

POINTS OF VIEW

Volunteers make it a better Farmington

Thank you for your welcome smile,
For always going that extra mile,
For constantly doing the best you can,
For meeting needs with comfort and
care,
And serving others throughout the
year.

Volunteer reception program

Another late-April morning... another Farmington-area volunteer reception at the Farmington Hills Senior Center.

It's the same every year: You walk in at 9, anxious about your busy day ahead, hoping the speeches will be short. You leave about 11, wondering where the time went.

It's not just the honoring of the area's hundreds of volunteers (volunteers... where would we be without them?), a noble enough pursuit in itself.

It's also great getting to meet some of these helpful and caring people, and hearing their interesting stories over the

fete food — fruit cups and orange juice. Some of them go way back in the Farmington area.

This year, the woman whose family owned the dance hall on Inkster Road really made my morning with remembrances of old Farmington. And so did the woman who actually grew up on that farm on Halsted Road I've always admired.

They were among the more than 400 honored last Monday for volunteer service in the community.

And, no mistake, the honored volunteers make it a better Farmington. 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 has been 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.



TOM BAER

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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.

I've seen it in so many communities: Volunteers believe firmly that giving is

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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 program in the Farmington area has been a huge success, and officialdom seems to know it has a good thing going.

At the end of Monday's whoop-de-doo, Dan Potter, director of the Farmington Hills Special Services Department and program moderator, asked the crowd for

help.

Seems there's a special election on the SMART bus system coming up in June and absentee ballots have to be made up. Anyone interested was asked to show up at City Hall at 9 a.m. Monday, May 15.

Potter asked for volunteers. I bet he gets a bunch.

Tom Baer is the editor of the Farmington Observer. He may be reached at 477-5460.

Sign of times: Bullies throwing weight around

In times like these, I recall Sgt. Len Kenzer.

Kenzer (not his real name) ran our unit of Weekend Warriors. That was in the days of the Kennedy Administration's saber rattling. Twice, during the Berlin Wall and Cuban missile crises, we were "alerted," a prelude to being called to active duty.

Sgt. Kenzer was ecstatic as he contemplated active duty. His eyes glowed. By God, he was going to crack the whip and shape up the outfit. He was going to show everyone who was boss. He was going to make everyone toe the mark. And more threats.

I asked myself: 1) If this guy wants active duty so badly, why doesn't he leave his family and ask for active duty? 2) If we warriors were so bad, why not shape us up immediately? All of us were imbued with the work ethic.

Kenzer, I believe, wanted active duty so he could push folks around. The top brass would be too busy to hear complaints, no one under him could retaliate. Despite the Uniform Code of Military Justice, a sergeant can make life miserable with impunity, despite what you see in the movies.

Kenzer was a bully. Bullies like to flaunt their authority. Bullies like to push people around, to intimidate, to require others to answer idiotic questions like "What do you think this is, a Boy Scout outfit? Are you trying to be funny?"

In times like these — the Oklahoma City bombing — Congress and the president feel compelled to "do something," to concoct "tough new laws" to protect property and people. About 95 percent of the restrictions wouldn't have saved a soul if they had been in place April 19, 1995. The authorities, however, feel compelled to "do something."

In such an environment, bullies thrive. They have a perfect excuse to shove people around.

This is not a tirade against government or its officials. It's about bullies, the one person in eight who abuses his or her authority. Bullies abound in police departments, in private security firms, in customs check lanes, in federal law enforcement. In the last week or so, I culled these examples of bullying from decisions by Michigan's second highest court:



TIM RICHARD

■ A Ferndale cop pulled over a driver in 1992 and found the car's plates had expired a day earlier. The driver had a suspended license and outstanding arrest warrants. The cop arrested him and prepared to impound the car. Out came the driver's mother, who gave the cop the correct spelling of her son's name (helpful), declared the car was hers (correctly) and refused to let it be impounded (correctly). Mom also used some bad language on the cop (not good).

The cop called for backup and impounded the car — improperly, said the trial judge. The prosecution ap-

pealed, but the Court of Appeals backed the trial judge, saying: "The police officer illegally seized the vehicle. Defendant Douglas was entitled to resist the illegal seizure of her property."

■ A Detroit police officer raided a house at 11:30 one evening and broke down the bedroom door of a man named Watts, interrupting him with his girlfriend. As Watts tried to dress, the cop pointed a shotgun at his head, slapped him, handcuffed him and poked him in the back with a flashlight. Another officer asked Watts if he ever had sued the state; yes, said Watts. Why did he want to take taxpayers' money? asked the cop. When Watts attempted to respond, the cop slammed Watts' head into the wall.

