

POINTS OF VIEW

Narrow liquor policy hurting small boutiques

Birmingham is justly proud that it's a mainstreet community and not a mall. It points to its boutique-lined streets — one-of-a-kind shops, antique stores, art galleries, individually-owned day spas, "charming, boutique hotel" (according to the Zagat Survey) and intimate yet state-of-the-art film theater — as hard evidence that Birmingham offers an experience no mall has duplicated.

Over the past few years, it has added a bevy of interesting restaurants — coffee houses and Coney's, middle eastern and Asian, bistros and nouveau American — which have changed Birmingham into much more of an eating-out town. Still, as recently as two years ago, no Birmingham restaurant made the top 20 list in the original Zagat Survey of Michigan Restaurants.

Part of the reason Birmingham has had such a bland culinary history is that city fathers have an alcohol problem that's quite opposite from the disease of alcoholism.

They suffer from the legacy that because it wasn't until 1972 that liquor could be sold by the glass in their city, and because it passed by a close vote, they should be guided by that kind of mentality today. And so they hold Birmingham's population-based allotment (16) of Class C liquor licenses close to the vest. And they regularly dismiss, as they did again recently, the notion of supplementing those with resort licenses.

But, in 1998, that mentality could change, partly because of Artie Oliverio.

Oliverio, somewhat of a restaurant gadabout, sidled into a long, skinny space in a prime spot on Old Woodward south of Maple last May. The storefront is notable for its small size — seating for just 30 at its red and white checkered tables.

Previous versions of Oliverio's, all highlighted by his gourmet Italian food, were in Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield, Royal Oak and Farmington Hills.

Patrons of the made-to-order dishes concocted by Artie and his dad, George, served by his mom, Phyllis, and who now are often greeted by his wife, Jill, have followed him as a flock follows their shepherd. Artie last summer confided that he would apply for a small winemaker's license from the state later in the year, if Birmingham didn't loosen its wine and beer restrictions.

In November, he did just that. The license, available directly from the Liquor Control Commission, bypasses local government. It allows an individual to manufacture up to 50,000 gallons of wine and offer it for on-site consumption.



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tion.

"I'm not trying to circumvent the city," Artie maintains. "It's legal and fair, and, to me, it's a question of making or breaking the operation. I wouldn't care, if they allowed customers to bring in their own wine."

On the issue of alcohol, Birmingham officials envisioned all the small restaurants in Birmingham following Artie's lead, bypassing city jurisdiction to stop on their own grapes.

Reality is that few small restaurants will go through the effort to make their own wine because their cuisine is not dependent on it. I'm nearly a non-drinker. But Italian cuisine of Oliverio's quality cries for a nice wine.

Commission hysteria was certainly bolstered by the unfortunate comments of Dennis Brinker, current chairman of the Birmingham Restaurant Collection. "Why is it a matter of survival?" questioned Brinker. "I operate 10 restaurants without licenses."

He didn't explain that most of those restaurants are pancake houses and that his Birmingham restaurant, the Old Woodward Grill, holder of a Class C liquor license, is no doubt heavily dependent on liquor sales.

In an effort to re-establish their control, commissioners are due to examine in this new year doling out "mini" licenses to sell just wine and beer. It's the first time the commission has seriously examined this issue, according to long-time Commissioner Bob DeLaura.

DeLaura, a former small retailer himself, goes through the paranoia. "What this whole thing boils down to is the Class C liquor license people trying to blockade everybody else from selling booze," says DeLaura. "Sometimes, serving liquor is a means for a business to survive and I think that it is the responsibility of the community to check that out."

The battle between mall and mainstreet is unrelenting. As the corporate-run steak, chop and west-coast pizza houses flavor nearby Somerset Mall, a small, family-run restaurant with the big reputation of Oliverio's can be one more ingredient to draw people to Birmingham.

After all, tiny Oliverio's is the quintessential restaurant boutique.

