

Welcome the foes

The choir needs more members

Light the skies, ring the bells and don't forget to thank the electors. Last Saturday, they finally passed a millage in the Walled Lake School District.

Sure, it was just a renewal — 18 mills on nonhomestead property and 4.3 on residences — but the folks who run the Walled Lake Schools badly needed to win one. This one.

The loss of those mills would have had a devastating effect on a district already smarting from voter rejection of several tax proposals.

Voters usually renew mills with few questions asked: there's no tax increase, after all. But please remember this is Walled Lake, that sprawling, burgeoning school district where nothing of a financial nature is ever certain.

Over the past two years, voters have said no to three bond issue questions that would have provided funds for badly needed new schools in the district that covers several communities, including a populous corner of northwest Farmington Hills.

Superintendent Jim Geisler must have been wondering if the good voters were ever going to say yes to school officials' pleas for financial help. Well, Saturday they did, 9,304 votes to 1,385.

We hope the favorable result is a sign of better things to come financially for the Walled Lake Schools.

Officials have said that the district will again try to pass a bond issue next year. What will happen when they ask again? Will it be the same acrimony and rejection? The same

tired, old them-versus-us?

Or will officials have managed somehow to pull together the diverse elements of the school community so that they all can deliver on the implicit promise that public education makes to all students?

That's the real challenge for Walled Lake backers, we think. They have to win over their enemies or, anyway, enough of them so that a bond issue can be passed. Despite all the hard work (yes, we acknowledge and applaud the tremendous effort put forth by officials and boosters in past campaigns) that hasn't happened.

Bond issue supporters can't be preaching only to the choir. That choir needs a few more members, and they must be recruited from the enemy camps that seem to be flourishing throughout the community.

Supporters have to take their message to the foes, and they shouldn't be afraid to take on the toughest of questions from even the most strident of the school-bashing, tax-hating citizens.

If, for example, someone brings up "blackmailing the taxpayers" at a rally, or if it's the "where's-the-money-really-going?" question, officials should offer honest, straightforward answers.

These are real people who are concerned about their communities and the schools. They should not be ignored. If it comes down to "them-versus-us," why not offer the dissidents a chance to join the "us" side. Maybe it's the one element that was missing from the other elections.

Rally 'round education Nov. 29

At this revered, patriotic season of the year, let us give thanks for the institution that kept our country unified and strong. It taught us patriotism and respect for our fellow humans, even those different from us. That institution is our public schools.

Now, however, Michigan's public schools are targets of a counter-revolution. Threatened are the reforms which, from the mid-1980s to 1993, changed school finance to give non-industrial districts the same kind of per-pupil funding that the richest districts had. Also at risk are laws passed for curriculum standards, diplomas that meant something and innovations like student portfolios. Improvement plans and the requirement for accountability to the voters through annual reports also could be lost.

There are signs that the counter-revolution, slapped together by state Senate Republicans, will be stalled in the House. There, Education Committee leaders are splitting the school code changes into bite-sized changes. Other representatives, including Republicans and Democrats, are asking hard questions about the Trojan horse called "charter schools" that senators should have discussed.

The House Education Committee has set a Dec. 5 deadline for voting on its version of improved school quality.

Meanwhile, we note that friends of public education will rally from 6:30-8 p.m. Wednesday, Nov. 29, at the Oakland Schools office, 2900 Pontiac Lake Road west of Telegraph. It is a rally that is badly needed and just in the nick of time. We hope our legislators will attend and pay attention.

As the Legislature revises, updates and pares down the school code, it is time to ask some hard questions about SB 679, the Senate's vehicle:

■ Michigan has 35 charter schools, and the Senate bill will take off the lid. Charter supporters estimate 400 or 500 charter schools will be formed. But what research is there to show that charter academies actually are offering better education?

■ The pro-charter literature says charter schools are supposed to be reconstituted public schools. Many aren't. It turns out that many charter schools were private schools until 1994. They're just getting state aid now, getting around the Michigan Constitution's ban on aid to private and parochial schools.

■ As charter schools drain the state school aid fund, we dilute the amount of money going to true public schools. That defeats the purpose of voter-approved Proposal A, to save school funding.

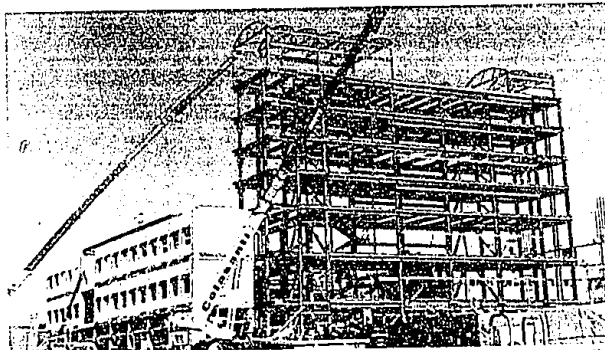
■ And there is a question whether the state has enough dedicated taxes to support the existing public schools, let alone to bail out private schools.

