

# King's message

## Better integration is the key

President Bill Clinton has been promoting the idea of a national dialogue on race.

We believe this idea has merit. We also agree with those who insist that any true "dialogue" on race must include those with a variety of conflicting views on the best means of ending racial problems.

But as we approach Martin Luther King Jr. Day, we find that race still matters in this country and that despite the validity of many conservative positions on race, many are using those positions as a pseudo-intellectual shield for their racism.

In the great racial debate of the 1960s, Martin Luther King Jr. was the eloquent spokesman for integration. He never denied the need for black pride or community identity, but he died believing that the only way to achieve parity and justice for black Americans was through complete integration into a basically "color blind" America.

We are now engaged in a great national debate over "affirmative action." Legitimate arguments have been made by conservatives, including many black conservatives, that these programs have created racial tensions rather than alleviating injustices.

Unfortunately, this has allowed a lot of self-righteous posturing by racists. People who never saw the injustice when blacks were systematically denied jobs, college admissions, housing, insurance, bank loans and service at stores because of their race suddenly see an assault on the "American Way" when programs are instituted to redress these past (and present) discriminations.

Nor do these people, including some prominent state legislators who are playing the "race card," acknowledge a long history of ghettoization that has separated blacks into neighborhoods with inadequate housing, few job opportunities, aging and poorly run

schools and little opportunity to acquire the necessary skills to live in a fast-changing urban environment.

This urban pressure cooker has led to an unbalanced crime rate, many young blacks seeing crime and drugs as the only way out.

Though this is a pattern that many ethnic groups had to endure when they first arrived in the United States, only blacks have had to endure it through generation after generation. Major institutions such as insurance companies, banks, realty companies, employers and universities have participated in this discrimination.

Affirmative action was meant to redress those policies. It has produced many success stories, including Colin Powell and Clarence Thomas. It has also caused consternation for some whites who have been "rejected" when a black applicant with marginally less qualifications has been admitted. Unfortunately, the people who oppose affirmative action are not the people clamoring for better schools and fair housing and insurance reform.

The only way out of our racial morass is integration. Programs that promote stronger black communities and responsible group action, such as the work of the Black Muslims, have much to commend them. And welfare reform that ends dependence on government, when linked with job training and back-to-school programs, also has merit. But, ultimately, a strong black community that doesn't interact with the larger white community will never achieve full parity.

The only road to integration is the movement of more black Americans into a solid middle class through better education, better jobs and better housing.

When the current debate is over, those are the goals we must achieve.

# Memories of a 25-year career

Yesterday, once more. Today marks my last day with the Eccentric, the end of a wonderful journey that began nearly a quarter of a century ago.

An Oakland County resident since 1968, I joined the Eccentric in 1973 after graduating from the University of Michigan and free-lancing for the paper in Southfield. I've seen super highways replace country lanes, expensive homes move aside woodlands, malls sprout from cornfields, chain stores outmuscle mom-and-pop operations and a once-obscure attorney, L. Brooks Patterson, rise to fame on the issue of cross-district busing. Oakland is now the third-wealthiest county in the U.S. It's home to 1.1 million people, 40,000 businesses, 220 Fortune 500 companies, 360 foreign-owned corporations and an Export Assistance Center.

When I arrived at the Eccentric in March of 1973, my beat included high school and recreational sports in Birmingham, Troy, Beverly Hills, Franklin, West Bloomfield, Bloomfield Hills and Bloomfield Township. It was then I discovered how zealous parents and students can be over prep athletics. During the school year, many families built their lives around game nights. My stint as a sports reporter yielded two key memories: Birmingham Brother Rice winning the state boys' basketball title and the Birmingham Federal all-star team making it to the Little League World Series.

In mid-1974, I moved into news reporting for the Rochester Eccentric. By late 1975, I had become editor, a position I held for 10 years. Major stories flourished — Rochester annexing the Parke-Davis area of Avon Township, Avon becoming the city of Rochester Hills, the Main Street Bridge collapsing and threatening downtown commerce, and Oakland University becoming the high-tech epicenter along the Squirrel Road corridor, to name a few. I remember a house fire wiping out an entire family, a murder built around homosexual advances, the organs of a youngster who died in a crawl space helping save the lives of others, the landmark hirings of John Schultz as Rochester school superintendent and Ken Johnson as Rochester city manager, the upset election of Joan Buser as Oakland Township supervisor and the shocking death of Earl Borden, Rochester Hills' first mayor.

By 1985, I had moved to the editorship of the Farmington Observer, part of the Observer Newspapers — the other half of the Observer & Eccentric network. Again, headlines broke significant news — Farmington creating a Downtown Development Authority to revitalize the central business district, the Roman Terrace restaurant burning to the ground, the

### OAKLAND WATCH



BOB SKLAR

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retirements of legends Lew Schulman as Farmington school superintendent and Bill Costick as Farmington Hills city manager, the hiring of Detroit police commander Bill Dwyer as Farmington Hills police chief to replace now Oakland County Sheriff John Nichols, the 150th anniversary of the Botsford Inn, Oriental health spas serving as alleged fronts for prostitution, pro-life marches in front of women's care clinics and Botsford General Hospital's tower expansion.