At the cop's request, the trial judge summarily dismissed Watts' suit for assault, battery and gross negligence. The Court of Appeals reversed, sending the case back for trial or settlement.

■ Oakland Prosecutor Richard Thompson seems to be facing a lot of "double jeopardy" appeals these days. In 1990 his office nailed a woman for possession with intent to deliver less

than 50 grams of cocaine; she got one to 20 years. So far, so good.

Then the prosecutor got a grand jury indictment and tried her again, this time for conspiracy to possess with intent to deliver more than 650 grams of cocaine. The jury found her guilty only of possession with intent to deliver between 50 and 225 grams of cocaine; she got 10 to 30 years. The Court of Appeals said the same evidence was used in both trials; hence she was placed in double jeopardy; her conviction was reversed. In addition, the Court of Appeals said the 30-year sentence was invalid because it exceeded the statutory maximum of 20 years.

I say the two cops and the prosecutor are bullies. These cases all started between 1988 and 1992. The Court of Appeals slapped down the bullies. It will be worse, now that Sgt. Kenzer's pals have Oklahoma City as an alibi for their intimidating behavior.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

Exploring the mistrust of government

I want to choose my words carefully here, for this is a meditation on the Michigan roots of the terrorist bombing in Oklahoma City, a serious subject by any measure. I'm groping for insight and understanding, not trying to excuse or justify.

As some part of the plot has to do with farming communities in the Thumb, I started by calling John Snyder, editor of The Farmer's Advance, Michigan's largest farming newspaper and a sister publication to this one. John talked with Dawn Schoen, a sales rep for The Advance who lives in Sandusky, about 15 miles east of the now-famous Decker, where the Nichols brothers live.

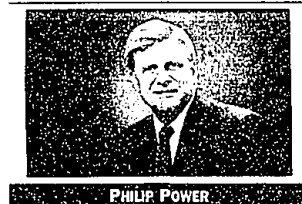
Dawn said that Sandusky last week was overrun with limousines disgorging blow-dried network news correspondents. The sight of uniformed drivers trying to maneuver their Mercedes around the John Deere tractors pretty well illustrates the cultural chasm between the New York/LA media types and ordinary folks in the Thumb.

Could it also illustrate the chasm between horrified ordinary folks, trying their best to understand how something ghastly like this could happen, and members of the militia groups who are also ordinary folks who happen to like to play with heavy weapons and apout words filled with hate? Dawn reports that the Nichols brothers are indeed well-known and well-regarded in the community.

I wondered what had happened to the farmers in the Thumb, that a few of them had concluded that their government was a betrayer, not a friend.

John explained that in the late '70s the U.S. Department of Agriculture had encouraged them to expand, "plant fence row to fence row," take on loads of debt and export to the world. That went all right until the dollar strengthened, commodity prices plummeted, and debt-ridden farmers couldn't make their loan payments. And then came the fall flood of 1986, the worst in memory.

So people think: First the government encourages you to expand and take on debt, and then lets you twist slowly in the mud while the bank repossesses your farm. Surely this is cause for anger, possibly the first whiff of paranoia. It also helps me understand one of the most bizarre aspects of the whole thing: Is this the twisted logic that justified James Nichols in turning in his driver's license and Social Security card and refusing to vote on grounds that everything the government did was corrupt, but



PHILIP POWER

then taking \$36,522 in wheat, feed grain and disaster aid payments from the federal government and complaining that he was owed more? I wonder.

Pill on the increasingly intrusive effect of government regulations. Remember the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, up this year for reauthorization? Ordinary farm folks barely hanging on by their fingernails don't take kindly to letters from the government instructing them to install a new septic field or prohibiting draining that wetland.

And don't leave out the subtle effect of the political and media environment, increasingly filled with violent and demonizing rhetoric. A March ad by the National Rifle Association, headed by Michigan conservation leader Tom Washington, called federal agents "storm troopers," while Gov. John Engler last month gave a speech which argued that America is being "ruled by twin tyrants," the judges and the executive branch.

If our leaders are talking like this, why shouldn't ordinary folks?

Our history as a country is punctuated by episodes of violence and alienation by groups of ordinary folks who are missing out on the American Dream and who feel betrayed by their government.

I knew a fair number of people like that the last time America faced something like this back in the 1960s. They were ordinary college kids, mostly, who felt impotent and betrayed by their government's war in Vietnam. Some of them carried guns; a few blew up innocent people.

We got over that. Finally. And I pray to God we'll get over this, too.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1880.

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