#### **POINTS OF VIEW**

## Holiday fare: Tell your children to stay in school

Ithough it's kinda dry, the annual forecast "The Michigan Economic Outlook for 1999-2000" just issued by the University of Michigan's Research Seminar in Quantitative Economics is the best in

the business.
As everybody knows, our economy flourished in the 1990s. If we have two more years of job growth, Michigan will have experienced the longest run of job creation in the past 50 years. The forecast suggests this might well be possible, although at a what slower rate of growth than

The forecast assumes no big notional strike by the UAW against deneral Motors. It takes into account the GM plant closings in Flint and Kalamazoo, offset against a boom in construction activity in the Detroit areh stemming from new casinos and area stemming from new casinos and stadiums and the \$1.5 billion renova-tion of engineering and research facil-ities at the GM Tech Center in War-

The forecast foresees job growth The forecast foresees Jub grown over the next two years but slowing in the year 2000, with just moderate inflation. Conversely, unemployment is expected to rise a bit, to 4.2 percent in 1999 and 4.5 percent in 2000. If these rates are sustained, Michigan unemployment for the four years eight 1997 usual the type best since. since 1997 would be the best since

What's the big worry? As anybody who reads the Help Wanted section is this newspaper knows full well, it's the labor shortage, especially intense in the higher-skills categories. risk posed by labor shortages is that they can impede job growth," the RSQE forecast dryly notes. Most employers would snort, "Impede, my foot!" What they're faced with is abso lute labor shortages and increasing cests, especially for skilled workers.

Traditionally, economies get new workers from three sources: From the unemployed; from increases in partici-pation in the labor force (for example, women deciding to go to work instead



#### PHILIP POWER

of staying home); and from increases in the working-nge population. But in Michigan unemployment is at record low levels, and job growth over the past years has sucked about all the n who want to work into the job

So the pool of labor supply is drying up, especially at the higher-education end of the spectrum, where most of the higher-wage jobs are concentrat-ed. The U-M data show that people who never got to an associate's degr from a community college are three times as likely to be unemployed as

those who have an associate's degree and above. Unemployment for those with a college degree will be at just 1.1 percent; for those with a master's

1.1 percent; for those with a missel a degree, 0.6 percent. Readers with kids who are thinking of dropping out of high school or get-ting a job after getting their high school diploma would do well to urge

school appoint would do well to lege them to think again!

This also goes for those who are thinking of getting UAW jobs in the auto industry. UAW membership peaked at 1.51 million members in 1979 and has declined steadily to the present level of 760,000.

How come? The UAW lost the auto

How come? The UAW lost the auto supplier sector during the 1950s, when the percentage of unionized workers fell from 52 percent in 1979 to 21 percent today. Why? A 100-percent wage gap between for Big Three-UAW parts plants and independent nonunion parts plants. This, in turn, forces attention on GM and the UAW. GM wants to spin off its Deloki parts negration because

off its Delphi parts operation because

than Ford or DaimlerChrysler. The UAW faces the bind of either seeing parts plants spun off (and, potential-ly, decertified) or consenting to a reduction of wages.

The situation is even tougher when it comes to Big Three plants versus the Japanese transplanted plants. According to Sean McAlinden of U-M's Transportation Research Institute, the labor cost advantage for a simulation for a sim

So, when your family gathers around the dinner table for Thanksgiving, urge them to stay in school, get good skills, stay away from UAW-auto plants. Then give them a second helping of masked potatoes!

Phil Pawer is chairman of Home-Town 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@oconline.com

### Alternative middle school: Its students are works in progress

erald and Patricia Estwick of Farmington Hills are particu-larly grateful this Thanksgiv-

Their son Demetrius has exchanged the D's and E's he used to bring home on his report cards for A's and B's. He is more helpful around the house and kinder to his younger sisters. And, according to his mom, "He feels good about Demetrius. He

Just can't stop grinning."

Demetrius is one of 50 students enrolled in the newly-established Southwest Alternative Middle School

which opened its doors this fall in downtown Farmington.

His classmates are seventh and eighth graders from the West Bloom-field, Farmington, Novi, Huron Valley and South Lyon districts who had dif-ficulty learning in a traditional middleischool setting.

To seven students spread out over

room the size of a traditional classa room the size of a traditional class-room, teacher Derek Miller talks about literature with an engaging mind, a roving eye and a firm, but delicate, hand. He works to draw everyone into the discussion, and somehow is able to make what each student says important, no matter how off hand the remark.

"In alternative education, we have "In alternative education, we have a saying: 'If kids aren't learning the way we teach, we have to teach the way kids learn," says Russ Averill, who coordinates and teaches in the new school. 'The key to our success is small class size – 12 students per

"Teachers can take more time with you," reports Amanda Kempker, who, like many of her classmates, had qualms about leaving her friends and neighborhood middle school for a new,

iknown experience.
"I'd probably be getting in a lot of



#### JUDITH DONER BERNE

trouble (there)," she acknowledges. "My dad's really happy because I'm doing better. He took me shopping since I was doing so good."

Amanda's mom, America Kempker, is equally delighted. "We were kind of reluctant. We just didn't know if it was the right thing. But what a turnaround she has made.

Demetrius

mother also was initially leery. 'I did-n't like the word 'alternative.' I was worried they were labeling him. But my husband said let's give it a chance. We're going out of town for Thanks-giving. Demetrius will be able to report to his grandmother: 'I am somebody."

Enrollment in the new school is voluntary, but parent involvement is not. Parents are expected to attend meetings and workshops devoted to child's educational program and to learn specific skills for interacting more positively with their child.

Although this is the first alternative regional middle school to open thus far in Oakland County, "they're popping up all over," Averill reports. Proponents of alternative middle

schools hope that by interrupting the cycle at a younger age, students will go back and prosper in the regular public school system.

Southwest Alternative middle schooler Chris Perdue says that's right up his alley. He wants to do well, "so I can go back to my other school. I actually got to see better let-

ters than 'E' on my report card."

Stay tuned, The alternative middle school, like its students, is a work in progress.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloom field resident, is former managing edi-tor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can comment on this column by call-. ing (734) 953-2047, Ext. 1997, or in a letter.

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