Between 1990 and 1994, I found great reward in overseeing special sections plus several regional pages, including the arts sections. In the summer of 1994, I became managing editor of the Eccentrics. Since then, we've created new editions in Clarkston, Lake Orion and Oxford, new pages focusing on spirituality, recreation and health, new opportunities for spotlighting art, entertainment, restaurant and business news as well as various other refinements. I've helped oversee the morzog of the Rochester Eccentric with my old competitor, the Rochester Clarion. I'm especially proud of the West Bloomfield-Lakes Eccentric earning Newspaper of the Year and the Birmingham-Bloomfield Eccentric winning General Excellence honors from the Michigan Press Association on my watch. Ditto for the Clarkston Eccentric and the Troy Eccentric capturing Suburban Newspapers of America General Excellence honors.

I'm moving on to the editorship of the Detroit Jewish News, based in Southfield. But I'll always be an avid reader of the Eccentric, which has been a great friend.

Bob Sklar is outgoing managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers.

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

Have you bought any University of Michigan merchandise after the Wolverines' National Championship season?

We asked this question in front of the Farmington post office.



"I haven't yet; I may."  
Jerry Kney  
Farmington



"No, but my brother goes to U of M. I haven't even thought about it. I went to WMU (Western Michigan University)."  
Jim Craig  
West Bloomfield



"No, I'm only here temporarily. I'm a UCLA fan, so that doesn't help."  
Al Wilson  
Farmington Hills



"I just mailed (a hat) to my son (Gary) in New York. I said you need this to walk around New York City."  
Jan Dolan  
Farmington Hills

### LETTERS

#### Goodfellows grateful

The 1997 Goodfellows year is coming to a close, and our pledge of "No child or senior without a Christmas" has been successfully completed.

Even though the economy was good this year, the Farmington Area Goodfellows helped 141 families, which includes 308 children under the age of 13. And there were 125 seniors who received assistance.

This program happens each year because of the many generous people who live or work in the Farmington area. The two weeks before delivery day, we had over 10 people at our headquarters each day to help sort and pack the food boxes. Many people came in the evening to help with the toy packing and the home boxes for the seniors. We put others to work typing gift certificates and sending out thank you's to those who sent us money in response to our "All Community Mailing."

On delivery day, we had over 80 students from the three high schools (National Honor Society) to help with delivery of the boxes and packages. The volunteers of the Farmington area are the greatest. However, most residents don't realize the amount of time and effort that it takes to make the Goodfellows program happen. We have 11 standing committee members who start working in mid-November to do the work needed to complete our mission.

We have many folks that spent countless hours working at our headquarters, but one person put in more time than any of us, and that's Bob Chappell, our warehouse manager. Bob's commitment to the Goodfellows and other local organizations is outstanding, to say the least. His time, talents, and contacts have been valuable assets to the Goodfellows.

All of us on the board of directors want to extend our most heartfelt thanks to all those who helped this year. We hope you enjoyed what you did, that it made you feel good to help others, and will consider helping us again next year.

We trust you had a wonderful holiday and that the new year will be good to you.

Richard Tupper  
President and general chairman,  
Farmington Area Goodfellows

#### Elite team ignores equity

Once again, the Farmington school board is showing its propensity for selective equity. This time the proposal is for an elite high school hockey team.

For a school system that has condemned its program for the academically gifted and talented as being too exclusive, they sure don't have any problem in selecting the biggest, tallest and strongest for their elite sports

teams.

They see nothing wrong with creating a privileged class of gifted athletes. They have no problem parading this select group around in expensive sports equipment in the most costly of facilities. These students are then promoted through the school and community newspapers as heroes. The gifted athletes are lauded each game by their own elite squad of cheerleaders. If that isn't enough exclusive self-esteem building, the board even throws in a marching band to trumpet these students' glorious achievements.

More school space is devoted to sports than any other school activity. More time, money, staff and effort are expended as well. Meanwhile motivation for the academically gifted and talented students to achieve is minimal. In the elementary schools, students must go to physical education class twice as much as art, music or a foreign language. Consequently, the students aren't developing these skills to any high degree. Art on a cart isn't building anybody's self-esteem.

Parents of the academically gifted and talented who complain of the district's neglect of basic academic needs are called elitist for wanting a selective program. They are forced to follow the district's guidelines that provides that "equitable opportunities be made for all students." In practice, the district's policy is oppressive because it fails to take into account the special needs of the gifted, and is hypocritical because it sets a double standard that is never applied to the sports program's selection process.

Isn't it time the Board of Education consider the needs of all gifted students, not just those with athletic gifts? Why can't there be a performing arts school for drama, dance and music, or an exhibition gallery for our future artists? Haven't we watched this aspect of our culture deteriorate long enough? What about a children's science center for our future scientists? Why does the center of our children's interests have to always be about sports? The board can go ahead and give this select group their hockey team, but let's have some balance and equity in all the school programs.

Eric Borregard  
parent/advocate, Gifted and Talented

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number.

Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to (248) 977-7722.

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OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power