

Transit truth

Routes must reflect reality

You can't get there from here — not on public transit, anyway. That's what we had to tell an elderly man who stopped by our office a few years ago to ask where he could catch a bus for a shopping mall in a nearby town.

The fact was, he couldn't then, or his trip would have been so complicated with multiple transfers and layovers that he likely would have got there faster by thumbing a ride out on Farmington Road.

The suburban SEMTA lines ended far short of where he wanted to go. Taxi service was uncertain and expensive. That was (and is) life in metropolitan Detroit: If you don't drive, you'll probably walk.

The suburban bus picture has improved a bit since SEMTA became SMART (Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation) back in '89. But the privately owned automobile is still king in the Farmington area and elsewhere in metropolitan Detroit.

SMART has been in the news lately. Transit officials are trying to do a better job getting prospective workers to and from their jobs. "Too often the lack of transportation is the missing link between a qualified worker and a job," said Michael E. Duggan, SMART's interim general manager.

The availability of jobs in Oakland County and SMART's so-called "guaranteed ride" program have boosted ridership on the suburban lines, Duggan and other officials have said.

Still, SMART has its problems, and outmoded routes are chief among them.

Conventional wisdom holds that suburban bus lines survived (with hefty subsidies) only to carry people back and forth between outlying areas and the downtown business district of the core city.

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Here in Motown, that meant moving folks along speedways like Woodward, Grand River, Grafton and Michigan to downtown Detroit, where a lot of them went to work or play.

But with the greening of Oakland and western Wayne counties in the 1980s, the needs of bus patrons have changed. Today, fewer people need round-trip transportation between the suburbs and downtown Detroit.

Many, however, would like to get from places like Farmington Hills, where they live, to Plymouth, where they work. Could they do that on a SMART bus in reasonable time . . . or would they be like that man in our office who had to be told he couldn't get from there from here?

Recently, SMART officials have been studying route changes at several forums (none in the Farmington area, unfortunately) attended by concerned riders and business owners.

Let's hope everyone comes out of the forums with the understanding that cross-suburban travel is equally as important as city-to-downtown travel. The people who run the bus system need to learn one basic truth — all roads don't lead to downtown Detroit anymore.

State still has education crisis

Proposal A didn't solve Michigan's educational crisis.

There is more equity — but still our wealthy districts continue to have more money behind each child. And the quality issue has a distance to go.

Yes, we endorsed it. It was the better choice the Legislature gave us. And after the sales tax ballot fiasco last year, we did ask the Legislature to use its gumption and create an improvement.

But what will happen when millages expire; when Oakland County districts go for "hold harmless" millages, which entitle them to what they got last year per child plus 3 percent; or if they go for enhancement millages to provide extras? We're predicting that voters in many districts will come up with a quizzical "Huh? That's not what the governor said" when asked for renewals or voted increases.

Well they should. The truth is that it takes good money to run good educational programs; however, voters are smarter than many politicians give them credit for being. They aren't going to throw their hard-earned, good money after bad decision-making.

For instance, voters in the Rochester district probably will think twice about future millages after the school board decided to build a school it could not afford to operate, despite protests to the contrary.

Let's Rochester school folks think we are picking on them, there's also the 3.5 operating millage request in the Plymouth-Canton district that voters rejected in June. An arrogant board insisted residents didn't mean what they said and, in August, put the identical millage

on the ballot. That, too, was turned down.

The problem is, school boards don't develop budgets. School administrations, the real operating force in any district, develop spending plans that school boards almost routinely approve.

With the new school tax shift plan, voters in those districts will have to ask themselves how much \$10,700 per student in Bloomfield Hills will buy that \$6,594 in Livonia won't.

There are areas voters should demand that their board look to for savings. Hard as it's going to be to consolidate, these gerrymandered, small districts like Clarenceville and the Red-fords lack efficiency of scale. We all have to ask if we want to pay for someone else's expensive tradition.

Legislators privately tell us that an economic stranglehold on schools will force changes in the way things are done. But default is not the way to alter behavior. Change becomes a monster projected on the wall if not planned for.

And change apparently is what voters are demanding. A survey sent out by state Rep. Jerry Vorva, R-Plymouth, showed that voters' demand for cost containment in schools (retirement reform, contract bids, downsized administration and wage containment) closely followed voting patterns for Proposal A.

