

# Mental health

## Shame on state cost-cutting

The plight of a 60-year-old man found living in an unheated, dilapidated Farmington Hills house filled with rodent fecal matter, as well as a decomposing pet dog, is sad and disturbing.

But as the story of this man has unfolded, the efforts of some good Samaritans — neighbors, police and a building inspector — have come to light.

The story also shines a spotlight on the human toll that has resulted from state cuts in mental health services, including facilities that could provide long-term care.

Efforts were made to care for this man. But you can't force an adult to leave his home against his will. A social worker went to Oakland County Probate Court to have the man declared legally incapacitated.

Finally, an attorney was made the man's guardian and conservator. How can one man address the needs of 540 troubled individuals and ensure they are in good shape and getting the care they need?

Efficiency and sound fiscal management are required of any government program. But state officials, including Gov. John Engler, need to stop and take a look at the human toll that has been left in the wake of cost-cutting.

We must remind Engler and his buddies that it is the state's responsibility to support mental health facilities, programs and services. And we must remind them that these programs are for people who cannot help themselves.

In the wake of hospital closings, Engler should take the time to find a place to live for this Farmington Hills resident, who is without family, and who obviously needs some type of supervised care.

We laud the Lundy Street residents who did what they could to help the man. They are good neighbors and ones we would all want near should life take a turn for the worse.

The same goes for Farmington Hills Zoning Department employee Barb Cociolone, who could have done her job and walked away without a thought about the person behind the apparent building code violations. Instead, she was determined to give help when she saw that it was needed.

It is people like Cociolone, the man's neighbors and the police officers involved in the case, who put heart into a community.

The next step is to get state officials to see the light, reorganize their priorities and put a heart into state services.

## It's time to give some thanks

Although January 1999 will be best remembered for snow, it's also School Board Recognition Month in Michigan.

We take this time to honor the men and women who invest countless hours making difficult decisions about budgets, personnel, curriculum and other matters which affect parents, students, teachers and taxpayers.

This year's theme of "Building Better Futures for Children and Communities" is an appropriate one because a good education is key to building good citizens and good communities.

Children in the Farmington area attend one of three public school districts: Farmington, Walled Lake or Clarenceville.

We salute the Farmington Board of Education and its members: Cathleen Webb, president; Priscilla Brouillette, vice president; Linda Enberg, secretary; Frank Reid, treasurer; Bobbie Feldman, trustee; Jack Inch, trustee; Gary Sharp, trustee.

In the Clarenceville school district, we salute board members John Kanyo, president; Ronald Silve, vice president; Matthew Boettcher, secretary; Gary Garrison, treasurer; Thomas Aldrich, trustee; Bryan Bentley, trustee; John Shaw, trustee.

## Groundhogs are just part of show

**Question:** What do Punxsutawney Phil, Monica Lewinsky and El Niño have in common?

**Answer:** They are all players in a media circus. And the show just seems to go on and on.

This revelation came to us as we were contemplating our annual ruminations on Groundhog Day, coming up next Tuesday. It's a minor observance, also known as Candlemas Day, a date on which, according to German legend, badgers came out of hibernation. If a badger saw his shadow (meaning that the sun was shining) it was an indication that more winter weather was in store. A cloudy day (with no shadows) meant that spring was just around the corner.

When German settlers moved to Pennsylvania, they found no badgers but plenty of groundhogs, or woodchucks, and they transferred the badger legend to that native American creature.

The show opened in 1887 when Clymer Fress, the editor of the Punxsutawney, Pa., Spirit, wrote about a group of groundhog hunters and labeled them the "Punxsutawney Groundhog Club." In a flight of fancy, recalling the German legend, Fress declared that the Punxsutawney groundhog was the only true weather prognosticator and that he lived on a local hill called Gobbler's Knob.

The Spirit kept the story going for years and eventually national media picked up on it, focusing on Punxsutawney every Feb. 2. The exact location of Gobbler's Knob was kept secret and only members of the "Inner Circle" were allowed to witness the groundhog's emergence.

But in 1986 the location of the hill was disclosed and members of the media descended on the small community, filming the events and making Punxsutawney Phil a household word.

In the Walled Lake district, we salute board members Cynthia Campion, president; Thomas McConnell, vice president; Marc Siegler, secretary; Alp Onder, treasurer; Samantha Ruetenik, trustee; David Carlisle, trustee; Michael Karson, trustee.

Serving as a public school trustee is a tremendous commitment. A four-year term requires lots of time, preparation and patience in balancing local needs and wants against state financial realities.

As Michigan Gov. John Engler noted in his proclamation marking January as the special month to honor school board members, "the competitiveness of Michigan's economy and the character of our society depend to a great extent on the quality of instruction offered in Michigan's schools."

As school boards throughout the nation join in School Board Recognition Month, a national observance co-sponsored by the National School Boards Association and the Michigan Association of School Boards, take time to say thanks — in a public way — to the public school board members in our town. They are working hard to improve public education, the cornerstone of our democratic society.

The real circus for Phil began in 1993 when Harold Ramis directed and Bill Murray starred in the movie "Groundhog Day," the story of a cynical weatherman who comes to Punxsutawney to report the annual event and is forced to live the day over and over until he gets it "right."