■ The Senate school code bill says the school year will be lengthened by 15 days. Wonderful. But of concern is where the money will come from and how will we pay for longer school years when 400 or 500 charter-private schools are draining their shares.

By now, the curious reader will have concluded that there is a hidden agenda in the counter-revolution's savage attack on public schools, school funding, teacher certification standards, curriculum standards and school improvement plans.

We in Michigan have barely re-equipped public schools to do their job. From their founding in the 1830s until now, Michigan's public schools have played a key role in making ours a strong and unified nation. This is no time for our representatives to yield to the ideological hidden agenda of the "charter" and "choice" counter-revolution.

On the Move



OU Expansion: Construction of a \$43 million engineering and science complex is well under way at Oakland University. Other university highlights include the planning of a \$37 million student recreation center. Also, U.S. News & World Report magazine editors ranked Oakland University third overall among the 122 best midwestern colleges and universities in faculty resources. New graduate degree programs at OU include master of science degrees in physical therapy and engineering.

LETTERS

A big thanks

As chairperson of the Safer Farmington Hills Committee, I wish to thank all the volunteers who dedicated so many hours to the successful passing of the Public Safety millage on Nov. 7.

Your concentrated efforts to inform the voters contributed greatly to the overwhelming "yes" vote.

Thanks for caring enough to be involved.

Betty Nicolay, Farmington Hills

Writer is right

Bravo! Our compliments to Judy Parran of Farmington Hills who wrote Letters, Nov. 16) that she cannot afford more taxes. Our paychecks look like gigantic deposit slips to the government now, riddled with deductions.

Ruth Clark, Farmington Hills

'Partisan bile'

The partisan bile expressed by letterwriters Brozovich and Parran illustrate one reason many of us opposed the direct election of the mayor.

In addition to the admonition, "if it ain't broken, don't fix it," the corrosive effects of partisan politics that we have seen all too clearly at the national level have no place in local elections.

The majority have spoken, so let us get on with good government. In the 33 years I have been a resident of the township and city, many politicians have come and gone. Although I have not always agreed with their politics, they have given their best to make this community a fine place to live.

They deserve our thanks and appreciation. Remember, like the proverbial bus, if you didn't like the last election, there will be another along soon.

James Dermody, Farmington Hills

Facilities are good

It seems that your Brad Emons is out of line again! To the people of Clarenceville, the only thing he ever has to say about the

Clarenceville athletic program is negative. It is true that the football stands and press box facilities are for a Class C school because that is what class the Trojans are.

The field that is shaggy, uneven, and lumpy seems to be good enough for all Catholic Central games and our home games, as well as St. Michael's of Livonia (we will share our facilities, which is not done by the surrounding school districts).

By the way, when was the last time you walked the field or were at Clarenceville for an athletic event?

The concession stand at Clarenceville is operated by the athletic boosters club and has nothing to do with the school district. The concession, along with our craft show, provide funds to award four \$1,000 college scholarships to student athletes of Clarenceville, plus helps supplement other worthwhile programs at the high school, but this is a positive so I don't think you are interested in writing about this.

There are facilities in the area with a larger seating capacity and bigger press boxes, but Clarenceville will not take a back seat to anyone when it comes to facilities, whether in the classroom or on the athletic field. Again, your article seems to be running true to your type of reporting when it comes to covering Clarenceville.

Richard Wood
member, Athletic Boosters Club,
Clarenceville

A great event

We were sorry the Observer was unable to attend the Raider Rake '95 at North Farmington High School on Saturday, Nov. 11.

This was the fourth time students and faculty members from North have donated their time and energy to helping local seniors and handicapped citizens.

Despite the terrible weather, 51 students and nine faculty members assisted 18 residents and provided 170 hours of service.

We believe this is a newsworthy event and that your readers, in many cases parents and neighbors of the students involved, would appreciate reading about the positive efforts of the Raiders.

This is just one of the real-world experiences connecting our students with their community through our service learning program. We invite you to consider some of these projects for future stories.

Edward Davis,
Kathleen Malsner,
service learning coordinators

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:
What are you thankful for?



'My family and house.'
Ada Hughes
Farmington Hills



'A healthy family.'
Karen Blachford
Farmington Hills



'For my family.'
Kathy Brooks
Farmington Hills



'I guess I'm most thankful that everyone in our family is healthy.'
Karen Larson
Farmington Hills

We asked this question at the Downtown Branch of the Farmington Community Library.

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— Philip Power