

POINTS OF VIEW

Sense of community makes difference for her



JUDITH DONER BERNE

What brought me there was they denied me my right to vote, she recalls. Her appeal that 'I'm old enough to look out for myself' didn't change the minds of board trustees.

For a third of a mill for three years, West Bloomfield can rejoin the SMART system, which would be tailored to residents' needs.

That's \$32 a year for the owner of a \$300,000 home to assure small bus transport for the elderly and handicapped; fixed routes to get employees to businesses and students to OCC's Orchard Ridge campus; and service on Maple west of Orchard Lake Road and to Metropolitan Airport.

Plus a plan is in the works to offer transportation by reservation for students who stay after school for activities.

She acknowledges still more work is needed. "But it's the start of something that can grow into a really great regional transportation system."

In an age of skepticism, you want to know what's in this for Helene Singer who says, "I've never done anything active before. I've been a sideliener."

Well a few years back, she returned to college and says she came away with more than a diploma. Her experience at Oakland University rekindled some

lung-lost idealism. "I was presented with a wrong," she said of the transportation issue. "It's our right as a citizen to petition the government. Then you get caught up in it. I felt an obligation to see it through."

She has already accomplished her original mission — exploring public transportation needs and putting the issue before the voters.

And she has a lot of faith in those voters, most of whom she believes are civic minded.

"This is not a political issue, it's a community issue," she says. "And transportation is important to the life of a community."

So is a citizen committed to making a difference.

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first met Helene Singer last spring at our hometown board meeting where we both lost the right to vote on public transportation.

After 17 years of life in West Bloomfield, she was attending her first governmental meeting, afraid that the township board might opt out of a county-wide vote on the SMART mass transit system.

"What brought me there was they denied me my right to vote," she recalls. Her appeal that "I'm old enough to look out for myself" didn't change the minds of board trustees.

She found the board short-sighted in its view that, just because few residents ride buses, public transit isn't important to them.

"It seemed to me this decision was lousy primarily on the cost side without any real thought to the benefit side," she said.

Mc. I wrote a few columns on the topic.

Her. She took real action. Singer went back to the township with a petition titled "A Matter of Vot-

ing Rights" signed by 178 people. It condemned the act which both left the community without public transportation and denied citizens their vote.

She called for public input on the transportation needs of the whole community and the impact of various public, private and combination options — with the final decision to be made by the people at the ballot box.

Meanwhile, the SMART issue passed overwhelmingly in 20 communities. And the county failed to come up with viable alternatives for those municipalities which had opted out of the vote.

So she formed Citizens for Smart with seven people and grew it to its present 35-40, both working with and keeping the pressure on township officials.

She volunteered and was appointed to a new West Bloomfield Township Public Transportation Committee.

And the work and information gathered by that committee was key to getting the issue on the upcoming March 19 ballot.

Mischief-makers will cause havoc with primary



TIM RICHARD

state Rep. Greg Kaza, R-Rochester Hills, would allow a NOTA option. To get it through committee, Kaza had it amended to apply only to his 42nd House District in the Aug. 6 primary. If it happens, the NOTA vote would be only advisory.

"In an ideal world," Kaza said, "if NOTA got enough votes, the election

would have to be conducted over again." California legislators are considering such an ideal bill.

Kaza handed me a sheet of paper from Nevada, where NOTC ("None Of These Candidates") has been on the ballot since 1976. Some results are startling. In the 1980 primary, NOTC got more votes for president than George Bush (R) and Ted Kennedy (D). NOTC led the 1986 Democratic ticket for state treasurer. NOTC beat the two Republican contenders for U.S. representative in 1976 and '78 and the Republican secretary of state candidates in 1978.

But the novelty seems to have worn off, and lately fewer Nevadans vote NOTC.

In Michigan, NOTA is supported by Ted Bohlen of Plymouth and Wicky Beeman of Novi, both active in Ross

Perot's United We Stand America movement. "It's time we put an end to the Tweedle Dee, Tweedle Dum candidates choices," Beeman wrote to Kaza. In Michigan's 1992 presidential primary, 5 percent in both parties voted "Uncommitted."

I doubt the "Uncommitted" turnout will be much higher in the March 16 Democratic caucus and March 19 Republican primary, despite the lady quoted in the opening paragraph. My hunch is that Pat Buchanan will lead everybody, in part because of the religious right, in part because of unhappy workers, and in large part because Democrats will cross over and do mischief to the Republicans.

