

Greasing the wheels Volunteers deserve thanks

*The more you give, the more you get;
The more you laugh, the less you fret;
The more you do unselfishly,
The more you live abundantly;
The more of everything you share,
The more you'll always have to spare;
The more you love,
The more you'll find
That life is good and friends are kind;
For only what you give away,
enriches you from day to day.*

Volunteers... where would be without them? Let's not even consider such a scary thought. Without volunteers, a lot of important work just wouldn't get done.

Americans who help without pay number almost 100 million, according to press reports, and their skills and time are worth just under \$200 billion.

Closer to home, it is estimated that volunteers save the Farmington area's senior citizen programs \$160,000 a year, helping out with just about everything the community offers its seniors from bingo games to world medical relief.

We'd all do well to express our appreciation to volunteers, especially at this time of the year when they're honored officially.

More than 400 volunteers, most of them elderly, were honored at ceremonies Monday morning at the Mercy Center in Farmington Hills. They're the ones who help with the community's senior citizen programs.

Of course, officials were on hand to remind us that volunteers do so much for so many, while saving the city so much money.

"They come in quietly," said one voice from officialdom, "quickly they do their jobs and then they disappear."

Said another official, "You people grease the wheels... you make things run."

Without volunteers, many community programs wouldn't exist. Resources are just too thin to operate everything on a paid basis.

The volunteers themselves ask little or nothing in return for their efforts, and some even seem embarrassed by the attention the officials pay them once a year.

We've seen it in so many communities: Volunteers believe firmly that giving is its own reward. They'll tell you that they get as good as they give through volunteerism, and their service helps them feel a part of the community.

The "Volunteer Creed" — taken from the program at Monday's event and placed at the top of this missive — pretty much sums up the philosophy behind volunteerism.

The annual volunteer recognition program is a wonderful affair. The only problem is that, while it honors so many volunteers, it also misses quite a few. They'd be the Farmington-area residents who do their volunteer work outside of the official government structure, for example at hospitals all over the Detroit area.

Wouldn't it be nice if the community could somehow open up the honors ceremony to include all Farmington-area residents who volunteer?

Indiscretion feeds stereotypes

It's spring and we have a situation in our corner of Oakland County where a few could ruin things for the many. Not one of us should tolerate such a situation.

It has to do with seven men arrested for soliciting and accosting in West Bloomfield's Marshbank Park. That's the most recent example. Less recent, but not less important, were similar situations reported by the Oakland County Sheriff's Department at a park in the city of Rochester Hills.

Most of the men involved were looking for other men. Most of them range in age from 30 to 50. Most of them, according to arrest records in the Marshbank Park case, are county residents and might very well live down the street from you.

These seven men were hanging around near the entrance to Marshbank Park, being very obvious about their intentions. So obvious, in fact, that West Bloomfield police officers had little trouble ascertaining their true intentions and making arrests.

All that does is rekindle memories about men arrested under similar circumstances at area rest stops. It makes you wince when you read it; it makes you wonder what has become of such intangible, yet important things as discretion and good taste.

This is the stuff of which panic is made — homophobia. Reading about this kind of circumstance reinforces the stereotype that all gay men are, in fact, deviants who practice an aberrant lifestyle. If you think that stereotype is an exaggeration, then turn on any conservative radio or cable program and listen to the descriptions.

The key here is not to over-react, but instead to offer a measured response that says anyone

openly soliciting sex in our communities, particularly in our parks, which by definition invite children, will not be tolerated.

There are gays and lesbians living in our communities. If they are stereotypical of anything, it's this: they are college educated, in well-paying jobs, in two-income households, with no children, and lots of disposable income.

Chances are you don't know who they are, unless they have chosen to let you know. They live, and should be allowed to live, their lives just like anyone else, enjoying the privacy and freedom they've earned.

Neither heterosexuals nor homosexuals have an inherent, insalubrious right to openly and publicly solicit sex. In an age where children get many mixed messages about sex, parents and schools are striving to give them a sound education that will serve them well later in life.

Frankly, we think the few who were arrested deserve whatever a judge throws at them. They were foolish enough to dare the system to catch them. It did. Put differently, it would be hard to have much sympathy for someone caught smoking marijuana in a car parked across the street from a police station.

Men have been chasing prostitutes up and down Woodward and across Eight Mile for decades. That doesn't mean all men do that, but sometimes, when the cops make several raids and the media reports those arrests for a few days in a row, it certainly seems like the favorite male pastime.

It isn't, any more than having sex in a park is the favorite pastime for gay men. One of our editors put it well. He said: "People's lifestyles are theirs and theirs to pursue — in an appropriate setting."

