

POINTS OF VIEW

Computer-ease helps to bridge generation gap

Birmingham's Pierce students and the BASCC Seniors are true partners in learning. Each child e-mailed five sets of questions to his/her partner. Seniors, who were also online, downloaded the questions, answered them using word processing and e-mailed the answers to their partners. The students were guided to write biographies of their seniors by third grade teacher Linda Taylor and many volunteer parents.

"The project was the dream of Sue Pryde, Pierce media specialist, Taylor. It was inspired by a similar program in Bloomfield Hills. Called Techno Pals, the program is a wonderful example of the community at work."

But there were several obstacles in the way: There was not enough available computer time at Pierce. BASCC lacked computers, modems and dedicated lines. E-mail service was not available for either group. So Pryde and Taylor wrote a grant to buy six Alpha Smart Pro keyboards. Their perseverance paid off. They received a grant from Lamb Technicon... on the third try.

Mike Wegener, of Emcee Corp., a local consulting firm, came to our rescue with a computer and modem for BASCC and E-mail service for all, as well as technical support. A BASCC member moved the fax line to the computer room to use with the modem. Training of seniors and other technical support were provided by Pierce Media Techs, Roberta Bolik and myself. Gina Potherick, a Pierce parent, and Roy Wheatley, retired from Burroughs, provided additional support at Pierce and BASCC respectively. Marion King handled BASCC communications.

"Our society does not reverse its elders as some cultures do, and often extended families don't have the priorities they had in the past. As I listened to one child, the value of the program became clear. He was reading the answer to the question "What kinds of beliefs and values do you think your parents tried to teach you?" Part of the answer was "The Golden Rule." The child got to the end and said "Can I ask you a question? What is the Golden Rule?" They launched into a discussion. "Families are so spread out and so busy that discussions like this don't take place very often. Seniors linked to children fill this important gap. Children sat down with their e-mail partners to read the final biography, and it was like they had known each other for years. Some exchanged home e-mail addresses to continue communicating."



JACQUIE THIEL

The next important benefit of the program was the living history and geography lesson the children received, not to mention the writing lessons when they put the biographies together. One senior talked about his grandfather taking the family wash tub and going on an adventure sailing across the Bosphorus Straits. They were in trouble when the plug came out of the tub, but fortunately were picked up by a passing fishing boat.

One man told of his grandfather courting his grandmother. He lived quite a way from her house by horse and buggy. When it was time for him to go home, if he was tired, he would climb into the buggy, tell the horse to go home, and was awakened by the whinny of the horse when they were safely home. Some told of getting their first automobiles, indoor plumbing and heating. One woman remembered seeing Franklin D. Roosevelt on one of his whistle stop tours.

Seniors profited from the program, too. One senior started e-mailing his 90-year-old mother, who eagerly awaits his messages. She said she has learned some things she didn't know about her son, after reading his answers to the children's questions.

The Techno Pals program really influenced three generations. There were a number of parents of third graders who volunteered to work with the children on condensing, paraphrasing and editing of their work. One parent said how touched she was to read the answers and wished she had such information about her parents.

I personally met some people who are wonderful examples of vibrant human beings who quietly contribute a great deal to the life and spirit of our community.

Four Mac Classic II computers have been donated to BASCC for use by the seniors. This year there were only two computers and one modem for 26 seniors.

The Techno Pals program is one which could be used for any grade level. The combination of older wisdom guiding children who have such unquenchable curiosity is something we desperately need in our society.

As Sue Pryde said: "Here is an example of something that became bigger and more far-reaching than we ever dreamed."

Jacquie Thiel is a media technician at Pierce School in Birmingham.

Caring people learn lessons from tragedy



JUDITH DONER BERNE

I had not heard from her in 10 years. But earlier on the day that a series of tornadoes wreaked death and destruction on several Oakland and Wayne County communities, the woman who successfully prodded Redford Township to install tornado warning sirens left a message at my home.

