

STATE OF THE COUNTY

Patterson wants to cut taxes, fix drain network

BY SARA CALLENDER
STAFF WRITER

Despite a booming economy, the county still faces future challenges, including a solution to the Twelve Towns Drain problem, said Oakland Executive L. Brooks Patterson.

In his State of the County address Thursday night, Patterson said he wants to cut the county tax rate and provide other measures to help communities finance bonds to help fix a large network of old pipes and underground retention tanks that service 14 southeastern Oakland County communities. His combined tax cut/drain plan would cut the tax rate from 4.35 to 4.19 mills, and would save the owner of a \$200,000 home about \$16 a year.

Servicing nearly 400,000 residents, the 40-year-old Twelve Towns Drain faces \$140 million in improvements ordered by the state. Currently, the system overflows during rain storms, flooding basements and sending sewage into streams and Lake St. Clair.

"Tonight, I would say to the residents of Oakland County's

Patterson's
Proposals:

- Cut the county tax mill from 4.35 to 4.19.
- Provide finance measures to help communities repair piping networks.
- Planning a countywide festival on Labor Day weekend to be called "Arts, Beats and Eats."
- Improved law enforcement information management systems.
- County-directed initiative to help small businesses get affordable health care.
- Campaign to renew a one-third mill tax for SMART bus service.
- Forming a national marketing group of 117 CEOs of the largest businesses along I-75 to promote "Automation Alley."



"Tonight, I would say to the residents of Oakland County's cities, townships and villages... you do not stand alone."

— L. Brooks Patterson



STAFF PHOTO BY SARA CALLENDER

Speaking: Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson speaks to about 200 people, Thursday, at the MSU Management Conference Center in Troy

cities, townships and villages who may be called upon to bear the burden of multiple new assessments to remedy pollution problems — you do not stand alone," Patterson said in his speech delivered to about 200 people in the MSU Management Conference Center in Troy.

"The county will stand shoulder to shoulder with you. If the board accepts this cut that I

have called for this evening, the county will be foregoing \$11 million tax revenues it would otherwise be eligible to impose and collect."

Regardless of the Twelve Towns situation, Patterson described a county economy that created 2,700 jobs in 1997 and \$1.8 billion in construction. Oakland is ranked the third wealthiest county in the U.S., based on its per capita income.

Dan Dirk, Deputy General Manager of SMART bus service said that Patterson has helped Oakland become an economic powerhouse.

"(Patterson) is truly a leader in southeast Michigan," Dirk said. "He really supports this county and with his help, I believe the good times will continue."

In his speech, Patterson also discussed other cultural programs, business and cost-cutting programs including the following:

- Planning a countywide festival on Labor Day weekend to be called "Arts, Beats and Eats."
- Improved law enforcement information management systems.
- County-directed initiative to help small businesses get affordable health care.

■ Campaign to renew a one-third mill tax for SMART bus service.

■ Forming a national marketing group of 117 CEOs of the largest businesses along I-75 to promote "Automation Alley." Similar programs include California's Silicon Valley and Route 128 in Boston.

In addition, Patterson proposed a county-wide health care

program directed at small businesses with less than 100 employees. The program would offer a standard health care program with a full range of insurance benefits at competitive rates and a subsidized plan tailored for low to moderate income employees.

Rochelle Heyniger, a candidate for the Oakland Community College Board of Trustees, said Patterson's health care plan would

allow smaller businesses to flourish. Heyniger has received support in her campaign from Patterson.

"Small businesses lose a lot of employees to large corporations because they can't provide them adequate health insurance," Heyniger said. "It's very encouraging to see that Brooks is really trying to enhance the quality of this county."



Listening: Over 200 people turned out to listen to Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson's address.

Universities battle state corrections for funding

BY TIM RICHARD
STAFF WRITER

"This becomes a donnybrook, more and more every year," said state Sen. John J.H. Schwarz, who he listened to one university after another lament the 1.5 percent state aid increase proposed by Gov. John Engler.

"The governor is correct on more prison space," said Schwarz, chair of the Senate Appropriations subcommittee on higher education. For the Department of Corrections, Engler proposes \$1.4 billion, a 5 percent increase, in order to add 5,420 prison beds.