Building new bridges



STEPHEN CANTRELL/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Tireless worker: Chuck Campbell of Rochester Hills trades the streets of Troy, where he works for that city's parks and recreation department, for those of Detroit. Hats off to him and the more than 300 volunteers from our suburbs who took part in Saturday's effort to help clean up Detroit.

LETTERS

No sale on smokes

A short time ago, I witnessed the sale of cigarettes to two youths that I know to be 15 or 16 years old. Current Michigan law prohibits the sale of cigarette products to those under 18 years old.

I asked the proprietor why he knowingly sold to a minor. He admitted questioning their age, but shrugged it off, saying, "It's society's problem... and something to the effect, 'They will get it from somewhere, I may as well make the sale.'"

I spoke to him about the illegality of such a sale, and I pointed to a sign hanging over his head regarding this law. He remained unconcerned.

I went directly to the police station, where I hoped to learn that he could be held accountable for the sale I witnessed.

I was told that unless I had stayed at the station and called the police from there, preferably while detaining the two youths as well, a ticket could not be issued.

As a person who volunteers in the drug education field, I am keenly aware of the ease with which youth can obtain cigarettes and other illegal products.

I am aware of the fact that one salesperson saying "No" is not going to change the world.

Given the recent results of the drug survey conducted by Farmington Families In Action and the Farmington Public Schools, 16 percent of the youth in this age group use cigarettes daily.

I have also read that the chances of a youth becoming addicted to cigarettes is slim if he stays away from cigarettes up to age 18. Advertisers know this, and target this age group.

Cynthia Helleck, Farmington Hills

Farmington Hills' most wonderful resource, the woods and fields and hills of Heritage Park.

With its breathtaking hiking and nature trails (one of which is wheelchair accessible), children's play areas, horseshoe and volleyball courts, outdoor classrooms and picnic areas, this beautiful park should be considered a 200-acre backyard to all area residents.

It was a day filled with special moments sponsored by a very special group. I hope next year you'll make an effort to share it with them.

Linda Heard, Plymouth

Drivers suffer

According to Webster Buell, director of the Compliance and Rules Division, Michigan Department of State, Michigan State Police have a department policy that a police officer must issue an "at fault" citation for car crashes or answer why not to his/her superiors.

I have it on reliable word from an attorney that one would be hard pressed to find a local police department in Michigan that does not have the same policy.

The fact is, most often no police officer is witness to a car crash. They have to rely on "witnesses" who may be prejudiced or otherwise unreliable, or use their own best judgment.

With computers in police cars, an officer can quickly run an individual's traffic record and be sorely tempted to issue an "at fault" ticket to the individual with the worst record, when everything else appears equal.

This is an unlawful procedure, but who is to know? Only the police officer knows for sure. If the officer does not issue an "at fault" citation, he or she must answer to superiors "why not?" The temptation and potential for abuse is omnipresent in such cases.

But what about the rights of driver Joe Doakes? Perhaps he was not at fault and he has been trying to drive carefully in order to use up those three years of violation points on his traffic record.

His insurance rates are already sky high and now they will be even higher — for three more years, and he may not even have been at fault.

Police officers are not infallible. They make mistakes like anyone else and succumb to temptation like anyone else.

Who is behind this ticketing policy? You guessed it: The insurance companies. They put pressure on police to find someone at fault because it brings their costs down and their profits up.

It's great for the city coffers, too. These traffic fines bring in a lot of revenue. The insurance companies profit. The cities profit. The drivers, you and I, are the losers.

Kenneth Kemp, Farmington Hills

A great day

On Saturday, April 16, and Sunday, April 17, Team Farmington Special Olympics, the year-round sports program for the mentally challenged, held its second annual Earth Week Festival celebration.

More than 3,000 people attended. This letter is to those who didn't attend. Here's what you missed: an arts and crafts show with delightful and inexpensive items from Special Olympics; a "Trash to Treasure" contest with entrants creating art from "junk"; the spectacular release of 15 pheasants; intricate duck carving; kids flying colorful homemade kites; a scrumptious pancake breakfast; and lots of displays and seminars, along with a touching tree-planting ceremony in memory of a former Team Farmington member.

And all this took place in one of Farmington/

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Would you use an ice arena if one were built in Farmington Hills?

We asked this question at the downtown branch of the Farmington Community Library.



"No, I wouldn't use it... I'm originally from Florida."
Matt Williams
Farmington Hills



"No... although I'd probably be a good community service."
Larry Frazz
Farmington Hills



"No, I'd like to see a swimming pool, something seniors could use. Maybe some nice safe walking areas."
Loretta Lise
Farmington Hills



"Yes. My kids like to skate. Now they have to go to Southfield."
Louie Lopez
Farmington Hills

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