occurred seven million to 15 million years ago.

As you can see, Tim Richard, the theory of evolution is anything but proven. In the future you would be well advised to consider all the facts before you bash Christians.

After all, we are to love our neighbors as ourselves.

W.P. St. John, Farmington

Insensitive remarks

I am appalled by the insensitive remarks attributed to Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson, in the Observer article "Linda B. Patterson swaps jokes with Judge" on June 21.

Beyond a derisive reference to Lani Guiner, the respected legal scholar and recently sabotaged nominee to head the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Mr. Patterson directed his scathing "humor" at one of the most vulnerable groups in society: homeless girls.

In introducing Judge Clifford Taylor to the Oakland County Republican Committee as someone who "told his sons to date only homeless girls because after the date is over you can drop them anywhere," Patterson showed callous disregard for the human suffering of homeless families.

While people living on the streets and in the eight homeless shelters in Michigan's wealthiest county lack political power, they are supported by committed constituents: people of social conscience working toward a just society.

The biggest joke that Patterson had previously enjoyed was the removal of his office blinds to symbolize an open administration responsive to the needs of the people.

Reflecting the increasing number of homeless families in Oakland County, the Pontiac Rescue Mission will open a new shelter to serve women and children.

Perhaps Mr. Patterson should gaze into the eyes of a homeless girl, as if she were his own daughter, to recognize the universal needs for human kindness and respect.

Doug Cooper, West Bloomfield

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What do you like best about the Farmington Founders Festival?

We asked this question in downtown Farmington.



'All the crafts... and getting out and seeing all my neighbors.'
Kathy Gillgren
Farmington



'It's a great festival, but I haven't gone in maybe 20 years. I've always been out of town.'
Christy Swayze
Livonia



'I like the crafts best. I enjoy going around and buying things I don't really need.'
Jackie Bowen
Bloomfield Township



'Seeing the people. It's a great opportunity for people to be together, especially families.'
Liz Beckhold
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