Florence Burke called about a different matter. But fearing that I had forgotten who she was, she linked herself to the tornado warning system to identify how she knew me back in the mid-'80s when I edited the Redford Observer.

The coincidence became evident as I heard the tornado warning system wail soon after I finished returning her call later that day.

As I rushed to the kitchen window to appraise the darkened skies, I recalled a similar view out that same window 21 years ago. That was when, on an early Saturday evening in March 1976, a tornado spun across West Bloomfield, touching down within a couple blocks of my home.

We were very lucky. All we lost was several days of power. Many of my friends and neighbors lost their houses. Businesses were damaged or destroyed. Several people were injured. One young woman, riding in a car on Maple near Orchard Lake Road, lost her life in the path of the errant wind.

My first thought was that my daughter was probably on her way to pick up my granddaughter at the daycare center she attends on Maple Road, just a few blocks west of where that tragedy occurred.

Luckily, these days are different. With cellular phones relatively commonplace, I was able to reach my daughter in her car and confirm that they were safe and nearby home.

Most important, Oakland County now has a system of 160 tornado sirens. It was a huge endeavor, a direct result of that March day in 1976 when we had no warning. Back then, as I looked out at a sky that appeared to be dyed a strange shade of gray-green, I didn't know that it could harbor a tornado. This time I knew all too well.

More than 21 years later, I can still see the yellow-helmeted Oakland County workers and National Guard fanned out across my neighbors'

lawns and gardens... the Red Cross workers set up at tables offering doughnuts and coffee... the tumble of bricks and sticks, shingles and glass that once were places where parents tucked their children into beds.

Now residents of northwest Oakland County, Hamtramck, Highland Park, the Pointes and a portion of Detroit unfortunately also know those indelible scenes of destruction. As we mourn those who died, we marvel at the stories of near misses, some due to the tornado warning sirens and radio and television alerts of treacherous weather which began when a tornado watch was issued shortly after 1 p.m.

The lack of serious injuries and more deaths is an indication that the warning system — sirens, radio, TV — was effective, said Gail Novak, chief of Oakland County's emergency management unit. When the sirens sounded, for example, students and teachers at the Farmington Hills campus of Oakland Community College were moved from upper floor classrooms to safer ground. At Somerset Mall in Troy, customers and employees were ordered to a well-sheltered area until the warning expired.

Burke fought for four years to win a tornado warning system for her corner of the world. "I started out with a couple of file cards and ended up with a whole volume," she said. And shortly after our conversation, she heard the siren go off in her neighborhood and headed for the basement. "I think," she says, putting in those sirens "was the best thing we've ever done."

We need more Florence Burkes. And we have them. From the moment the storm struck off, individuals, agencies, corporations and governments rallied to aid the injured and those who lost loved ones, to help rebuild homes and businesses, to sustain a sense of community. Now, as then, the worst of mother nature brings out the best in human nature.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can comment on this column by calling (313)953-2047, Ext. 1097 or by writing or faxing, (810)644-1314. Sandra Armbruster who edits these opinion pages.

Clout clobbers open meetings

"The seat of government shall be at Lansing," so says Art. III sec. 1 of the Michigan Constitution, as approved by voters.

Lansing was picked in 1847 because it is more centrally located than Detroit, the previous capital.

Tell that to the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce. With its clout, the Detroit chamber was able to relocate the seat of government to a rocky island in northern Lake Huron from May 29 to June 1. The assemblage is called "the Mackinac Conference." The chamber has been doing it for 17 years. In the words of one of my media brothers, "it gets the movers and shakers away from ringing phones for a frank discussion of the future of southeastern Michigan."

Bill McMaster protests. McMaster, 58, of Birmingham, is president of Taxpayers United and spends more time battling tax and public access issues than he does on his marketing and public relations business.

McMaster is a red-fused gadfly who constantly denounces public officials with the bellicosity of an archangel, which ranks him above appellate courts, popes, saints and angels. For this reason, a lot of people dislike him. For this reason, he and I are buddies.