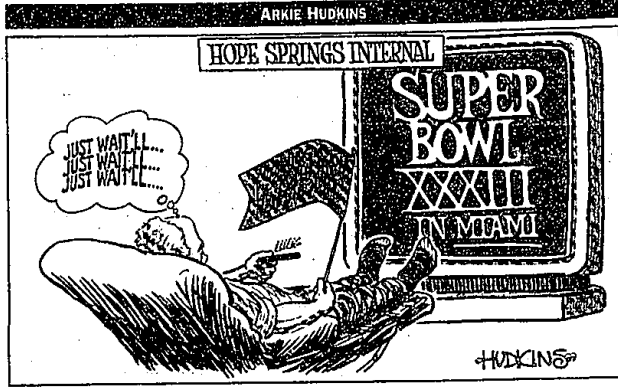
The movie captured the public's imagination and has become a metaphor for everything from computer glitches to presidential peccadilloes. Last November, Margaret Carlson, writing in Time magazine, compared the media coverage of the Ken Starr investigation to "a pallid remake of Groundhog Day, the umpteenth reliving of Bill Clinton's worst 24 hours. And unlike Bill Murray, a small-market newscaster who finally gets it right, no one in this drama is changing for the better."

Last year, Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey took on both El Niño and Punxsutawney Phil by staging a media event in New York City's City Hall Park on Feb. 2. Claiming that El Niño was threatening to disrupt the traditional Groundhog Day activities with bad weather, the circus offered its own weather prognosticator: a 14,782-pound elephant named King Tusk.

And a group calling itself "The Committee for the Commercialization of Groundhog Day," has a Web site offering everything from Groundhog Day birthday cards to T-shirts to Groundhog Day books, cassettes, CDs and videos.

An unabashed statement of purpose reads: "CCGD is dedicated to the commercial exploitation of America's most undercelebrated holiday... We will not stop until we have a Groundhog Day Major Appliance Sale!"

When Clymer Fress penned his tongue-in-cheek yarn about the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club in 1887, he couldn't have known what a circus he was starting. But if he had known, he would probably have loved it.



## LETTERS

### Let all speak

There have been letters in the Detroit and suburban newspapers recently thrashing Cardinal Maida and Catholics for their efforts and pending to help defeat Proposal B that were written by proponents of Proposal B.

Now, I have not been an active member of any religious institution for 35 years, but I feel that I must come to the Catholics' defense in this matter. In doing that, I must say that these writers must not read the same newspapers or view the same TV broadcasts that I do. They, the media, have plainly stated that it was a coalition of Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, Jews, Right-to-Lifers and perhaps a few more organizations that pooled their efforts to help defeat what they, and I, viewed as bad law.

To singularly pick on Catholics for the defeat of Proposal B shows either an open bias towards Catholics or an abiding ignorance of what the vote showed, that Proposal B faced more than just the opposition of the coalition. Perhaps both examples apply to some writers.

Some letter penners also decry the use of what they term "tax-exempt church money." Huh? You mean the people who donated that money did not pay taxes on it? Oh, you mean the donors got an income tax deduction for it.

Yes, a few cents on the dollar and only if the long form is filed. You can bet that the media outlets that were paid by this money are certainly paying taxes on it. It is the ability to speak out because of this money that is truly resented, not its tax-exempt status and that I view subverts the rights of the moneys donors.

Furthermore, I did not see any "religious" doctrine per say in any of the coalition's appeals to the voting public. I only saw reasonable argument of the coalition's point of view of just why Proposal B should not be passed.

It is apparent in the overwhelming percentage of Proposal B's defeat that many voters not in the coalition ranks also thought Proposal B was a bad law and that Proposal B would have gone down to defeat even if the coalition never came into existence.

One more, perhaps most important thing. In our republic to deny a coalition of this sort their right to voice their opinion would be undemocratic and against the principles that this nation holds as its rock-hard foundation. Deny them and perhaps the next voices to be denied could be the ACLU or efforts like Marier's Friends.

Tom Murphy  
Farmington Hills

### 'They' can be a danger

A response to the reader who commented on Tim Richard's article of Jan. 7 ("State aid to private schools involves propaganda use").

Yes, let's talk about who "they" are, the "they" who want public tax money to fund public schools.

Are "they" those who don't view the public schools in a historical context, as the major factor in creating the "melting pot" that this country was in the past and must continue to be if it is to survive?

Are "they" those who don't appreciate and probably would not acknowledge the benefits we reap today from the public education that has been provided to all over the last 100 years or more?

Are "they" those who don't have the foresight to see the dire results for this nation if we become more and more divided, intolerant, selfish and polarized?

Are "they" those who, rather than pitch in and help "fix" the public schools — where they need fixing — take cheap shots at perceived ill?

Are "they" those who are so obtuse that they do not acknowledge that the public schools take responsibility for and accept the resulting consequences that the private schools can and do avoid?

Are "they" those who are so selfish and narrow-minded that they don't know how important it is that all children be taught to understand and relate to those who are disabled?

Are "they" those elitists who "home school" their children, holding them aloof and isolated from their fellow citizens?

Are "they" those who have the economic means and intellectual abilities to benefit this country with their input but who, instead, turn their actions inward to personal benefit with no care for the good of society as a whole?

We propose that: "They" are individuals whose emphasis and motivation are centered around "I," not "we."

"They" are those who do not realize the importance and benefits of the "community school," especially now, at a time when society has largely evolved from rural to urban and will further become more dehumanized as we retreat from each other into the world of cyberspace.

"They" are people who have never had the joy of a lifelong friendship with a person of a different ethnic, religious or economic background that began when "we went to school together."

"They" are those who spew propaganda in order to destroy the public schools, thus further widening the economic and social gap between the "haves" and the "have nots."

"They" are a danger to our country. If the "grand experiment" — this nation — is to survive, "we the people" must find ways to preserve and nurture our public schools. They are the basic strength of this "one nation, indivisible."

Mr. and Mrs. R.J. Davis  
Livonia

## Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALISZEWSKI, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450  
SUSAN ROBERT, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149  
HUGH QALLAHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118  
PEE KHOSPEL, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177  
LARRY GEDER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234  
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252  
RICK FIGURELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

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— Philip Power