So here we are, still talking about funding education and about property taxes when all we want to do is provide a good education for all our kids. The three are inseparable. This year's March madness at the polls has helped but not solved the crisis of quality and equity in our schools.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

An angel in disguise

Patricia Kulwicki was not just a teacher at Mercy High School. She was an inspiration to her students. She can only be described in one word: beautiful.

When I was a student at Mercy, each year a single teacher stood out from the rest. My senior year it was Miss Kulwicki (Ms. Wick). She was pure in heart and rich in spirit. I knew as the semester passed, that Ms. Wick was more than just my teacher. She was my friend.

Ms. Wick was famous for cheering her students up. One day I was losing my mind over all the stress I was under. Ms. Wick stopped me in the hall and handed me a manila envelope, she said, "Jen, someone left this for you in my office."

I curiously opened it and inside was an inspirational book of poems, and a card with a load of encouragement from Ms. Wick. She never expected anything in return, except for the person to pass this kindness on to someone else.

"Don't let those turkeys get you down!" was a familiar saying of hers. I thought it was the sweetest thing anyone could ever do for me, until she again touched my heart.

Often in her class I found myself staring at a fascinating picture of Jesus on the wall. After class I asked her where I could possibly get one. A week later, while I was visiting with her she handed me a duplicate copy of the picture I had admired. I actually started crying.

I have met less than a handful of truly decent souls in my life, so needless to say I was devastated to have lost one of them. The last time I saw her was the Monday before she passed. She had other matters to tend to that night, so we planned to have dinner over the weekend.

As I was walking to my car, I turned and said, "Bye, Miss Kulwicki, I love you!" Little did I know, that would be my final goodbye.

Ms. Wick was well-known throughout Mercy for her "Justice and Pence" class. It was a down-to-earth class that taught students about the real world. Her classroom atmosphere was relaxing, compared to the normal classroom situation. During special classes students were allowed to sprawl out on gigantic floor pillows, or walk down by the pond.

Patricia selflessly gave to everyone and was deserving of a peaceful life. Unfortunately, though, all the really good people are delivered all the tough challenges. Ms. Wick's righteousness was evident to all who knew her, yet she was often treated unjustly.

Deep down in my heart I believe that Pat was an angel in disguise. Through all the trials and challenges life gave her, she was always strong and willing to put others first. There were many who condemned her for her willingness to go the distance for her students.

Those same people claim to be Catholics, yet they shunned her in her time of need. Pat and I

often wondered where all the justice in the world had disappeared to. She was such a selfless person and she should be applauded for her accomplishments.

Ms. Wick offered everyone an invitation into her heart, and those who accepted it will miss her the most. I commend her for being an outstanding person, teacher, and friend. I can only hope that when my day of judgment comes, people will be able to say I touched as many hearts and chained as many souls, as she did.

Patricia Kulwicki will never leave my heart, yet she has left my life. My only comfort is that she is in a superior place now and that she has truly found justice in peace.

And don't worry, Pat. I won't let those turkeys get me down.

Jennifer Garmo, Southfield

Editor's note: A story about Patricia A. Kulwicki, who died March 12, may be found on page 10A of the March 17 Farmington Observer.

So many questions

Why do people have belly buttons? What are their main purposes? Are they a fashion tool for the fashion people to exploit for their own purposes?

There are many fascinating things in our lives. We all have questions about why things are. Why is it some animals sleep in the winter while some don't? What happens to the old records now that we have CDs?

There were many good artists that have been lost because of the CDs. Although there are cassettes, the CDs are a different kettle of fish, though.

George Washington . . . Why is it both political parties claim him as their own but know nothing about what he stood for? Same with Abraham Lincoln. What about the planets in the sky?

Does the movie industry ever make movies without actors and actresses nude? It seems as though the only purpose for movies is to see the other sex nude.

The animals go nude, so why can't we? Why is it that people just cannot be their own self without forcing themselves upon others?

Vernon C. Kleplinski, 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.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Who is your pick to win the NCAA college basketball tournament?

We asked this question at the Taystee Thrift Store in Farmington Hills.



'The University of Michigan will do real well, I'm sure.'
Marguerite Boggs
Farmington Hills



'South Carolina . . . a great basketball tradition.'
Roy Dobbs
Novi



'I'm a Michigan resident, so I'd like to see the Wolverines win.'
Jim Rex
Farmington



'I don't know anything about basketball. I'm just not interested in it.'
Busham George
Farmington

The Farmington Observer

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