Michiganders are like that. Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events.

The Republican-voting lady gave me her impressions of Dole, Buchanan, Forbes and Alexander (all bad) and asked: "Can I vote for None of The Above?"

No, but you have two other options in the March 19 Republican presidential primary: 1) Write in another name — say, Kemp or Powell or Wilson — 2) or vote "Uncommitted."

As a practical matter, a write-in vote has been a waste of time ever since the demise of the paper ballot. It's hard to recall an election where a write-in effort had any impact.

But "Uncommitted" is another matter. A party may send "Uncommitted" delegates to its national convention. In a tight contest, they could make a difference. We'd have a brokered convention. Just like we had through the first

half of the century. As it is, the parties throw four-day conventions for which the results are known weeks in advance; delegates must spend a lot of money and use up vacation time but exercise no power.

Brokered conventions have an undesired bad name, conjuring up images of bosses in smoke-filled rooms. Actually, delegates often know the inside dirt about candidates. I doubt Tom Eagleton or Spiro Agnew would have been nominated if delegates had free choice.

Michigan Democrats will have "Uncommitted" on their March 16 caucus ballots, too, in case anyone is less than fully enchanted with Bill Clinton.

The idea of voting for NOTA — "none of the above" — has a bit of support. House Bill 4794, sponsored by

Test examines more skills for our school consumers



PHILIP POWER

complaining for years that high school diplomas are meaningless, really start looking for state endorsements while conducting job interviews?

I can sympathize with much of the concern. Examination periods for my 13-year-old son aren't exactly delicious times around my own household.

But at the end of the day, I firmly believe that the new proficiency tests mark yet another milestone on the way to fundamental improvement in our public schools.

Many criticized the use of MEAP tests to evaluate what children learn, on the perfectly legitimate grounds that this was not MEAP was designed for. But most agreed that some data were better than no data, especially if the data gave parents and school people an objective way of evaluating their success in helping kids learn.

Now we have the new proficiency test, explicitly designed to assess what kids actually learn. Sure it will be tough, and certainly it will force teachers and parents to re-think just how they teach and review what they teach.

After all, as they used to say at IBM, "You cannot manage what you cannot measure." Over time, these new tests will provide the customers of our school system — students, parents, teachers, employers, taxpayers — a measure of outcome. And once we have a measure of outcome, we can begin the task of managing the process by which our children learn.

Good luck, 11th graders! It probably won't do you any good when you're sweating over a tough math problem, but you should realize that you are taking the first step in an important leap forward for our schools.

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Starting this week, some 110,000 students in 11th grade will take the new Michigan High School Proficiency Test. It won't be easy.

Covering math, science, reading and writing, the new test will consume more than 11 hours over a two-week period. Much tougher than the old Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) that it replaces, the new proficiency tests stress writing and creative problem-solving skills and downgrade multiple-choice questions.

The writing test, for example, will ask students to analyze their own writing as well as to write original essays on assigned topics. The reading portion will involve three passages on the same theme; students will be asked to identify the theme and analyze it.

The new tests will determine whether students get a state endorsement on their high school diplomas. Given the current climate in Lansing, they will also likely play a role in whether individual schools receive accreditation for full state funding.

Like upgrading the MEAP tests, scoring the new tests cannot be done entirely by computer. The majority of the grading will be done by the contractor which is administering the test for the state. Results are not expected until August.

With the new test, Michigan joins a national movement to assess what students actually learn in school. Seventeen states have tests that students must pass in order to graduate, and three others — now including Michigan — offer a state diploma endorsement for students who demonstrate satisfactory achievement in given subjects.

Not surprisingly, the new tests is causing a fair amount of anxiety.

Kids are worried over the length of the tests and their reputed difficulty. Parents who have seen their 11th graders sweat over the MEAP test are wondering why the kids must go through the whole rigmarole again. Teachers wonder whether they have prepared their pupils properly. Administrators grumble about having to jam an additional 11 hours for test-taking into an already crowded schedule.

Beyond the short-term aggravation, many wonder just how much difference the new proficiency test is going to make. Will colleges really base their admissions decisions on test results, or will they stick with the national ACT and SAT scores? Will employers, who have been

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