

POINT OF VIEW

Help celebrate 30th anniversary of Focus:HOPE

It was 30 years ago, when the ashes of the riots in Detroit were still smoldering and people were still looking at each other in shock, that I first started hearing the rumors.

There was this Catholic priest, prematurely gray but with fire in his eyes and quicksilver on his tongue. And there was his sidekick, a soft spoken woman who seemed much, much bigger than her 5-foot-4 height when she started organizing things.

Together they were supposed to be doing something to rebuild a city that the riots had revealed as a hollow shell. Doing something to bring the races together. It had an odd name and odd punctuation.

I had just started the company that owns this newspaper, and even from a suburban perspective, I was horrified and dismayed at what was happening to a once-great city. So it was only logical a little later on that I should sit down with Father William Cunningham and Eleanor Josaitis to talk about what they were doing at Focus:HOPE.

In the beginning, Focus:HOPE was little more than its logo, a white hand

and a black hand reaching out but not yet touching. But Father Bill and Eleanor soon gathered a cadre of earnest and well-intentioned folks, attracted by the idea of doing something practical at the grass-roots level that would provide some measure of, well, hope.

In 1971 they established The Commodity Supplemental Food Program to provide free monthly food rations to pregnant women, post partum mothers, children up to the age of 6 and seniors more than 60. When I visited Focus:HOPE back then, it was pretty scruffy but effective; lots of surplus food was being gathered and distributed, efficiently and compassionately, to a whole lot of folks who needed it.

Time passed. I was busy with other things. I saw Father Bill and Eleanor from time to time, always filled with hope and optimism, always brimming over with new projects. By then, Bill was certainly the best salesman in Michigan, reaping wealth and help from the mighty, while Eleanor toiled along in the background, cleaning up after the messes that great salesmen



PHIL POWER

always leave behind.

And then the day came when I was serving as chair of the Michigan Job Training Coordinating Council and trying to design a job training system that would provide Michigan workers with the skills and productivity to get and keep good-paying jobs. We had given some grants to Focus:HOPE, and I thought I'd better go down to their headquarters to have a look at what they were doing with our money.

I never will forget the shock of walking into the complex Father Bill and Eleanor had built. The Focus:HOPE I remembered was, well,

and 49,000 volunteers, participants and contributors.

But last year, Father Bill Cunningham died of cancer, and a tornado roared down Oakland Boulevard, ripping a chunk out of the Focus:HOPE campus. Eleanor Josaitis stepped forward into big shoes and started filling big holes.

This Saturday, Focus:HOPE is celebrating its 30th anniversary, just a little bit later than the actual anniversary date of March 8. "There has just been too much grieving for Bill," explained Eleanor. "But we hope everybody will come on down and see what we've built."

The celebration runs from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, July 25, at 1355 Oakland Boulevard, Detroit.

In my view, what they've built is nothing less than a monument to hope.

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@eoonline.com.

LETTERS

A fine job

I wish to comment on the two letters written to the editor, published on July 2, 1998, regarding the June 21 article on the Kornacki family.

The Kornacki parents approached Our Lady of Sorrows school over a year and a half ago regarding the kindergarten admission of their son Greg, who has spina bifida. At the time, the principal, Roberta Clemak, assured them that they would be happy to work with Greg. At this late date, the decision was reversed unfairly. The three families who are unknown to the Kornacki family, yet who wrote in obvious support, are to be commended. The family is touched by your support and I thank you personally.

However, I would like to address the letter from Nell Young, who obviously has made uninformed assumptions

tions that I would like to clear "for the record." I will quote her letter "Be fair. Get all the facts." I advise her to follow her own advice. I have known Greg, since he was an infant. I do have all the facts. A child who can bike around the neighborhood (on a special bike) without assistance, can move from room to room at school without assistance. He had done so, inside that same school for the last two years, during Sunday school and vacation Bible school.

As far as a ramp was discussed, Nancy and Ed offered to pay for a professionally constructed ramp that meets all building code requirements. Never was the word "homemade" discussed. The specific classroom that a ramp was needed for involved one step of a few inches above the ground (a second exit for emergencies).

A ramp for such a small drop would certainly be in keeping with the new building expansion that is supposed to be completely handicap accessible. Would liability be a concern? Take a look at the risk of playing on the Sorrows playground. I am not suggesting that the playground is unsafe. In fact, it is a nice place that I have taken my own child to play at. Like any playground, there are plenty of elevated areas to fall from. Indeed, less risk would be involved on such a small ramp, less than falling off the curb in Sorrows parking lot.

The fact is that Greg was denied admission to Our Lady of Sorrows simply because he sits instead of stands. He does not require a full time aide. His parents would never have pursued admission if Greg could not handle himself in the environment.

No parent wants to set their child up to fail. Monsignor Hurley has obviously used the school administration as a scapegoat for his decision.

Shame on him for presenting the story in any other way. Kudos to your reporter for doing a fine job on the story.

Diane Reynolds
Farmington Hills

Just imagine

Almost every week I go to at least one of my two favorite places. They are the Farmington Library branches. I borrow about eight books a month. While there I peruse the various magazines and newspapers. Sometimes I look up stocks in Value Line. Occasionally I check out videos; some of these are free and others have a rental fee of only \$1.50.

To buy the hardbound books would cost me at least \$25 each. I therefore take out each year books with a total value of \$2,400 or more. Paperback copies aren't too cheap anymore

either. Subscriptions to the many periodicals I read there would be quite expensive. And a year's subscription to Value Line costs \$70.

Then there's the two-hour per day free linkage to the Internet the library provides. And there are many other services to adults, teenagers and children too numerous to mention here.

Just imagine if we had to pay privately for all these materials and services. Not many of us could do so. We and our families would suffer deprivation of pleasure and knowledge.

I believe public libraries, which often are taken for granted, give us one of the best values we have for our tax monies. Am I going to vote for the library millage proposal on Aug. 4 to maintain and improve our libraries? Of course. I'd be crazy not to.

Lydia Rizzo
Farmington Hills

DESTINATION: CRANBROOK

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