

POINTS OF VIEW

Skip over the name-calling and fix the system

I being called nasty names could hurt, state Rep. Deborah Whymann would be covered by a dung heap. The second-term Republican from Canton Township is taking verbal abuse such as one rarely sees in the polite corridors of the State Capitol.

"She's a racist," Rep. Ed Vaughn, D-Detroit, told the Michigan Chronicle. "If she's not a racist, she certainly appears to be one."

She's trying to position herself as a force for "the racist far right. She's a participant in the dumbing down of America. She plays to dumb folks and blames the victims," Vaughn went on.

"The only plausible explanation for this rather astonishing proposal is race," said Robert Sedlar, a Wayne State University law professor.

"The minute we get any inkling that they're trying to take our court away, we'll use every legal resource to fight it," said Recorder's Judge Kym Worth.

"I'm sick of these people coming into Detroit and telling us that we can't think for ourselves," said Geraldine Block, a

retired Detroit teacher who uses the mail and talk radio to bash Whymann.

Now, Whymann votes with evangelicals like Alan Crossley, Harold Voorhees and Jack Horton on school and abortion questions. But racist? Her desk is next to my press box station, we chat a good bit, and I've yet to hear her whisper a racist comment.

In fact, those who make aside references to "These People" and "They" are the ones we should suspect of prejudging people on the basis of race.

A lady who's never shrill and who does her homework, Whymann is sponsor of House Bill 4952, to consolidate Detroit Recorder's Court (with its criminal jurisdiction) into Wayne Circuit Court. If enacted, HB 4952 would correct one flaw in a pattern of flawed state laws — the tendency for Lansing to write one bill for Detroit and one for the rest of the state.

In the other 82 counties, circuit court handles all criminal cases, as well as divorces and civil suits worth more than \$10,000. Only Detroit has a separate criminal court.



TIM RICHARD

Ann Arbor doesn't have a separate court from Washtenaw County; Flint isn't separate from Genesee County; Detroit Recorder's Court (with its criminal jurisdiction) into Wayne Circuit Court. If enacted, HB 4952 would correct one flaw in a pattern of flawed state laws — the tendency for Lansing to write one bill for Detroit and one for the rest of the state.

The Legislature made a big, fat mistake when it created a separate court for Detroit, just as it erred when it created a

separate class of school district for Detroit, and separate income tax provisions for Detroit, and separate dozens of other things for Detroit.

Detroit isn't unique. It's a city with about half the county's population. It has a large minority population. It's an old city. But it absolutely isn't unique, no way.

In the last decade, the Supreme Court has shifted jurisdiction of suburban criminal cases out of Wayne Circuit Court and into Detroit Recorder's Court. A handful of circuit judges have been rotated onto the Recorder's bench to help out. But essentially we have an unfair situation.

If I were a black Detroit, I would raise an eyebrow if my neighbors were judged solely by white suburbanites. And Whymann's constituents raise an eyebrow at having their criminal cases judged in Detroit Recorder's Court. Suburbanites have feelings, too, you know.

Since Whymann's bill hit the Judiciary Committee — with a ton of co-sponsors — the Supreme Court has changed the

rules and ordered suburban Wayne County criminal cases back into circuit court. So is HB 4952 even necessary? Absolutely, because the Supreme Court could change the rules again.

In my estimation, Whymann's bill has a single shortcoming that could be remedied easily. It should provide for electing circuit judges from three districts — one for the east side suburbs, the second for Detroit, Highland Park and Farmington Hills, the third for the western and downriver suburbs.

Black Detroiters don't want to see their voting strength diluted by a county-wide election. We all appreciate that view. Whymann's research shows that fair numbers of blacks have been elected to Wayne Probate Court and to countywide posts (Clerk Tools Hunter, former Sheriff and Executive William Lucas). But she tells me she would have no problem with the idea of election districts.

It's too bad she has had to take all that abuse.

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

First Night regroups with great stuff for New Year's Eve

I feel quite sure that barring a blizzard or thunderstorm, this is going to be the best First Night ever seen in Birmingham.

That's because this annual celebration of the arts, presented from 5 p.m. to midnight Sunday by the Cultural Council of Birmingham/Bloomfield, is being re-rooted in downtown Birmingham.

Just like a business that expands too fast and loses its focus, First Night/Birmingham looked to find larger locales for its performances after its initial years of success.

Some were the auditorium and gymnasium of Seaholm High School, the Birmingham Ice Arena, the Birmingham "Y" — all fine sites.

Although there was more room for more people to see the headliners perform, it took the crowds of people off the sidewalks of downtown Birmingham.

And something was lost.

That was the excitement of scurrying

together from one performance venue to another, stopping off for coffee between shows and ending up stomping our feet and singing Auld Lang Syne in Shain Park.

Well scurry and stomp and sing you will Sunday at the sixth rendition of First Night/Birmingham — and at even more downtown sites.

In addition, you'll dance, sheltered but still out of doors in the covered parking lot adjacent to the main Jacobson's, propelled through decades of steps by the Star Trax Dance Troupe. And you'll line dance in Shain Park — as the Gone Country line dance team teaches and performs throughout the evening.

Plus you won't have to miss a performance when you stop for that warm-up cup of coffee or hot chocolate. Four of Birmingham's cafes will feature entertainment pretty much all evening.

It's jazz with Billy Ivory and his special guests at the Caribou Coffee; Rachel and Kapp Ivory playing jazz and



JUDITH DONER BERNE

R&B at Elie's Cafe; The Amazing Eric performing magic from at The Latest Scoop; and jazz from the Rob Rabinowitz Quartet at Lone Star Coffee.

Meantime it certainly won't hurt that Birmingham is aglow with wonderful new holiday lights that shimmer along its streets and at the entrances to Shain Park.

Another first is that First Night/Birmingham has a title sponsor. So just as the Orange Bowl is now the Federal Express Orange Bowl and the Cotton

Bowl became the Mobil Cotton Bowl, First Night/Birmingham this year is NBD Bank First Night/Birmingham.

NBD Bank and the long list of sponsors, many of which have been backers since the beginning, know the difference it has made to many in this and surrounding communities who no longer have to fumble for what they will do on New Year's Eve.

Like the original First Night in Boston and more than 150 others across the country, ours in Oakland County is basically an alcohol-free party that you can attend as a family or with spouse, date, friends or alone.

Buttons that allow you into all performances are \$7 for adults, \$1 for children 5 years and under.

And NBD Bank First Night/Birmingham, featuring 32 different performers and performance groups, can be the whole or a part of your evening.

For example, you can bring your children to the early acts, many of which

are designed for them, such as "Susan from Sesame Street. Then take them home and come back for Elvis and Tina, classical guitarist Paul Vondizano or organist John Cannon among many others.

We have done it many ways, but this year we'll attend 7 and 8 p.m. performances — hopefully David Syne and the Michigan Opera Theatre's "From Broadway to Hollywood" review — with one set of friends, then join others for dinner.

And as 1995 becomes 1996 the national countdown in Manhattan's Times Square will have little on the Oakland County countdown taking place in Birmingham's Shain Park.

Happy New Year!

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. For full information on NBD Bank First Night/Birmingham, call (810) 540-6688.

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