POINTS OF VIEW


# Job talk becomes a political constant

Congress is taking a look at how today's youngsters will work tomorrow. The U.S. Senate earlier this month sent to conference committee a schools-to-work proposal for high-school age students.

Today, staff members Sandra Armbruster and Wayne Peal take serious and light-hearted looks at their own experiences in the world of work.

This is an arena in which everyone has had experience. To share yours, write to the Observer, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150, or to the Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009. Or fax your comments to 644-1314 (Eccentric) or 591-7279 (Observer).

"Get a job" is more than just a popular song by the Silhouettes from the late 1950s. It's the politically correct thing to talk about.

"*Jobs, jobs, jobs,*" Jim Blanchard would sing out back when he was governor.

His replacement, John Engler, crooned in his state of the state address this year that not only were *good paying jobs* important, but unemployment was lower than the national average for the first time in 23 years.

Wednesday, U.S. Rep. Bob Carr added his voice to the chorus by declaring himself a candidate for the U.S. Senate, saying the issue was to grow the economy in order to promote — you guessed it — *jobs*.

Making it a quartet is the Detroit *job* summit now in the planning stages.

But it seems that always has been a tune for the times. Those of us attending the University of Detroit back in the '60s studied medicine or marriage, as sometimes still happened at that time. But basically we were there to get *jobs*, and when the university president declared that we were an urban school with a mission to the community and to ourselves personally, we figured he was just tooting his horn.

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**■ Sometimes, when I have the moody blues, I remember those days and what I later learned from those in and out of my career. From a professor: Stay flexible. From Roger B. Smith, a Bloomfield Hills resident and former chairman of General Motors who spoke to our Observer & Eccentric editors group: If you don't like the job you're doing, switch.**

I switched to journalism while in college and found not only a way to earn a living but a way of living.

However, my college career hit a high note while on the job as an editor with the Varsity News at U-D. It's about this time each year that I remember when in 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. came to speak at the original Grosse Pointe High School.

My *job* that cold night, as we crossed the picket line of right-winger Donald Lobsinger, was to photograph King as he spoke before a packed auditorium. A writer by training, it would be the first time my photos would be published.

I did my *job* and got the pictures, but I often wonder how much richer I would have been had I been able to listen to his words.

Sometimes, when I have the moody blues, I remember those days and what I later learned from those in and out of my career. From a professor: Stay flexible. From Roger B. Smith, a Bloomfield Hills resident and former chairman of General Motors who spoke to our Observer & Eccentric editors group: If you don't like the job you're doing, switch.

Some years after college graduation, I met one of the editors I had worked with on the Varsity News during the great Detroit daily newspaper strike the year that King died. While daily reporters walked the streets that year, we published a special edition. I met that former editor at a suburban art show. He said that he now traveled the country — making jewelry.

That's why I'm concerned about a political refrain that is fast becoming public policy — whether we like it or not. There are spin doctors out there who tout training high school students for jobs.

While it's one thing to provide them with work skills, it's quite another thing to train them for one specific job. High school students may still be exploring their interests, and the job market is in a continual state of flux, now that high school grads are no longer guaranteed slots in the auto industry.

Which brings me to my final point. We certainly don't want our youth consting through life without a *job*. But politicians talking about jobs are a lot like country music: They'll always go on whining.

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# *Some get to live out chance for a 'dream team' job*

Michael Jordan isn't my favorite basketball player. He certainly wouldn't bump Magic Johnson or Dr. J off my personal dream team.

But this spring, he is my favorite baseball player.

Jordan, the most celebrated athlete to ever arch a jump shot, is trying out for the Chicago White Sox. I say more power to him.

There's been a fair amount of grousing, from fans, sports commentators and some of his would-be teammates about the appropriateness of all this.

"He's not a *real* baseball player," they moan.

They're right, of course. Even though he can run faster and leap higher than almost all the other men in the White Sox training camp, even though his physical stamina and competitive instincts would leave them in the dust, Michael Jordan hasn't spent most of his adult life as a professional baseball player.

He's only *dreamed* of being one.

In that aspect, he, I and several generations of American men are brothers under the skin.

Baseball was the first sport I wanted to play — ballplayer the first job I wanted to hold — and there are at least a dozen 30-, 40- and 50-something guys in my workplace, and yours, who can make that same claim.

My own baseball dreams died early. Even as a 12-year-old, I realized that my beloved New York Mets had no room for a player who ran as if his legs were sinking in sand and who fielded batted balls warily as if they were hand grenades.