But after several years of hefty increases for universities, Engler proposes a flat, across-the-board hike of 1.5 percent to \$1.46 billion for fiscal 1999.

"We're fighting different factions. We're going toe-to-toe with Corrections," Schwarz said at a Feb. 20 budget hearing in Ann Arbor. He made only one promise: "There absolutely will be a floor (on student aid) when this bill leaves the Senate."

At the bottom of the heap are Grand Valley State University at \$4,086 per student followed by the University of Michigan-Flint with \$4,210 and Central Michigan University at \$4,216.

Top three are Wayne State University,

\$10,141; the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, \$9,087; and Michigan Tech, \$9,087.

Those at the bottom of the heap find fault with Engler's flat 1.5 percent approach because it widens the dollar gap between the top and bottom universities.

"I represent one of those that keeps getting poorer," said David Brandon, board chair at Central Michigan University.

Schwarz, the Legislature's top man on higher education money bills, divides the 15 campuses into two groups: three apples and 12 oranges. The apples are U-M, Wayne and Michigan State.

That was when he promised a floor for the 12 oranges rather than a flat across-the-board 1.5 percent increase. "I'm thinking about moving money around for the (research) universities to keep the gap from widening," he said.

CMU makes pitch

Central Michigan vice president Richard Davenport supported that view. "We would respectfully ask the committee to start by adjusting last year's funding floor by inflation before applying

any across-the-board adjustments," he said.

"Or, better yet, appropriate any increased dollars — equally — to each public university student in the state," Davenport said.

Davenport called CMU a special case because:

■ "We have been in the top quarter of public universities in terms of growth for the past two years (while) state funding is lagging considerably behind the average."

■ "CMU is offering the nation's first bachelor's degree in vehicle design" in cooperation with Megatech Engineering, to meet the shortage of automotive designers.

■ CMU has a new College of Health Professions to address rural health care for an aging population. It wants to build a state-of-the-art building for physician assistants, physical therapists, speech pathologists and audiologists.

U-M: 'Difficult time'

"This year is a curious, odd time," said University of Michigan President Lee Bollinger. "The economy seems to be booming, but it's a difficult time for

higher education."

Bollinger cited these as U-M's top needs:

■ Library — "Student use of references has increased by 60 percent in a decade. Then there are technology costs added on."

■ Faculty — "At the full professor level, our faculty salaries are 16 percent below our cohort. Ten thousand dollars, to a young faculty member with a family, would be quite an inducement."

■ Undergraduate education — "The number of seminars has doubled for beginning students. We are using more senior and full professors for undergraduate classes."

■ Life sciences, including genetics and cloning.

Bollinger said that instead of linking university appropriations to the consumer price index ("what an urban consumer would spend this year to buy the same things as last year"), "we should link U-M to personal disposable income across the state... 3.7 percent is what I have for personal disposable income."

Graduate growth

U-M Dearborn has not only grown, but its growth has been at the more

costly graduate student level, said Chancellor James Renick.

"In many fields, a master's degree is required... We have developed new programs to meet the needs of working professionals," he said. Renick asked for 10 more faculty members for automotive engineering, computer science, engineering management, adult instruction and communications at a cost of \$699,000.

Videconferencing and other technology will cost \$1.25 million, and deferred maintenance will cost \$2 million a year for the next five years, he said.

Engler, however, proposed \$346,000 more for a total of \$23.4 million for U-M.

Like other presidents, Renick foresaw tuition and fees rising 5 percent or more if Engler's 1.5 percent hike becomes law.

The Senate Appropriations subcommittee will hear university budget presentations on Monday, March 2 in Mendonbrook Hall, Oakland University, Rochester. Schedule: Northern Michigan at 10 a.m., Wayne State at 10:30, Michigan Tech at 11, the King-Charles-Parks minorities program at 11:30, and OU at 11:45.

OAKLAND DIGEST

Oakland Digest provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to March 1.

BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP

DSC supports Olympians: Excitement generated at the Bloomfield Township Skating Club throughout the fortnight of competition at the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. The DSC was represented in Nagano by ice dancers Elizabeth Pagan and Jerod Swallow and Jessica Joseph and Charles Butler and figure skaters Todd Eldredge and Tara Lipinski. Lipinski, 15, is the youngest woman to win an Olympic gold medal.

