

POINTS OF VIEW

Troy has 'heart' when it comes to commerce

Once upon a time, probably before your's and mine, Pontiac was the heart of Oakland County. Then, in the '50s, it shifted to Southfield, prompted by the opening of Northland, the nation's first suburban shopping mall.

Later, Birmingham-Bloomfield had its turn as fashionable stores and art galleries took hold in downtown Birmingham and prestigious law firms, brokerage houses and ad agencies branched out to Bloomfield Hills.

Certainly, a contingent led by the young might say that Royal Oak, if not the heart of Oakland County, has won their hearts in very recent years. And Novi, spurred by the original Twelve Oaks Mall, certainly had its run to be the center of it all.

But, as we speak, the center of Oakland County (now that you can actually drive Big Beaver again) has to be in Troy.

It might appear that the Somerset Collection and its up-and-coming across-the-street expansion are the reasons.

But that's the easy answer.

There are plenty of others, some of which were induced by Somerset and some that were not.

For example, Troy was already a center for businesses, including Fortune 500 companies. So major hotels grew up, residential housing sprouted and the school population burgeoned so that a new Troy High School had to be built.

Troy was chosen to inaugurate, some say suffer through, a new state-of-the-art computerized traffic system in which signals would be responsive to actual traffic.

And Troy has been a leader in the battle to meet the needs of young people by giving them alternative activities to drinking and drugs.

Against that backdrop the long-sought Somerset Collection North was announced three years ago. And since then, the city counts include:

■ Magna International, a Canadian-based auto parts supplier, now locating a \$23 million major office/research park on 32 acres at Big Beaver, west of I-75.



JUDITH DONER BERNE

■ Delphi Automotive Systems, the world's largest and most diversified automotive supplier, now building its \$50 million world headquarters on Square Lake Road east of Crooks.

■ A \$25 million sports complex with a combined ice arena and indoor soccer facility, retail center and housing units for the elderly, planned for John R and Big Beaver.

■ D'Arcy Masius Benton & Bowles advertising agency, now on Woodward in Bloomfield Hills, moving to a Troy site with easy access to Somerset.

Meantime, most of Troy's hotels are upgrading as the city grows as a destination for business and retail visitors. They include the Northfield Hilton, Drury Inn, Courtyard by Marriott, Somerset Inn, DoubleTree Guest Suites and Troy Marriott.

And just two weeks ago a new luxury apartment complex, The Park at Somerset, was announced within walking distance of, yes, the Somerset Collection. The 310 units are aimed at well-heeled empty nesters who may well work and shop in Troy.

As for getting around, two crucial miles of Big Beaver Road have been widened from four to six lanes.

Now subdivisions are feeding more and more students to Troy High School, so that school officials are weighing their overcrowding options.

And, as if to renew their pledge to young people in the midst of all this growth, Troy's city council recently banned cigarette vending machines from the city.

So, it's no coincidence that Southfield has recently launched a major advertising campaign. Radio ads lure prospective homebuyers to "Come home to Southfield." Print ads directed at businesses counsel, "If you're in Southfield, you're in business."

Or that Birmingham is spending \$225,000 to develop a master plan. Seven days of community meetings and a survey of more than 500 shoppers have been conducted. Changes are expected to better define and further improve the city's downtown and immediate environs.

Troy is in its heyday, but other communities improve on their offerings and continue to challenge. Lucky us.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the *Eccentric Newspapers*. You can leave her a message at (313)953-2047, Ext. 1997 or write or fax a letter to the editor of this newspaper.

Halting no-fault divorce wrong way to boost family ties

Hearings are being held throughout the state that could affect the way families live, or at least the way some legislative dream weavers would have them behave.

At issue is the state's 24-year-old no-fault divorce law which state Rep. Jessie Dalman, R-Holland, wants to repeal. The package was introduced on Valentine's Day, with Dalman saying "We speak from our hearts..."

Such silliness. It takes a lot more than a card, flowers and chocolates in a red silk box to keep a family unit together. Hallmark must have been delighted with Dalman.

According to Dalman, there were 39,795 divorces statewide in 1994, affecting 38,794 children. However, Oakland Family Services, a non-profit human services organization, said that the divorce rate actually declined since its peak in the 1970s. That makes one wonder why Dalman et al are so worried about the problem now.

There is a real need for social and economic reform in the job sector, with

transportation provided out to the suburbs where those jobs are. That may be one way to keep families together and off the streets.

