

POINTS OF VIEW

Grumpy old men move out to change the world

I haven't seen the film "Grumpy Old Men" but I've met them. And they're so nicely grumpy. They belong to a non-dues-paying, open-to-anyone fraternity they label A.D.C. — short for "Another Disgusted Citizen." Their raison d'être is their concern for future generations. And their motto: "The pen is mightier than the sword."



JUDITH DONER BERNE

At least that's how Tony Brehler, of Livonia, describes it. Brehler, a retired office manager and World War II veteran, over the past year has gathered a small band of dissidents who are willing to do more than just talk about their concerns.

They take advantage of what Brehler calls "the powerful pen" and write letters to the editors of newspapers and to radio and TV stations and networks — as local as the Birmingham Eccentric and as national as The Wall Street Journal — when they have something to say on a pressing issue.

They come from Southfield, Franklin, Bloomfield Township, Farmington Hills, Livonia, gathering once a month at Bob Evans restaurant on Telegraph in Southfield to exchange information and ideas.

But they don't form a consensus: Their opinions are their own.

One way they add to their group is by writing to other letter writers whose opinions they respect and inviting them to join them.

That's how Ray Dubin happened to come to his first meeting. Dubin, from Farmington Hills, wrote recent letters gaoing the MEA and warning taxpayers about the Clinton health care plan.

Brehler saw them and, as they say, the rest is history.

But Dubin breaks the "grumpy old men" mold as he is probably 30-something, the father of a 5-year-old and proprietor of a day care center.

The others are retired (except for R. Thomas Hunter, a financial advisor from Bloomfield Township) and readily acknowledge they have the time to spend trying to change the world. But still they are frustrated that more people don't seem to care or are afraid to speak up.

"How do we get the citizens off their cans?" asks Bill Carruth from Clawson at the group's January session.

"I don't know," Dubin responds. "Apathy is alive and well. Things that are important to me I make time to do. I might get up an hour earlier or stay up an hour later."

"This is a start," says Brehler. "If we can consolidate a group like this — and expand."

"I have friends in Bloomfield Hills who are worried the IRS will come after them (if they publish letters questioning the system)," says Carruth.

"I can't believe we're talking about this kind of thing," Hunter says. "It's about expressing your opinion."

"What we need," says Paul Harding,



Caring citizens: Neil Fraser of Southfield (left), Bill Carruth, Tony Brehler, Paul Harding and R. Thomas Hunter (foreground) talk about how to "get citizens off their cans."

a Livonian, is "for this group to multiply a thousand fold."

"I don't know if the world can stand that," Hunter jokes.

I think it could. Here are people who, after a life time of work, could be indulging more selfish interests or turning inward.

Instead, they talk — and write — about educational reform, children's

self-esteem, their hopes for Detroit under a new mayor.

By the way, they are not all-male by choice. They have tendered invitations to female letter writers (as well as to their wives where appropriate), but so far have not had any takers.

You can reach Brehler at 477-3816.

He'll tell you: "We have no officers (no offices either), no dues or fees and no

religious or political affiliation. We are various religions (never asked) and all independent voters. We are united to express ourselves more fully, and hopefully, motivate others standing at the brink."

Think grassroots — at its finest. Judith Doner Berne is managing editor for The Eccentric Newspapers. You can reach her at 901-2563.

LETTERS

Columnist is confused

If Tim Richard has been reading his (newspaper), he ought to know that Philip Power, the chairman and owner of the Observer & Eccentric, has to be one of the "ideologues" of Michigan school reform who Richard thinks ought to "quit."

In his scathing column of Jan. 13, Richard targeted respected analysts Tom Bray, editorial page editor of The Detroit News, and Lawrence Reed, president of the Mackinac Center think

tank, as "ideology peddlers" trying "to peddle vouchers, charter schools, schools of choice, and a variety of union-busting schemes under the guise of reform."

Phil Power — an ideology peddler? Power cited the issues of choice and accountability among others in his excellent column of Jan. 3. He expressed his dismay that the Legislature did "virtually nothing" about the quality of Michigan education, which supposedly was to be at the heart of the debate. Power charged that the governor and Legislature chose to ig-

nore "proven components" of reform that have emerged nationwide.

Richard said there was adequate debate. Power said there wasn't. In his Dec. 9 column, Power observed that the debate was one of finance and not reform. He quoted sources from across the spectrum of the educational community who stated that our political leaders had no coherent goals or plan for reform, no understanding of the issues, and apparently no desire to find out and to do anything about them. Further, Richard confused "Michigan's edu-

cational traditions (which) are 156 years old" with Michigan's educational institutions and practices, which writers like Power are trying to bring into the 20th century, let alone the 21st. Richard also confused informed viewpoints like those of Power, Reed and Bray with union busting and attacks on our public schools. He probably didn't notice that he managed to label all public school students as "cabbage heads" in the process.

R. Thomas Hunter, Ph.D., Bloomfield Hills

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