McMaster filed a complaint with Attorney General Frank J. Kelley about the Mackinac conference, contending it violated the Open Meetings Act.

"It is my understanding that more than a quorum of the 38 Michigan senators, 110 members of the Michigan House of Representatives, nine Detroit city council persons and 16 Wayne County commissioners have accepted expensive invitations from the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce to participate in meetings on 'public policy issues,'" said his book-length complaint. Everything McMaster writes is book length. I'll have to talk to him about that.

Without question, the legislature he cites met without posting notices as required by sec. 4 of the Open Meetings Act. Without question, they discussed public business, a violation of sec. 3 (3) of the OMA.

Public access, as required by sec. 3 (1) of OMA? Forget it. McMaster offered to buy his way in for \$760 and was told it was "sold out." He wanted to rent a hotel conference room to



TIM RICHARD

hold a news conference on behalf of Taxpayers United. "It's not possible. All accommodations for the Grand Hotel and the seven other hotels on Mackinac Island must be handled through the Greater Detroit Chamber of Commerce, and all facilities have been booked," he quotes chamber staffer Earlene Williams as saying.

Only people connected with the chamber had access to the press room. That's unlike the State Capitol, where any clothed person can walk in and drop a news release in my box No. 27.

McMaster has written to Kelley three times without result. I figured as much. Kelley, though he possesses the wisdom of Holy Brendan and the valor of the mighty Cuchulainn, isn't crazy. He would never prosecute the Legislature three weeks before it approves his budget.

I contend the situation is worse than McMaster says it is. This is more than lawmakers violating the OMA. It's the governor, county executives and a big-city mayor talking shop with the brass of General Motors, manufacturers and the like.

Environmentalists were left out. Housewives, mechanics, mom-'n'-pop hardware store owners, plumbers, cosmetologists and other folks of humble means were excluded, unable to hear let alone rebut the big shots' line.

The chamber effectively removed the state capital from Lansing. It was an outrageous thing to do, and it should be stopped.

If saying that puts me in a category with Bill McMaster, I'm honored.

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

Do you love history?

Don't miss these upcoming events at Greenfield Village:

Old-Fashioned Summer Evenings
July 24 - 26
Open 'til 9 pm! Experience the magic of twilight in the village. Enjoy a carriage ride at sunset, climb aboard a train, play a game of quills and more.

Celebration of Emancipation
August 2 & 3
Meet a "Buffalo Soldier," hear about the Underground Railroad, visit the encampment of the Civil War's famed U.S. Colored Troops as African-American history comes alive with stories, songs and demonstrations.

Old Car Festival
September 6 & 7
It's the only car show of its kind, with vehicles from 1932 and earlier. See 2-cylinder engines, the first "self-starters," and a Model T assembled right before your eyes. Even ride in a vintage car or on a high wheel bike!

Railroad Days
September 20 & 21
See vintage train cars and locomotives chug around the village. Turn a 30-ton locomotive on a turn-table. Visit a fiddle playing hobo in his camp. Even eat a railroader's lunch made from a 19th-century hobo bread recipe!

A Full Year of Fun
To learn how you can become a member and enjoy free unlimited admission, call the Membership Office at (313) 982-6116.

Summer Festival sponsored by

Indulge in all kinds of authentic foods during A Taste of History, July 17-20.

Although the authentic recipes at A Taste of History have been around for centuries, you'll surely be trying them for the first time... unless of course you're over 200 years old! Under our giant "Tent you can indulge in Dutch Kiss Cookies, Mohawk Corn, Black Pot Soup, and Scalloped Chicken, just to name a few. Take in the aroma of each as they are prepared throughout the village. Join in the fun of food games like a 1800s ball game, dances to a live brass band and more.

Sponsored by ANR Pipeline Company.

For more information call (313) 271-1620. Open 9 am-5 pm daily. Open 9 am-8 pm July 17-19.

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