Critics of divorce are quick to point to what they call "dysfunctional" families as being at the root of all social evil. That term is usually applied to single-parent homes, but truly dysfunctional families are those where there are signs of abuse, abandonment, use of alcohol and drugs, non-financial support, etc.

It's true that the proposed series of bills would allow an out in such cases; however, they would force the victimized party to show proof of the offending action. More than likely that would take time, be costly and, possibly, could be dangerous.

The only apparent winners would be the legal community.

Adding another wrinkle to the mottled view of certain lawmakers is that if the divorce is contested, complications set in. That begs the question of whom the legal system is trying to serve. A



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spouse desperate to stay in a destructive relationship can only hurt all involved.

But this is an election year, when the state school board invoked the name of God in reaching its decisions, and it would not be unexpected for certain legislators to invoke the family values chant.

Michael Earl, vice president of Oakland Family Services, said: "This is an ill-conceived law that doesn't thoughtfully take into consideration the care of children. What lawmakers don't realize

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is that it's not divorce itself that's harmful to kids, it's the disruption in parenting during the divorce that's key."

Earl added that, if the no-fault divorce is eliminated, the process will become less about "property" and more about name calling.

There are things that could help: 1) high school programs about the seriousness and commitment required in a marriage; 2) premarital counseling that is more than an after thought when the bride and groom are busy with other preparations; and, if worse comes to worse, 3. counseling on how to handle a separation and divorce.

After all, when the divorce is over, mom and dad may no longer be married but they're still parents. As Earl explained:

"Disruption during a divorce process is normal, but anything the legal system does to prolong the period of disruption — making it more difficult for parents to collaborate on the job of parenting — is not in the best interest of the child."

Sandra Armbruster is Oakland County editor for the *Eccentric Newspapers*.

Legislative games mislead the public over guns, gays

The best way to understand the Michigan Legislature's \$30 billion budget game is to think of Junior's allowance.

Suppose Junior gets \$10 a week. That's his, for whatever he needs, be it lunches or school supplies or kite repairs.

But then you decide you don't entirely trust Junior's discretion, so you attach some conditions: He can't go to a certain kind of movie; he can't buy a candy bar for a certain girl you disapprove of. Got the picture?

It's a messy picture. Do you trust him or not? If not, why give him the money in the first place?

Our heroes and heroines in Lansing twice last week played that kind of game:

■ In the State Police budget, the House inserted part of Rep. Alan Crocsey's handgun liberalization bill. The amendment tells the State Police representative on three-member county gun boards to vote yes on all handgun permits except where the applicant is a convicted felon or certifiable looney.

■ In the university and community college budgets, the Senate added Sen. Bill Schuette's amendment that cuts their state aid if they pay health benefits to the homosexual or lesbian partners of employees.

We have some messy bills.

First, our lawmakers have used budget bills to try for non-budget results — more liberal gun rules and fiscal disapproval of unnatural partnerships. Other, cleaner bills that would achieve the same results are stuck in committee. In effect, the lawmakers have bypassed the public hearing and committee procedures by making quick-and-dirty amendments to spending bills.

Second, they are amending acts that have only a one-year life — the fiscal year from Oct. 1, 1996, to Sept. 30, 1997. In short, they have accomplished no permanent change in society's laws.

We in the media eat up such shenanigans. The debates provide colorful quotes about gun nuts and perverts, God's law and social norms.

The great unwashed public gets the impression that Crocsey, R-DoWitt, and Schuette, R-Midland, are in there fighting for America and the Bible.

Personally, I wouldn't mind seeing both pro-



TIM RICHARD

■ Neither amendment will make it into law. Each must go through a second chamber of the Legislature. Each must go through a conference committee when the two chambers pass different versions of the budget acts.

posals become law. Many county gun boards are a farce, controlled by police state zealots who want to disarm everybody but their own kind. And this same-sex marriage stuff is a fact that will go away and embarrass us when we see it in the history books 20 years from now.

But conscience compels me to reveal the truth: Neither amendment will make it into law. Each must go through a second chamber of the Legislature. Each must go through a conference committee when the two chambers pass different versions of the budget acts.

Then there's the most important hurdle of all. To take effect this year, a budget bill must get a two-thirds vote — 26 in the Senate, 74 in the House. Since the fiscal year begins Oct. 1, a two-thirds vote is necessary to give the bill immediate effect. No way will the pro-gun and anti-homosexual amendments survive.

Meanwhile, the glibbie voters get misled, liberals and conservatives can get all revved up, politicians can get headlines and sound bites, and journalists can earn a living.

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

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