

POINTS OF VIEW

Governments learning to do more with less

The language was dry as dust. The typography and graphics weren't much better. But the content was significant, even exciting. "It's a publication entitled 'Award Winning Joint Projects' by SEMCOG (the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments) and MAC (the Metropolitan Affairs Coalition). It describes a variety of award-winning joint projects undertaken at the local level in communities around Southeastern Michigan."

"Ho hum, you say. How come this stuff is 'significant, even exciting'?" Here's why. The historic problem of all governments — whether local, state or even federal — is that they are very good at doing more when they get more revenue. But over the years, governments have proven mostly clueless at figuring out how to do more with less revenue.

Hence the term (thanks to Tim Richard, who covers state and region-

al government for this newspaper) "Entrepreneurial Government," the idea that governmental bodies ought to think and act like entrepreneurs. Be innovative. Experiment. Try to redeploy existing resources and revenues so as to get a better return. Even take risks.

The "Award Winning Joint Project" publication offers up a whole slew of wonderful examples. As we approach the August primary, they should be at the top of the mind of every candidate for public office and every voter.

A good example comes from the little town of South Lyon, happily perched just off I-96 in southwestern Oakland County.

Turns out that both the City of South Lyon and the South Lyon Community Schools needed new administration buildings. Now the usual relationship in Michigan between local government and local schools is like a dysfunctional family — they occupy the same space at the same time, but



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nobody's talking back and forth.

They decided to do things differently in South Lyon. In August 1996 the city and the schools agreed to share development costs and use of the same administration building. The school district provided the site for the building, while the city's Building Authority financed the construction with municipal bonds. The \$2,666,105 project cost was divided — 42 percent by the city and 58 percent by the schools.

The taxpayers of South Lyon got a

good deal. They paid no site acquisition costs, because the site was on school district property. Financing was by low-interest, 15-year municipal bonds. Both city and school groups share use of conference rooms, parking lots and lobbies, while overhead costs such as maintenance and repair are reduced. Moreover, folks living in South Lyon gain the convenience of going to a single building to transact their business with both the city and the school district.

Jeff Potter, the mayor of South Lyon, is bubbling with enthusiasm about the award-winning project. "It's bizarre that someone has to give local governments an award to do something like this," he says.

For years, turfing between cities and schools or between differing departments within one governmental structure has been the bane of cost-effective government. Sometimes turfing is disguised as a commitment to local autonomy, going it alone

regardless of how cost-inefficient that may be.

Potter provides this example: "You have a joint emergency medical service program and some guy has a heart attack. The team goes to his house and finds him gasping for breath. The guy with the heart attack will never say, 'No; go away. Local autonomy.'"

The joint project in South Lyon is a perfect example to how collaboration, between governmental units makes everybody — city, schools, taxpayers — better off. No wonder both South Lyon and Potter won their awards. They deserve them.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@coonline.com

Personal watercraft pose tricky regulation problem

There are two ways to look at personal watercraft, just as there are two ways to look at cigarettes.

■ A hazard, a problem, a concern to health and safety.

■ A business employing thousands, paying taxes, giving pleasure and making campaign contributions.

I ran into both approaches — from the same party — the other day. It was the same day the national news reported the U.S. Department of the Interior is considering banning personal watercraft — sometimes referred to by the trade name of Jet Skis — from national parks.

The ban is due in some parks immediately. For the Sleeping Bear and Pictured Rocks national lakeshores in Michigan, it's two years away.

My question to a group of Republican state senators was: What should one do to get the same kind of ban on Michigan lakes?

"It has been a concern," said Sen. Dan DeGrow of Port Huron. "These machines go up to 50 mph. Sometimes 12-year-olds run them. They come near shore." He predicted "someone will get killed" when hit by a PWC at high speed. "I don't advocate banning them. But we need to do some things," he said.

His close political ally, majority leader Dick Posthumus, R-Alto, took a different approach, beginning: "Be careful. Michigan is a tourist state. It's part of the boating industry."

Posthumus thinks in terms of an industry, not operator safety, not swimmers' safety, not noise, not fish spawning bed protection.

Their answer to my question of what restrictions can be imposed, lake by lake, went like this: The Department of Natural Resources can have something to say if there are public launch sites. Otherwise, it's up to property owners and local government.



TIM RICHARD

Sen. Bill Bullard Jr., R-Milford, cited one Oakland County lake (of 450) that had banned all motorized watercraft. Posthumus cited Lake Geneva at DeWitt where no motors may be more than 5 mph.

Myself, I like Kensington Metropark: no speedboats, no PWCs, no snowmobiles, no off-road vehicles, no all-terrain vehicles.

It's a jungle war zone on many Michigan lakes, just like on I-696 except there are no shoulders and

lane markers.

The kids on PWCs get the attitude from their dads — the ones driving pickups with bumper stickers saying, "My kid just beat up your honor roll student." or the Lake St. Clair boaters who buzz anchored anglers at full throttle and never look back.

Michigan hasn't been totally blind to the PWC problem. The Legislature passed a law (after the Senate watered down the House bill). Beginning in 1999:

■ Persons under 14 would be prohibited from running PWCs.

■ Hours would be 8 a.m. to an hour before sunset.

■ A person born after Dec. 31, 1978, may not operate a PWC unless he or she has obtained a boating safety certificate, effective Jan. 1, 1999. DNR will establish training programs and a system of issuing boating safety certificates to persons who complete the program satisfactorily.

■ PWC operators and passengers must wear life jackets.

■ Younger passengers must be accompanied by a parent or guardian or designee.

■ PWCs must be kept 200 feet from a shoreline unless operated at a "slow — no wake" speed.

■ Minimum distances must be observed between the PWC and shorelines, docks, swimming areas and vessels.

Will the law work? William F. Buckley, the conservative commentator, is fond of saying that people should exercise self-restraint more and depend on laws and cops less. He would say a dad should teach a kid, not to buzz swimmers, fish spawning beds and wildfowl nests.

But I fear Sen. DeGrow may be right: We'll have to wait for someone to be killed, praying it isn't someone from our family, before we think seriously of bans.

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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