

POINTS OF VIEW

Buses give cold shoulder to hopeful rider

Juliette Jones drives to work in our Oakland County suburbs from her Detroit home.

Except for the occasional times when her car is on the blink.

Then she usually gets a ride back and forth from her husband.

But two weeks ago, when her car was in the repair shop, she could only get a ride one way.

So she walked the four blocks to the marked bus stop at Walnut Lake Road just east of Middlebelt in West Bloomfield, from where infrequently over the years she has taken the bus.

After 45 minutes or so, she figured out that no bus was coming.

It took some major investigative work to track down someone to pick her up. And it took some fine detective work for the two of them to figure out where indeed buses were still running that would take her to her eastside home.

Their first thought was Maple and Telegraph in Bloomfield Township, but no buses stop there either.

They finally ended up driving the eight miles to Northland in Southfield where she was able to pick and choose from a huge assortment of buses.

Jones should have known, you might say, that this spring officials in West Bloomfield and Bloomfield townships had refused to allow their residents to vote to tax themselves for public bus service. So buses no longer run in those two communities, among others.

But she had not had to depend on the bus system in some years.

Besides, the tax to maintain and improve the suburban bus system passed this spring in Wayne, Macomb and Oakland counties.

In most metropolitan areas, public transportation is a given, with many having a rapid transit system in addition to buses.

In short, it simply did not occur to



JUDITH DONER BERNE

her that public transportation no longer existed in selected communities.

And her reaction? Well, if they don't have it why don't they take down the bus stop signs? Well, why don't they? I doubt that this is a one-of-a-kind story. It is certain that every day we fail people dependent on public transportation. And that includes our young people.

A private enterprise, Kids Kab Inc., is attempting to fill a small portion of that gap — at least on Saturdays, with pick ups of youngsters too young to drive or anyone else without a car.

Curbside service will run from West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Hills and Bloomfield Township, none of which has public transportation any longer, back and forth to downtown Birmingham.

They are scheduled for 11 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. runs to Birmingham, with dropoff at Shain Park, and returns at 4:30 and 6 p.m. Initially, service will run through Oct. 15 and you must make reservations (1-800-506-5437) two days ahead.

No, you can't decide on the spur of the moment; no, it's not exactly the independence taking a bus or subway would help develop; no it's only one day a week; and no, it's not cheap (\$5 each way and you must buy a \$30 voucher good for six one-way rides).

But it is an avenue for those too young to drive or without a car to get to the closest thing we've got to a downtown.

If it proves successful and if there is further demand, Kids Kab founder Pam Henderson said they could also institute weekday, mid-day service. Both are down times for their 14 vans, used to scout children of working parents to school and after school activities.

But make no mistake, this is a band-aid on a gaping wound. It will help but not heal. Our towns without public transportation must give residents the opportunity to reinstate this basic service.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can leave her a message from a Touch-Tone phone at (313) 953-2047, mailbox 1997.

Technology is a building block for our future

From crayons to computers, the school world is changing. Not only are the crayon colors changing, but so is their technology. Hey, mom and dad, they're washable now.

There's that word again — technology. Some folks are tired of it, however, they should be grateful for it.

There are those who say "Enough! We didn't have fancy crayons or computer technology in school. And look at us."

Let's look at all of us. When I was young, my best times were spent perusing the shelf or two of new book releases at the local library. Now our libraries are equipped to scan lists of books and musical selections, all via computer. First, though, we need to know how to use the computer.

It's not unusual to see computers at use in college, from hand-held to desktop varieties. One educator recently told me that a teacher said it would be unfortunate for a child to see a computer once in grade school and then not again until in college.

I can extrapolate on that. How unfortunate it would be not to see another computer again until entering the world of work. For years now I've been successfully using a computer, but mostly for wordprocessing functions.

The Observer & Eccentric uses a

program called Quark as part of the production process, particularly in establishing X and Y coordinates for placing on-line graphics on the page.

"X and Y," said my supervisor. "You know, geometry."

I must confess, it's been all algebra to me.

The point is: What our young are learning in school is how to manipulate what's an information explosion, taking that information and using it to the best advantage of us all, in school and later at work or for recreational use.