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Detroit needs us

We come together, this diverse group of citizens from the metro Detroit area, to talk about race relations. Control is maintained by a well-prepared agenda of the National Issues Forum. So we will really never get a chance to look into each others' souls, at least not on this night. We all seem to be on our best behavior — no show of passion except for one white guy adamant in his proclamation that there is no excuse for poverty. All one needs to do, he tells us, is pull up his bootstraps and buckle down. The American dream awaits even the most destitute. It seems obvious, he's never been destitute.

I used to be like him — such concrete opinions. Everything was black and white. Now I think in shades of gray. I've come to realize that most people have limited perceptions of life. At birth we're all assigned a window with a view and some are quite content with their assignment. The scenery may change with the seasons, but the onlooker never changes his seat. For me, it was different. I spent my life peeking out of as many windows as possible. Ultimately, it has improved my overall vision.

Searching the faces of this group, I wonder about their stories. I am not black, but I know prejudice, I want to tell them. As a career, I chose the road less traveled, a woman in a man's world — engineering and construction. It was long before women's liberation and affirmative action. To be told, "We don't hire women" was acceptable. Sexual harassment was an everyday occurrence. I carry my resentment for the white male establishment to this very day. Yet it will never affect my performance on the job nor my ability to keep the lines of communication open.

I learned very early on that life is not fair. Women, minorities, the disabled, poor, old, overweight, unattractive, undereducated — that means most of us — are at a serious disadvantage. Yet society was here long before I came along. And it takes years to make changes — changes that cannot be forced. I know, I tried. So you learn to play the game. You walk the walk and talk the talk while you're in their arena. Then you go home to the "real" world and slowly work on changing the system.

I'm well aware my career didn't commence on the proverbial "level playing field." It's also quite apparent that the distance of my marathon was a hell of a lot farther than the white guys running next to me. The finish line is still out of sight and I know I'll never drink out of the winner's cup. Lashing out in anger would not change the outcome, only divide us further. Instead I can take solace in the fact that I've made the path a little smoother for those who



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come after me. I like to think Martin Luther King Jr. would have been proud of me.

Nearly two hours have passed and there have been no revelations in the discussion. My mind drifts to another time. I recall traveling the countryside in the '60s, proud to say I was from Detroit, the automobile capital of the world and home of Motown. But even then, conversations inevitably led to questions about race relations. Surprised that outsiders would be so aware of our dirty laundry, and defensive about my beloved city, I could give no good explanation. More than 30 years later, I still can't.

We're engaged in a team sport here, my friends, this society for which we all are a part. Even if you don't really like your teammates, we have to work together for the ultimate goal. A city's future hangs in the balance. And we can't sit back while one or two of us carries the load. Steve Yzerman proved that. For 13 years, with all his heart and determination, he still was unable to win hockey's greatest prize, the Stanley Cup. It took 24 players, who did not even speak the same language, unified in purpose, before the dream became a reality. And it mattered not that five members of this assemblage at one time had been universally hated by the entire free world. These five players implored the press to refrain from describing them as the "Russian 5." They were Detroit Red Wings first and foremost. Fighting off jeers of opposing fans in cities across North America and, without forsaking their individuality or heritage, they enmeshed their skills with the others to become world champions. As we got to know these incredible personalities, their differences seemed ennobling rather than foreign. In the end, we all tasted the glory and basked in the afterglow.

The people leaving the room now will probably never see one another again. This experiment in sharing, a seed of opportunity, will find little support for its germination. We cannot continue to pass up our chances. All the new stadiums, skyscrapers and houses will not rebuild the city of Detroit. Only the people can do that. And it will never happen if we can't even talk to each other. Is anyone out there listening?

Jane McCarthy is a Livonia resident.

Voucher leader softens view

Paul DeWeese has changed his tune about amending the Michigan Constitution to allow vouchers and parochialism.

The 42-year-old Williamston physician had been expected to use his Teach Michigan fund to seek a 1998 ballot proposal overturning the 1970 no-parochialism amendment. His old literature snuffed at public education.

Detroit author Russ Bellant, in his 1994 book "The Religious Right in Michigan Politics," gives DeWeese a full page and lumps him with Dick and Betsy DeVos, Clark Durant, Sen. Dick Posthumus, and Michigan Family Forum.

