

## POINTS OF VIEW

# Communication works both ways: Tell us what you think

**Y**ou've seen the commercial. A group of self-satisfied guys are sitting around and one of them says smugly, "It doesn't get any better than this."

I know how he feels. This week I'm stepping into the position of managing editor for The Observer Newspapers. That means it's my job to help a talented group of editors, reporters, photographers and artists put out the best community newspapers in America.

For a newspaper junkie, it doesn't get any better than that.

For decades newspapers have been given the 8-count, only to rise again to fight another day. First it was radio, then television and then the Internet that would provide the KO. But each medium found its own purpose and its own audience. And newspapers did, too.

Community newspapers have prospered by providing the news that you need. Our front page has a slogan, "Putting you in touch with your world." We don't have far-flung correspondents, national political pundits or an extensive travel budget. We don't cover the hot Hollywood gossip.

We're about you, your neighbors, your local government, your schools. We want to tell your story.

That's an important job and we take it very seriously.

We're diligent about covering local elections, even when the electorate seems apathetic. We keep a close eye on local schools, both what the school board does and what actually goes on in the classrooms.

We cover the school sports, putting the spotlight on energetic young men and women athletes, rather than on millionaire professionals.

We also try to reflect the life that is important to you and your neighbors with profiles of the people who live and work in each of our communities.

We cover issues, controversies, organized activities that have a vital interest for the people living in each of our towns. If it matters to you, it matters to us.

We cover regional and state news that will have a direct impact on our communities.

When something important happens around the world, we won't be giving you the latest



HUGH GALLAGHER

wire story, but we'll often find a local connection that brings the story home to you.

When we cover the arts, we'll tell you about what you're interested in attending and also about what your friends and neighbors are doing to express themselves.

We also present our opinions on issues that directly affect your lives. You may not always agree with our opinions and that's fine. Our goal isn't primarily to change your view but instead to stimulate debate and, maybe, encourage you to participate in the discussion with a letter to the editor.

I became a newspaper junkie probably by osmosis, watching my father devour newspapers from front page to back. He always had strong opinions about everything and carried on a regular dialog while he read.

That's what we hope you'll do with your Observer. We want to know what you think about what you're reading, what you'd like to see in the paper, what we're doing wrong and what we're doing right. If you think you know a good story we should be covering, don't keep it to yourself; let us know. If we're missing the big picture on what's important in the community, fill us in. If our opinions on local issues are all wet, set us straight.

After all, it's YOUR newspaper. You can reach me at (734) 953-2149, fax me at (734) 591-7279 or e-mail me at hgallagher@oe.homecomm.net.

I look forward to the discussion.

*Hugh Gallagher is the managing editor of The Observer Newspapers.*

## State needs Dems to be viable option

In the Democratic state party headquarters on Townsend Street in Lansing, there's a poster of a new superhero. Like all superheroes, this one wears a cape and red tights. He's overly musclebound and apparently can fly.

But this one has a big "D" on his chest and has the head of a donkey. The poster proudly proclaims, "The Democrats are Back."

That tells me one thing - Democrats have been somewhere else for a while. I'll speculate here they were stuck in "Fieger Time," which is a lot like the "Twilight Zone," and it's a long way back from there.

State Party Chairman Mark Brewer isn't willing to accept the premise. Democrats have not, as some argue, been out of touch with the electorate, he says.

"We had a very bad election last time. I won't blow smoke at you," Brewer said. But it wasn't as bad as it appears, he also contended. A mere 1,300 votes spread across four representative districts - the right four - would have put Democrats in control of the state House.

As it is, things are pretty dismal for the Dems in Michigan. The GOP controls both chambers of the Legislature and the governor's office. Among statewide offices, only the Attorney General's office is held by a Democrat, Jennifer Granholm. And now even the make up of the state Supreme Court is becoming a big issue for the Democratic party.

So the party is learning how uncomfortable it is to be in the minority. Regardless of where Democrats are, or where they've been, they have a plan for coming back. Brewer unveiled his plans earlier this month.

For one, the state party is planning a statewide door-to-door canvass beginning this summer and likely to continue until the next election. The goal, admittedly ambitious, is to get to every house in the state by the time the next election is here, Brewer said.

The Dems will be using the canvass to explain the party's position on education and its call for strengthening public education. They say they want to hire more teachers, reduce class sizes, modernize classrooms and institute a core curriculum.

But also, they'll be looking for voters' political persuasion and opinions on a variety of issues.



MIKE MALOTT

If Democrats are smart, they'll make a top priority of the latter. Voters are clearly disgusted with politics in general. Michigan Democrats have lost ground because of that disaffection. And I hear more and more from folks who feel the Democratic party doesn't represent the average guy, the one who is simply trying to make it through a typical work day, making a buck and trying to make a good life for the family.

Door knocking is an excellent way for the party to reconnect. Voters, from what I've seen, appreciate when politicians come looking for them and their opinions. Too often, when citizens head off to the seat of government to try to be heard, they leave feeling ignored.

I for one hope the campaign is successful. I would urge any resident of the state to give party members an earful when they come knocking. It's an opportunity voters ought not miss, regardless of which party they're from.

And I hope Democrats leave with a better idea of what voters really want and a restored relationship with their constituents.

The state needs the Democrats to be a viable party. Michigan needs two parties in full contention for running the government. Regardless of political leanings, we all need strong representation from both ends of the political spectrum.

As we are seeing now, one party domination of the system eliminates much of the advantage of having a two-party system in the first place.

Mike Malott reports on the local implications of state and regional events. He can be reached by phone at (248) 349-1700 or by e-mail at mmalott@homecomm.net.

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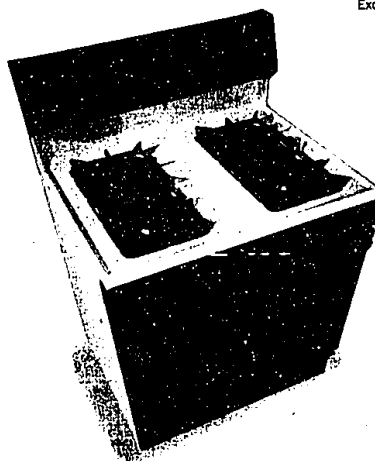
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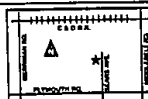
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