I first made the link between crayon and computer technology for students while passing this year's display of new school products at a local drugstore.

At the same, the Rochester Eccentric was announcing that a school district in that community was beginning an educational foundation, a sort of fundraising arm to supplement state school aid funding, which has been refocused since the passage of Proposal A.

I remembered that the Birmingham and Southfield school districts had talked about a similar program and Oakland Community College already had a foundation in operation.

In making a few phone calls, administrators quickly said, yes, technology is a good possible use for funds raised. The plan, they said, was to sup-



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plement locally generated tax dollars, not to take the place of them, and to provide for things taxes can't — like modern technology.

"Taxes aren't enough," explained Melinda Callahan from the Rochester school district. "We have to find new and different ways of funding education. From universities with alumni and athletic activities. K-12 is really the foundation of the future."

Perhaps local districts are taking a cue from OCC and Oakland University, which also has a foundation.

Cheryl Kozall, director of resource development at Oakland Community College admitted that, at first, she was a little uncomfortable with asking for foundation donations. That all changed, however, when she realized money sent to OCC's foundation was an investment, an opportunity to "be on the cutting edge for what employers need in five to 10 years."

Supported by the foundation have been projects such as a distance learning center in Pontiac and programs on goal setting and for the learning disabled.

Southfield schools foundation has been disbursing Interlochen scholarships, according to a spokesman.

In Birmingham schools, a fledgling

foundation will kick off its first season in October. In that district, Stan Orser, who is heading up the program, noted that residents and business are expected to continue a long-standing pattern of millage approval and volunteerism in that community with support for the foundation.

Orser admits that Birmingham may have a challenge, in that foundations originally were used by financially poor school districts. But he thinks there are "plenty of reasons why a foundation might be supported by business. A corporation (bringing in a new employee) might say, 'Here's where you can live.' We're one of the perks."

Perks.

Everyone wants to feel good about the community where they live or do business. So school foundations accept any size, or type, of donation.

Certainly a good school district, with solid curriculum goals — and a good community education program to teach the computer skills necessary to improve my work skills and lifestyle — is not only a perk, it's worth an investment.

Sandra Armbruster is Oakland County editor for The Eccentric Newspapers. You may leave a message for her at (810) 901-2597.

Local control issue tips U.S. balancing act too far

The United States of America has survived as a nation for nearly 220 years, undivided and unconquered, for a very good reason.

Meanwhile, the Soviet Union has dissolved, the Austro-Hungarian Empire has been broken up, Yugoslavia has disappeared, its surviving factions have splintered, Canada may yet break apart, and African nations are in chaos because of internal disputes.

In America, our genius has been our unending balancing act between the national and state governments; within Michigan, our unending balancing act between the state and local units.

This balancing act constitutes much of the news you read. In 1787, James Madison wrote about it in No. 10 of The Federalist Papers. "Among the numerous advantages promised by a well-constructed Union," the young lawyer began, "none deserves to be more accurately developed than its

tendency to break and control the violence of faction."

And: "The federal Constitution forms a happy combination in this respect; the great and aggregate interests being referred to the nation; the local and particular to the State legislatures."

Madison's words are pertinent in several current Michigan debates: court reform, handgun control, school reform and urban sprawl. All involve the delicate balancing act between state and local control. It's a debate that was conducted 100 years ago and will be ongoing 100 years from now. That's how we have survived. Neither side over totally wins.

My view is that within Michigan the balance has swung too far toward local control. The state of Michigan, but it has erred by giving too long a leash.

Last week, Chief Justice James



TIM RICHARD

Brickley presented that view. He said the Supreme Court will exert a much firmer administrative hand over trial court budgets and administration, while not interfering in local programs.

Brickley called for simplification and streamlining of trial courts, with their current layers of circuit, probate, recorder's and district courts and their rabbit warren maze of election districts.

Some say Brickley went too far. Oth-

ers say he didn't go far enough because he wants to leave Detroit Recorder's Court alone. The point, however, is that Brickley, like Madison in the 18th century, is seeking not domination but a better state-local balance to serve and protect the public.

Phil Power is writing about concealed weapons (CW) permits, the legal paper that enables a citizen to carry a handgun. In my view, Michigan has erred on the side of giving county gun boards too much arbitrary power to deny applicants their clear constitutional right to bear arms. A system that curbs arbitrary local power and honors the constitution is in order.

