

Acceptance

Defaced mural shows disregard

"The school is like the world. There's prejudice and hate all around."

Nothing could be truer than that statement by Margaret VanAmeyde, a counselor at Harrison High School and a moderator for the Gay Straight Alliance.

Her comments came in the aftermath of the recent defacing of a gay pride mural at Harrison High School. The mural was painted by members of the Gay Straight Alliance near the school's main office.

The defacing prompted the mural to be painted over. A small poster about acceptance and an open letter to the school population from the alliance's adult moderators also replaces the mural.

The mural featured the rainbow flag, symbol of gay pride, surrounded by 100 circles. In every 10th circle was a face, to represent that about one-tenth of the population is homosexual.

Acceptance is the key word. Kids will be kids and if there is a mural of any type painted somewhere in a school it is likely that someone will deface it with graffiti — because it is there.

The key word here is acceptance. And word apparently got around at the school that it was a gay mural and the rest is history.

Indeed a school, especially the size of Harrison, is a microcosm of society. But it is also equally sad that such young people can be so closed-minded, especially about their own friends and classmates.

If young people cannot have open minds and hearts and learn to accept all kinds of people, regardless of their religion, race or sexual preference, we are all in for a rough future.

It is the innocence of youth that makes young people so refreshing — until you hear about the defacing of a mural that was designed to inform and acknowledge.

The original intent of the mural was to speak to a small portion of the student body who has always been here but never acknowledged. Their intent was never to provoke,



STAFF PHOTO BY ELIZABETH CANNON

Acceptance: This is a poster that stands in place of a gay pride mural in a hallway at Harrison High School. To the right of the poster is an open letter to the school population explaining why the mural was painted over.

offend or ridicule," according to the open letter posted by adult moderators.

It is said that young people learn their attitudes from their parents and other adult role models in their lives. That's scary because it is adults who have lost their open-mindedness and closed their hearts as life's experiences jaded them just a little more each day.

The mural was just an expression from a group of both gay and straight students. It was also an acknowledgment that as depicted one-tenth of the population is homosexual. Some people may not like that, but that's the way it is. And regardless of sexual preference — just like religion or race — people deserve equal respect. Sexual preference is a small aspect of what living is all about. It should not affect education or work or the right to live a full and safe life, free of ridicule and fear.

We urge parents to sit their kids down and talk to them about openness and acceptance. Neither virtue can hurt. In fact, if indeed a school is a microcosm of society, openness and acceptance should be welcome and will go a long way in resolving problems in our larger society.

Drug tests: Read constitution

To get a handle on this welfare drug test question, ask yourself: What percentage of drug users would you have to find to justify invading everyone's bloodstream or urine sample?

That's the constitutional heart of the debate over requiring all welfare recipients to be tested. Here's what the Michigan Constitution says:

"The person, houses, papers and possessions of every person shall be secure from unreasonable searches and seizures. No warrant to search any place or to seize any person or things shall issue without describing them, nor without probable cause supported by oath or affirmation."

That's a high, tough standard. Law enforcement people must swear they have probable cause to believe someone has drugs before obtaining a warrant.

But the bills passed by the state House of Representatives fall far short of that standard. House Bills 4090 and 4091 give the state Family Independence Agency authority to run three pilot sites to test welfare recipients for drug use. One test area would be urban, another rural; the third in Wayne County.

If a welfare client refuses to take the test, he's punished by loss of benefits — no trial.

The sponsor, Rep. Lauren Hager, R-Port Huron, calls it "tough love and compassion in its purest form. A welfare client who is shown to be addicted is offered state-paid treatment." That's wise. Welfare should do more than subsidize people. The new welfare system is designed to get people on their feet, not, in the words of the bills' sponsors, to pay for their addiction.

The program wouldn't be cheap. The House Fiscal Agency said 175,000 tests a year would be given. At an average cost of \$3,000, treatment would total \$78.7 million. The Family Independence Agency (FIA) said it's unclear whether Medicaid would reimburse the state.

Despite his reputed fiscal conservatism, Gov. John Engler, who is making his second request for the welfare drug tests, isn't afraid to spend money. Remember when he ended "general assistance"? He didn't just put the money into other programs. He used it to match welfare federal grants and signed the biggest welfare bill in Michigan's history.

But back to our original question: What

If a welfare client refuses to take the test, he's punished by loss of benefits — no trial.

percentage would have to test positive for drugs to justify testing everyone? FIA estimates 16 percent will test positive. Elsewhere, we read of 20 percent testing positive.

Michigan has run into this kind of constitutional problem before. In the mid-1980s, Gov. James Blanchard advocated vehicle check lanes to catch drunken drivers. Cops would figure out which bars would generate lots of drunken drivers on which roads and stop every one passing by.

The courts shot it down for precisely the constitutional reason we cited — there was insufficient "probable cause" to justify stopping every driver.

Moreover, we note that supporters of HB 4090-4091 rejected an amendment requiring all state officials, including the governor and 148 legislators, to submit to drug tests. What's sauce for the welfare goose could well have been sauce for the legislative gander, particularly since lawmakers from both parties have been nailed for drug usage over the years.

