

## CONVERSATIONS



FRANK PROVENZANO

### Conference fosters deeper understanding of students' needs

For a long while, the gray cloud above Columbine High School will hover over any discussion about the future of today's youth. If there were any doubts about how tightly bound the global village has become, just look around at students and parents living throughout Oakland County, who stopped in their tracks and placed their hands over their mouths in utter horror when they heard the news coming out of Littleton, Colo.

These feelings of abandonment, alienation, utter senselessness, and the fear of being a victim of random violence, aren't confined to a large public high school in an upper-middle class neighborhood near the Rockies. Somewhere, somehow, something has gone terribly wrong.

### Searching for answers

Too many parents are too busy or are distracted themselves to find the answers.

Not that answers are easy. And besides, it's too easy to simply blame parents for not spending enough time, or not being a "good role model" for their children.

But there's no substitute for knowing where your child is at emotionally, psychologically and socially.

This Sunday through Tuesday, a conference sponsored by the Michigan Alliance for Gifted Children offers parents an opportunity to learn about what is considered typical and atypical child development.

"The issue for parents is how can we help our children be a good human being," said Gayle Kirker, chair of the conference.

Unfortunately, most educational curriculums are designed to create students proficient in math and science, prospective employees competing for salaries and status.

Good human beings? That too often is an afterthought.

How else can you explain why those programs in the arts and humanities that foster creative expression and emotional development are underfunded or under emphasized?

### Needing attention

"What gets tested gets taught" is the saying," said Kirker. "Teachers don't feel empowered when it comes to the life of a child. They feel controlled when it comes to policy."

Perhaps it's time, once again, to ask whether education should seek to standardize teaching or to teach students how they can beat understanding themselves.

The upcoming conference, "Nurturing the Gifted Learner," is aimed at understanding students who learn faster, deeper and have more academic needs. An estimated 6 percent of students.

These students might be considered exceptional

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### Roundtable to discuss arts education

You're invited to "Opening the Book," a roundtable discussion about arts curriculum in our local school districts, 6:30-9:30 p.m. Tuesday, May 18, at the Southfield Centre for the Arts, 24360 Southfield Road, Southfield.

Panelists will answer questions from the audience, and address their concerns about arts education and curriculum in the school districts the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers cover. There is no charge to attend.

Call Frank Provenzano, (248) 901-2557, Kelly Wygonik (734) 551-2105, or Linda Chomin (734) 953-2145 if you have any questions.



STAFF PHOTO BY GUY WARREN

Standing tall: Interim Director Maurice Parrish has provided much-needed leadership for the Detroit Institute of the Arts over the last year-and-a-half.

BY FRANK PROVENZANO

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et the Renaissance begin. This time, it's not the same old talk of renewal tossed around by supporters of flashy casinos and trendy sports stadiums.

There's no inflated rhetoric about the impending revival inspired by the influx of capital from corporate behemoths relocating south of Eight Mile.

If all goes according to the \$320-million plan, this time the "renaissance" will be the real thing—a financial and spiritual commitment to transform the Detroit Institute of Arts as a repository of culture and a symbol of the quality of the regional civilization, also known as life in metro Detroit.

For doubters wondering whether the DIA would exist into the 21st century, the question is no longer "if," but "how."

By 2010, the DIA is expected to be transformed into a financially self-sustaining, physically updated cultural trove with an endowment growing by three-fold, 30,000 square feet in additional gallery space, expanded hours and, above all, a new sensibility aimed at attracting more people to walk through its marble corridors.

Slapdash take a seat. Welcome to the nowfangled encyclopedic arts institution, no longer resting on its laurels as the fifth largest museum in the United States.

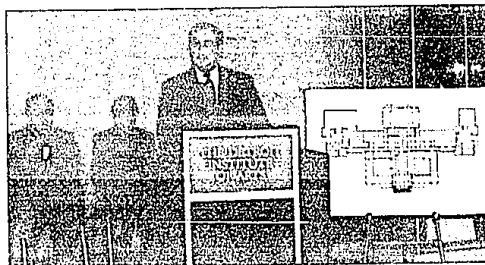
### Modern-day Medics

Of course, this is the same arts museum that has, over the last decade, struggled to keep its doors open and been the victim of divisive city-suburban-state politics, including haggling over state funding and who should be responsible for the day-to-day operations of the institute.