INDEPENDENCE TOWNSHIP

Location for new school decided: The Clarkston School Board unanimously approved purchasing the 30-acre property at the northwest corner of M-10 and Hubbard Road in Independence Township to build its new elementary school. The purchase agreement for the property is expected to be signed in March. Ground breaking should take place in early July and with completion in fall 1999.

LAKE ORION

Shopping center opening act: Great Lakes Crossing, the 1.4 million square foot facility, currently under construction on 300 acres on land south of I-75 between Baldwin and Joylin roads, will open on Nov. 12. The upscale outlet mall, which will create 3,000 full time jobs will feature a variety of stores including Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus.

OXFORD VILLAGE

Oxford Village youth uses quick thinking: Oxford Village resident Kyle Lewkowicz, 6, saved his mom's life by calling 911 after she went into diabetic shock. By the time Oxford emergency personnel arrived, Ann

Marie Lewkowicz was already starting to feel better. "If I Kyle not known what to do and acted quickly, she could have went into a diabetic coma," Oxford Fire Chief Jack LeRoy said.

ROCHESTER HILLS

Frumpy frock wins award: Borders Bookstore's Rochester Hills hosted the "Ugliest Bridesmaid Dress Contest." Cherie Korkus, once a bride and three times a bridesmaid, won the honor for her 1974 powder blue polyester gown. Korkus won dinner and a movie for two.

SOUTHFIELD

Three vie for commission: Republican Roderick Frounisi, independent Suzanne Goldstein and Democrat Vincent Gredy will square off in Monday's 20th District Oakland County Commission race. The district includes Southfield, north of I-696 and Lathrup Village. The winner will serve out the unexpired term of the late Oakland

County Commissioner Larry Perneck, who died last November.

TROY

Golf season opens: The Troy Chamber of Commerce annual mock golf outing will be held 8:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesday, March 3, at the North and South "courses" of Troy's Somerset Collection. The full day package included a breakfast compliments on D&N Bank of Troy; "Tips from the Pro" and designer golf tote bags compliments of Neiman Marcus, munch and lunch throughout the day at various half-way shops; special gifts, discounts, raffles, contests, prizes and foursome photos and 19th hole networking mixer and prize distribution at Capital Grille restaurant. Cost to participate in the full day event is \$70 person or \$240 per foursome. Call (248) 641-8151 for more information.

— Compiled by staff reporter
Sara Callender

Poster contest winners

Poster award winners in the MADD, Oakland County contest will be honored for their participation at 7 p.m. Monday at Andover High School in Bloomfield Hills.

The contest was open to all Oakland County schools, both public and private. The theme this year was "Stand Strong, Stay Sober." More than 40 entries were received.

Prizes are being awarded for first, second and third place winners in each division: grades 1-3, 4-6, 7-9 and 10-12. First place winners advance to state competition.

Posters awards are being given as follows:

■ Grades 1-3 poster: first place, Mariassa Ventura, Lanigan Elementary, Farmington Hills; second, Patrick Davis, St. Dennis, Royal Oak.

■ Grades 4-6 poster: first place, Lauren Morrey, St. Dennis, Royal Oak; second, Christopher Reger, Jayno Adams, Waterford.

■ Grades 7-9 poster: first place, Anna Habash, Marian

High School, Bloomfield Hills; second, Scott Elston, St. Stephen Lutheran, Pontiac.

■ Grades 10-12 poster: first place, Aaron Larson, Oakland Technical Center, Clarkston; second, John Schorach, Clarkston High School, Clarkston; third, Alan Horton, Holly High School, Holly.

■ Grades 4-6 essay: first place, Nikhil Gehani, Abbott Middle School, West Bloomfield; second, Emma Hurst, Kirtland Elementary, Milford.

■ Grades 7-9 essay: first place, Elizabeth Bazher, Cooke Middle School, Northville; second, Shayna Schumer, O.K. Dunckel, Farmington Hills; third, Chloe Canon, St. Joseph School, Lake Orion.

■ Grades 10-12 essay: first place, Beth Knader, home based education; second, Ashley Draccon, Andover High School, Bloomfield Hills; third, Michael Ellman, Andover High School, Bloomfield Hills. The program is open to family and friends.