A civil community is a well-governed one

he maturity of a community is tested whenever controversy __arises. On the same night — July 15 — two of our suburbs faced contractions issues.

About 40 residents of Beverly Hills

packed the village hall for a public bearing on whether Detroit Country Day, a private high school, could put an inflated bubble over five of its 10 tennis courts so they could be used

year-found.
Trouble was that it could be seen
by residents of the Georgetown subdivision next to DCD, leading one resident to worry that Beverly Hills would become known as "Bubble

It was an emotional issue, in which It was an emotional issue, in which property values and aesthetics were at odds with what could benefit young people. But, wrote Eccentric reporter Lairy Paladino, "There was no shouting, finger pointing or arguing. And there were no bitter words..."
Everyone who wanted to — 19 in all — spoke, with council president

John Mooney working to alternate those who were for and against. By a 5-2 vote, the bubble was turned down, Paladino reported.

quent, Faianino reported.
Afterward, soveral people spoke of
the civility of the process saying it
should set an example for other communities when dealing with contro-

That same evening in West Bloom field, the township board had on its agenda the question of whether an appointed township superintendent should replace the currently elected

supervisor.

This issue also drew a packed house, including supporters of the current supervisor and those of her opponent in the upcoming Aug. 6 Republican Primary. publican Primary. Feelings ran high on the question

reenings ran nign on the question itself as well as the propriety of bringing it up in the midst of an election. Comments were heated. The audience responded in kind. And finally a township resident was physically removed from the podium by the



police chief, according to reporter Je nifer Placinto. Later, he filed a lawsuit, charging he was denied his con-

By a 5-2 vote, the board agreed to put the item on the ballot in 1998, subject to a citizens committee study. In fact little but rhetoric was accom plished, since even one trustee who vote for it characterized it as "an advisory decision."

So I was wondering what might occur in Birmingham at a July 31 forum at the Baldwin Library on a proposed public sculpture by interna-tionally-known artist Alice Aycock, which has been commissioned with private funds still to be raised.

Published photographs and the model, on display in the lobby of the rary, had prompted a passionate dislogue around our towns and in the pages of the Birmingham-Bloomfield Eccentric. In general, those who don't like it consider the large,

abstract piece both unattractive and

abstract piece both unattractive and inappropriate to Birmingham. Those who do are excited by its energy and the attention it will bring to that city. It was standing room only at the meeting. The audience sat respectfully through a presentation designed to inform and educate including a video tape of Aycock in which she explained but the aesthalics of the work and but the aesthalics of the work and both the aesthetics of the work and details of its construction

details of its construction.

Then it was time to hear the views of the community as to why it was or wasn't an appropriate icon for the city. "I feel like yelling out the emperor has no clothes," said long-time resident Betty Gittlen who also said she resented having the sculp.

ture shoved down her throat.

But to Birmingham gallery owner
Lee Hoffman, "It is exhilarating, it is

Probably few minds were changed. No, those who called for a public erendum will not have it, since it is a

erendum will not have it, since it is a gift to the city.

But it was heartening that the forum certainly was much closer to the example set by Beverly Hills than West Bloomfield. And that at night's West Bloomfield. And that at night's end, moderator Dr. William Ritter, minister of Birmingham's First Methodist Church, could thank the crowd for "the civility of the dis-course" — the mark of a mature com-

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloom Judith Doner Berne, a west Bloom-field resident, is former monaging edi-tor of the Eccentric Newspapers and vice president of the Cultural Council of Birmingham-Bloomfield. You can comment on this column at (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1997 or by writing or faxing a letter to the editor.

Religious groups lobby toward national theocracy

ne night last month, Pat Robertson promised his "700 Club" TV audience an expose of the Internal Revenue Service, a federal agency he deplored as danger-ous and tyrannical.

Other media told "the rest of the

 Robertson's Christian Coalition gets an entire chapter in a new book called Dirty Little Secrets: The Persistence of Corruption in American Poli-tics by Larry Sabato (a political scien-tist at the University of Virginia in Robertson's home state) and Glenn Simpson (investigative reporter now with the Wall Street Journal).

The gist: The Christian Coalition was set up as a tax-exempt "social welfare organization" but was quickly turned by Ralph Reed into a political campaign organization, though its articles of incorporation made no mention of plans to do political campaigning. It found itself constantly under attack from the Federal Elec-tion Commission and the IRS. (Michi-gan is identified as a particular hotbed of CC activity, as readers of this column for the last four years

• The Federal Election Commission on July 30 filed suit in U.S. District Court, charging the CC improperly aided Republican candidates with its

voter guides.

• Mitchell Research and Communi-• Mitchell Research and Communications, an outfit well known in the western suburbs, conducted a poll for The Detroit News indicating Republican voters in Michigan are disturbed and divided about the clout of antiabortion forces — their "my way or the highway" attitude.

In reality, there are a batch of organizations that overlap into what is loosely called the "religious right." Michigan Family Forum, an affiliate



of another national outfit, is one; RTL is there with its focus on abortion and assisted suicide; Mackinac Center, though it dislikes the religious tag, should be counted because of its aid to

and advocacy of government money for religious schools.

Nationally and particularly in Michigan, the Grand Old Party has a big problem with the religious right's alienation of moderates. Time Magazine, in its cover story last winter

the CC's Ralph Reed, said it best: The religious right can't nominate a top-of-the-ticket candidate, but it can pr vent anyone it doesn't like from being

Democrats, again particularly in Michigan, have had the same trouble with their iron-fisted domination by the AFL-CIO labor wing.

What, then, is wrong with such groups' playing the political game and winning? Shouldn't we admire them for strategizing, working and winning? Yes, but:

ning? Yes, but:

Both big labor and big religion
have a propensity to label their side
as "right" or "saints" and all others as
"wrong" or "sinners."
Big religion portrays itself as persecuted by government, as under
attack because it believes in hetero-

sexual procreation and Jesus

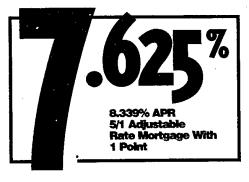
 Big religion's goal is a theocracy, religious control of government. It

and assisted suicide. It seeks govern ment-sponsored prayer, government-sponsored Bible reading, government-recognized status for "creationism" in recipince status for creations in residence classes, government money for religious schools (which first are to be relieved of the burdens of "burcaucratic red tape" such as qualified teachers, qualified administrators and a core curriculum). It seeks churchdominated "parental advisory" com-mittees to make curriculum policy in place of elected school boards and openly-hired administrators.

openiy-nired animistrators.
In 1994 Democratic gubernatorial
nominee Howard Wolpe had a public
employees' union tiger by the tail, and
ti ate him up. This year Bob Dole and
Gov. John Engler have a religious
store but the tail tiger by the tail.

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

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