With one stroke of the pen and a dip into their deep fortunes, three modern-day Medics (famous patrons of the Italian Renaissance) have generously made the point that the history of a region is defined by a shared culture, not culture.

## TRANSFORMING the DIA

FORD, MANOOGIAN, TAUBMAN  
\$50-MILLION GIFT KICKS OFF  
UNPRECEDENTED FUNDRAISING  
CAMPAIGN TO INCREASE  
ENDOWMENT, EXHIBIT SPACE, MAKE  
MUSEUM 'MORE ACCESSIBLE'



STAFF PHOTO BY GUY WARREN

Future plans: John D. Lewis, chair of the DIA's development committee, explains the details of the two-phase \$320-million campaign.

al differences.

Last Wednesday, Josephine Ford (widow of Walter Buhl Ford II), Richard Manoogian and A. Alfred Taubman made a \$50-million lump sum donation from their massive personal wealth to launch the DIA's 10-year fund-raising campaign with the goal of raising \$320 million.

"These three individuals have given before," said Maurice Parrish, interim director at the DIA. "They challenged each other to establish a new standard in philanthropic giving."

The "giving" is the largest donation ever to a Detroit cultural institution, far exceeding the \$9 million private donation the DIA received in 1970.

It was largely through donations of the Ford family that the DIA was built in 1927. Since then, the Ford family has played a central role in sustaining the museum. More recently, Manoogian and Taubman, among the wealthiest people in Michigan, have added their influence to the museum. Manoogian, chair of Moxco Corp., serves as president of the DIA board. And Taubman, of Bloomfield Hills and founder and chair of the Taubman Co., is president of the Detroit Arts Commission.

"This campaign will send a strong signal," said Manoogian. "We're alive and well and expanding."

The campaign is divided into two phases. Phase One aims to raise \$120 million over five years to fund the museum's operating budget and renovations. Phase Two is expected to take 10 years to raise an additional \$200 million to add to the DIA's current endowment of \$93.2 million.

In the last decade, the DIA has spent \$17 million to repair its roof, and electrical system along with updates and reinstallation to several of its galleries. Future renovations will minimize new construction and maximize the cur-

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## BOOKS

### Premature birth inspires book of 'Miracles'

BY HUGH GALLAGHER

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On Sunday, Nov. 20, 1994, Elizabeth Ellen Smith entered this world 15 weeks early and struggling to survive. Her parents, Tim and Donna Smith, were thrown into the anxiety and roller coaster emotions that confront the parents of very premature babies (micro-preemies).

For Tim Smith, a reporter for the West Bloomfield Eccentric at the time, and now for the Farmington Observer, his first concern was that of a worried father. It was only later that he realized his experience might help others.

"I wasn't going to write anything while she was in the hospital," he said. "I wanted to focus on her, on being a father. Then I saw the thumbs up photo and it was so dramatic, someone speaking to me, a spiritual thing. It was my duty."

That quick snapshot of little Elizabeth at 4 months old, a happy smile on her face and her thumb definitely giving a high sign, was the spark for a column, a series of stories on other micro-preemies and their parents.



Tim Smith

um, a series of stories on other micro-preemies and their parents. "Miracle Birth Stories of Very Premature Babies: Little Thumbs Up!" (Bergin & Garvey, \$15.95 trade paperback).

And the message that Smith provides through his dramatic and sensitive stories of brave micro-preemies and their parents was summarized in that first column, "... good things can happen to preemies."

Smith wanted to reach a wider audience and provide a book for parents of micro-preemies that would be realistic, factual and encouraging. As many first-time writers do, he got his share of rejections from the big New York publishers he queried before being signed

with the Greenwood Publishing Group. But he knew he had a good book and an audience.

With the help of Livonia's Laurie Blacker, of "Freemie Stars," the March of Dimes WalkAmerica program, he made contact with parents of premature children through the Premie L on-line chat room. He asked if there was any interest in a book that focused on the stories of premature babies who made their way successfully through the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit.

"The common thread was that there was nothing similar to this book," Smith said.

This book is a compendium of stories, all dramatic, some at least in part heartbreaking but all offering hope in

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Family portrait: Elizabeth Ellen Smith (center) and her parents, Tim and Donna Smith.