The school district follows the same pattern. The Religious Right, in control of the State Board of Education, is fighting a snarling, rear-guard action against the reforms of the past decade: state assessment tests, state accreditation of schools, state curriculum stand-

ards, tougher state certification of teachers. Two governors and a Legislature whose control has seen-sawed between the parties have put these reforms in place.

A few — not enough — minds are saying townships have engaged in a bidding war for business at the cost of the environment. The "urban sprawl" debate, as it's called, says giant companies push tiny local units into granting building permits that destroy green fields, trees, streams, habitat and croplands to generate a few, fast property tax bucks.

Clearly, state law and officials need to set higher standards for local units and make them think of a long-term global economy rather than placating police budgets today.

Balance. Not mere "change" but continued fine-tuning.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events.

Make no mistake: A 'polite' society is more dangerous

An armed society is a polite society.

I first heard the line a few years ago when I was fly-fishing in Vermont, at a state where anybody who isn't a convicted felon or judged crazy may obtain and carry a concealed weapon (CW) at any time.

Now it's at the cutting edge of the debate in Lansing over House Bill 4720, introduced by Rep. Alan Cropp, R-DeWitt, which would do the same thing in Michigan.

The measure is vociferously supported by the National Rifle Association and the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, joined like Blaine's twins at the ship by their common leader, Tom Washington. It's attacked with equal passion by a bunch of law enforcement folks, ranging from Attorney General Frank Kelley to Detroit deputy police chief Benny Napoleon.

Something like 80,000 Michiganians now have CW permits, issued by law-enforcement dominated county boards only after applicants demonstrate com-

pellent reason why they have to carry hidden heat. Conventional wisdom holds that 4 percent — that's 360,000 folks — of the population would try to get CW permits if the law is eased.

Recent polls indicate a solid majority of Michigan residents oppose making it easier to get a CW permit. Big majorities of men, women and gun owners feel accidental shootings would increase, and smaller majorities of each group feel changing the law wouldn't do much about crime rates.

Not surprisingly, the rhetoric gets pretty steamy.

Wayne County Prosecutor John O'Hair warned that passing the bill would allow guns into the hands of "criminals who have avoided prosecution, hotbeds, alcohol abusers, drug abusers and people prone to domestic violence." Others cited "malcontents with a vigilante mentality."

Washington argued that "the record does not support paranoia," asserting there has been no big increase in gun-



PHILIP POWER

related deaths in Florida, Texas and Virginia, states that have "shall issue" CW laws.

Cropey, Washington and their allies insist that the constitutional argument is airtight. Both the U.S. and Michigan constitutions permit every citizen to keep and bear arms in defense of themselves and the state. That's why they say that a state gun board, to be set up by their legislation, "shall issue" permits to anybody who isn't explicitly

ruled out.

I think that's nonsense. Both constitutional provisions deal with keeping and bearing arms, not carrying them loaded and out of sight.

In my mind, the issue reduces itself to the compelling core assertion: An armed society is a polite society.

The thinking behind the slogan takes two steps. (1) The law enforcement apparatus has largely failed to protect decent, law-abiding folks in the peaceful conduct of their business. (2) Therefore, it is only just to allow decent, law-abiding folks to carry guns to protect themselves from the barbarians who rule the streets.

Notice that the perspective embedded in this argument is that of the individual, entitled to protect himself when faced with menace.

If you switch the perspective, however, from the individual to society as a whole, what started out looking like a matter of personal protection turns suddenly into an issue of public safety.

If we let an additional 300,000 Michigan folks carry concealed heat, certainly some hothead with a grudge or somebody stoned or drunk is going to shoot and kill some innocent people.

What's unmarked about this passionate dispute is that everything depends on the perspective embedded in the discussion, whether the law-abiding citizen exercising his right to protect himself or the society as a whole exercising its responsibility to protect innocent people from carnage.

That's why I think the "shall issue" bill is a mistake. An armed society may be a bit more polite than an unarmed one, but it certainly is a whole lot more dangerous.

Refer to House Bill 4720 when writing to your state representative, State Capitol, Lansing 48909. Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.