One could argue that job applicants at private firms often are required to pass a drug test. It seems the constitution doesn't apply in business. So be it. Requiring a welfare recipient to pass a drug test can be viewed as practice in getting a job in the corporate world.

But we still bump into Sec. 11 in the state constitution's Declaration of Rights: "The person ... unreasonable searches and seizures ... probable cause supported by oath or affirmation."

Reps. Nancy Quarles, D-Southfield, and Tom Kelly, D-Wayne, bucked their colleagues in voting against the drug test bills. We applaud them for reading the Michigan Constitution, which their oaths of office require them to uphold.

The bills probably will be passed. The courts may well call them unconstitutional. The unsavory mess could be avoided if we would all read our constitution and take it more seriously.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Pleading again

Thank you very much for your editorial in the newspaper yesterday on the traffic noise from the I-275/96 freeway at my home. I agree with you totally that our state transportation department officials are a very "insensitive bunch." I would add that they also are extremely uncaring to homeowners who were in the area long before the freeway even was planned, because as they (Michigan Department of Transportation) apparently "see it," their job only is to provide easy movement for motor vehicles.

It would be interesting to find out where those officials live themselves — in homes next to high-speed, multilane roadways? I think not. They probably live as close as is convenient to have rapid transportation but not so close that they have to listen to traffic noise.

A suggestion, however: the word "irritating," at least for me these past 20-plus years, is too mild a word to describe the very great (and continuous) noise from I-275/96 at my home. Devastatingly, unconsciously too loud would be more accurate. For many years, other homeowners along I-275/96 and I-275 in Wayne County have had earth berms or concrete noise barrier walls to shield them. Why not those of us who live in Oakland County?

I have just sent a letter to Gov. John Engler. We elect our governors. We cannot do not influence state transportation department officials with our votes. My husband and I were very misled by the Michigan Highway Department in 1968 (when we had to sell our "right of way" property to them) because we were told by them that "highway noise" would be no problem for us.

We planned to a transportation commission meeting in Lansing this Tuesday to plead for the adequate muffling of the (soon to be reconstructed) I-275/96 freeway noise. Again, we appreciate your editorial and your support.

Joan Barber
Farmington Hills

Unique opportunity

As a state senator, I was very active in instituting legislation that dealt with sex offenders and protecting our children from those who would do them harm. Now, as the Oakland County sheriff, I have the unique opportunity to implement those tools to protect our children. One operation that I am very proud of, and one which has already shown results, is our cyberstalking to apprehend pedophiles who are preying on children through the Internet.

More and more children are using the Internet and visiting chat rooms. Parents should be aware that inappropriate contact is often occurring. This threat has prompted us to "patrol" the World Wide Web for pedophiles.

After one of my sergeants went undercover, acting as a 14-year-old Independence Township girl named "Jenna," he was contacted by a man, 50 years old.

During six weeks of chatting with him, the subject spoke about kiddie porn, meeting for sex, and sent pornographic pictures of himself and children. At this point, we moved in and apprehended him for trafficking child pornography, which is a felony in Michigan punishable by up to seven years in prison. Like many pedophiles, he had a prior arrest for sexual molestation of a child. The average pedophile has over 100 victims. This is why it is so important to continue the fight against such predators.

This type of activity, unfortunately, is only going to grow unless we work together to protect our children. Such an arrest will hopefully make predators afraid to prey on someone over the Internet.

For your part, as parents, there are ways of making sure your child is safe from predators. Make sure you keep the computer where you can monitor your child's use. Consider software programs that will block your child's access to sexually oriented Internet sites. Never give out personal information, such as an address, phone number, credit card, photo or checking account numbers. Make sure your child knows that someone who claims to be a child or teenager online may be an adult.

Lastly, ask your child to tell an adult immediately if they receive a message that makes them uncomfortable. Also, ask them to promise never to get together with anyone they meet online without asking you. These are helpful guidelines that the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children recommend you follow when allowing your children to go on the Internet.

Again, I strongly believe that by working together we can beat these reprehensible people who use the Internet as a weapon against innocent children. I will do all I can to see that every child can feel safe in their own home. Although this is a relatively new technology, I feel confident that we can make an impact on these sort of crimes and have pedophiles frightened to solicit online.

If you find that someone has tried to contact your child, or if you have any questions relating to the safety of your child or yourself, please feel free to contact your local police department or the Oakland County Sheriff's Department at (248) 858-4950.

Michael J. Bouchard
Oakland County sheriff

More Letters, Page A13

Farmington Observer

JOANNE MALIUSZAK, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 248-477-5450
SUSAN ROSE, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149
HUGH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118
PEG KNOX, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177
JIM JAMMERSON, PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252
MARK WARREN, CIRCULATION DIRECTOR, 734-953-2117
RICK FICORELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JOANNE TOWAR, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD ADRIAN, PRESIDENT
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