But my few heroic moments — those fly balls that cleared backyard fences,

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those curveballs that sent other batters down to defeat with a frustrated *whoosh* — still burn brightly.

Few kids today share such moments. Today, they play basketball, or soccer, or Nintendo.

Today, baseball is a troubled sport. Maybe even a dying one. If Jordan's presence on the ballfield ignites the interest of young American boys and girls, that would be great.

For me, it's providing a good, solid, vicarious thrill. It's better than any imagined trip down an Olympic luge run; much better than living out the rest of my life as Donald Trump. Or Bruce Springsteen.

Just think of this. Michael Jordan, a basketball megastar recognizable from Chicago to Calcutta, left it all behind for an infinitesimal chance to be the last man on the Chicago White Sox bench.

Or is it all a stunt? I don't know.

I do know that if the Mets, the Tigers or the Toledo Mud Hens called, and if they invited me down to spring training, and if they let me get even one time at bat, I'd dig right in, swinging with all the strength I could muster; simultaneously praying to dear God the ball wouldn't plunk me smack in the head.

If I struck out — *when* I struck out — and if they asked me right there to hand back my bat, my shiny batting helmet and my uniform with the big numbers of the back, I'd not only do it but I'd also walk over to shake the hand of the man who asked me down there in the first place. I'd go home a winner, as proud of my one strikeout as Babe Ruth was of any of his 714 home runs.

That's the appeal of this ancient, pastoral game.

Maybe you understand. Maybe you don't.

But I believe Michael Jordan understands.

*Wayne Peal is editor of the Southfield Eccentric.*

# State coffers are losing bet on funding through wagers

Gambling may be going the way of smoking: down.

Both horse race wagering and the State Lottery are losing customers and yielding shrinking revenue for state and local governments.

Why? You hear lots of reasons: the economy, competition from other states' lotteries, simulcasting of races in Windsor.

I would like to think people are getting smart. Economists say it's healthy when people try to achieve wealth by savings and investment; bad when they try to hit a jackpot with one wager.

Lawmakers look folks square in the eye and talk taxes instead of preying on gamblers.

Horse racing is regulated by the Michigan Department of Agriculture. In the old days, horses were considered a farm industry deserving of promotion, the way apples, cherries and beans are promoted today.

Clearly, horse racing's heyday is past. Ladbroke DRC in Livonia set its attendance record Memorial Day 1952; Northville Downs, May 15, 1950; Hazel Park, Memorial Day 1965.

From the tax standpoint, Michigan's record horse racing year was $28.9 million in 1975. Since then, state taxes have slipped more or less steadily to the $21 million mark, according to the racing commissioner's annual report.

Michigan has been trying desperately to raise the take by expanding the racing season from 590 days in 1975 to more than 900 days currently — even as wagering and attendance have slipped.

It was silly, in my opinion, to expand racing dates because the horse supply is down — 17,000 in 1991 compared to 19,000 in 1984, according to the Senate Fiscal Agency.

Fewer horses and more races mean poorer quality. A decade ago, I went to Northville Downs on a Wednesday night. The first five or six races were "maidens" — horses who never had won a race. Handicapping (rating) horses of such poor quality is impossible — like predicting the weather without satellite maps or looking out the window at the sky. Any bet is a sucker bet. I haven't been back. Obviously, other ex-fans agree.

The Michigan Lottery is having a similar experience. A decade ago, ticket sales were less than $600 million a year. They topped in 1988 and have been slipping since then.

Lottery Commissioner Jerry Crandall notes that Michigan pays out only 45 cents of each $1 bet. State taxes eat the lion's share. The retailer gets a fee.

Clearly, lottery players are making a wager with poor payoff odds.

Crandall thinks taxes should be cut. He thinks legislators blundered when they exempted lottery winners from the Freedom of Information Act. Newspapers used to give the lottery a lot of free publicity when they published feature stories on local winners. No more.

Crandall also thinks lottery fans become distrustful when Lansing doesn't (can't) tell them winners' names. Folks suspect bureaucrats are hiding the money.

Some lottery players believe fervently that certain numbers have "luck," as if luck were a measurable quality like radiation or calories. That's raw superstition, unscientific and anti-religious. The chances that any digit will come up are always one in 10. Ask your pastor. Ask your kid's math teacher.

If gambling casinos ever come to Michigan, I bet they go broke.

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