"It's really not anywhere," DeWeese said of the parochial-voucher drive in a recent interview. "There is a group of parents and people in Detroit (black Baptist pastors) who'd like to have an organized group run with it. I don't see that happening. I'm not active in that."

Instead: ■ Teach Michigan, based in Lansing, is "creating a parent information network" to "help parents be consumers of quality education services." Its tools will be an interactive Internet site and a magazine. Headquartered in Lansing, Teach Michigan has a staff of four led by Brian Taylor and up to \$1.5 million for a budget.

■ DeWeese is campaigning 30 hours a week for the GOP nomination to succeed the term-limited Rep. Dan Gutfusson, R-Williamston, in the 67th House District. It covers eastern Ingham County and eastern Livingston County to Howell.

His Democratic opponent is likely to be former Rep. Bill Keith, who served 20 years in the Garden City district before retiring to Ingham County in 1984. Keith's issue is that he's for public schools, DeWeese against.

Once a champion of charter schools, DeWeese still admires their sense of "reform and vigor." But he says "many lack business capability and don't understand the difficulty and complexity" of running schools with public money. "Some will close, some should be closed, and some will excel." And: "I'm not an unrestrained, applauding cheerleader for PSAs (public school academics, the formal name of charter schools).

His own three children attend St. Thomas School in East Lansing but "want to go to Williamston High School."

Raised in Grand Haven, DeWeese earned his bachelor's degree at Hope College and his M.D. at Wayne State University. He works in the



TIM RICHARD

emergency rooms of Owosso Memorial Medical Center and Eaton Rapids Community Hospital.

He calls himself "a moderate conservative Republican" and is paying his civic dues on the Michigan Municipal Bond Authority, Crime Victims Compensation Commission and Habitat for Humanity. He's most comfortable around policy-oriented Republicans like ex-Speaker Paul Hillegonds, minority leader Ken Sikkema and Sen. Mike Rogers of Brighton.

If elected — and the district has been 70 percent Republican — DeWeese won't opt for the policy-making House Education Committee. Rather, he will ask for Health Policy, Corrections and Economic Development because:

"We need a coalition to work on health insurance for the working uninsured; 800,000 people don't have insurance. . .

"We can't build enough prisons (to house all the people being sentenced). Prisons are the Pac-Man of state government. . . We need to be more aggressive at preserving prisons for the violent." He'd look at community service, tethering and public works as alternatives. He'd pay wages to prisoners so they could compensate their victims, support their families and build up nest eggs for their release.

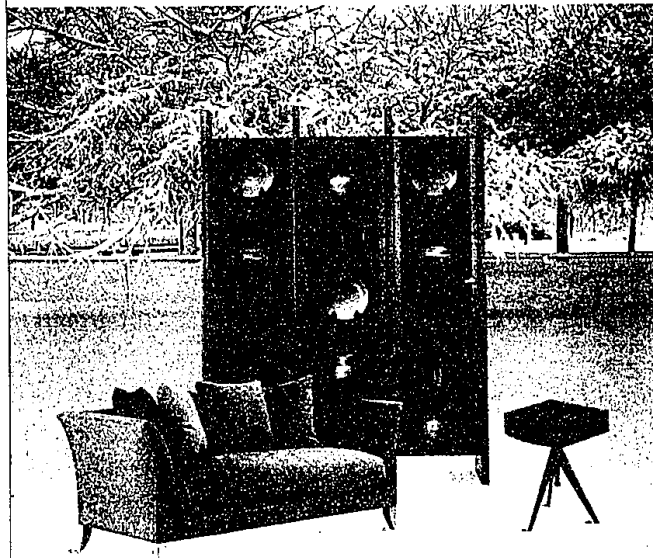
"When I talk to business people, there seems to be an overarching, arbitrary, capricious over regulation (by government)."

DeWeese, unlike John Engler and Brooks Patterson, is conversant with the issue of urban sprawl, the megalopolitan paving over of farmland. He thinks it's bad.

Parochialism is off the front burner as Paul DeWeese edges toward the political center.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His voice mail number is (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

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