

POINTS OF VIEW

State wildflower program perks up a long drive

There we were — my family and me — driving along on I-96, passing mile after mile of gray, concrete, characterless expressway punctuated occasionally by equally unremarkable bridges. Despite our best efforts, boredom was settling in, especially as we realized we had many, many miles to go.

Suddenly at the Portland exit, a blaze of color! Red poppies, white daisies, what looked like blue wild flax and something dark magenta that I couldn't identify. The small light blue sign featuring a yellow flower road, "Wildflower Planting."

What a pleasure it was to see that small, unexpected surge of color on the side of the road! Suddenly we all came awake, talking excitedly about how lovely the flowers were, what a surprise it was to see them, how the plantings came about.

So I made a few calls. It turns out the wildflower plantings are just a small part of a much bigger program called (with bureaucratic inevitability) the Michigan Transportation Enhancement Program. Funded most-

ly by the feds but requiring a local match, the Enhancement Program includes a range of projects from building bike trails to preserving historical transportation facilities, preventing ground water runoff and landscaping and streetscaping.

The Michigan Department of Transportation has been looking around for local partners to help invest this year's \$20 million allocation from the federal government.

"These are not your typical road resurfacing or bridge replacement projects that receive the lion's share of our federal and state transportation dollars," says State Transportation Director James DeSana. "The beauty of this federal program is that it encourages communities to decide for themselves how to invest these earmarked funds to further enhance the appearance, safety and economic benefit of their local transportation systems."

A lot of activity has been funded by this program:

■ Trees, shrubs, grass and flowers are being planted along Orchard Lake



PHILIP POWER

Road from I-696 to 10 Mile Road in Farmington Hills.

■ Accenting the new "Welcome to Redford" signs in Redford Township, boulder retaining walls are being built and shrubs and flowers are being planted at the Joy and Puritan intersections with Telegraph Road.

■ In Howell, a new walkway along Grand River Avenue from the Ann Arbor Railroad overpass to Elm Street will receive trees, shrubs, grass and flowers.

■ Statewide, the popular handbooks, "Wildflowers of Michigan" and

"Michigan's Roadside Trees" are being updated and reprinted.

Oddly, just planting wildflowers is not terribly expensive. Obviously, you can't just throw the seeds around and expect much to happen. You've got to kill off the grasses, till the soil and sow the kinds of seeds that match soil conditions. Still, a current wildflower project on M-32 near Gaylord is budgeted at \$2,500 to plant 12 varieties of native flowers and four kinds of grasses on 15 acres.

There are problems, of course. Some species don't make it, while others need periodic maintenance, which Michigan does not currently fund. Sometimes selfish people pick the flowers or even dig up the plants, jeopardizing the whole idea. MDOT even has had to put out a press release reminding people not to pick the daisies, because doing so is both illegal and unsafe.

But the whole program seems to me imaginative and valuable to a state whose road system needs all the help it can get. The Transportation Department is looking to partner with

local communities for projects ranging from wildflower plantings alone all the way to major landscaping with trees and shrubs.

MDOT will be issuing in September a call for project applications to be funded in the 2001-2002 fiscal year. People interested in looking into the program can contact the state at: www.mdot.state.mi.us/programs/enhance/enhance.htm.

At 18 acres, the planting we originally noticed on I-96 near Portland was completed in 1996 and is one of the largest ever attempted by the MDOT. However, with a total of 179,000 acres of roadside in Michigan and only 250 acres of wildflower plantings so far, there's a long way to go.

Philip Power is chairman of HomeTown 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@homecomm.net

LETTERS

Time to comment

Priscilla Brouillette and I have worked together on the Farmington/Farmington Hills Multicultural Multiracial (MCMR) Community Council for the past five years. Although Priscilla is running unopposed in the upcoming Farmington Public School Board election, it seems a good time to comment about her dedication to the community.

Priscilla believes that every child in the district has the right to equal opportunity for public education. In pursuing this goal, one of the supplemental volunteer efforts to her board position has been to serve as the Farmington school board representative for the MCMR Council.

Priscilla has shown our council ever present and unwavering support and she has demonstrated this support for all children of the district by

her visible actions on our council and on the school board.

Priscilla is not afraid to challenge the status quo if it means that all the children of the district will receive an improved education as the result. She has supported many initiatives to encourage communication among diverse student and parent populations, efforts to develop a diverse workforce, conduct student forums on topics of diversity, and revise the curriculum to be inclusive of many cultures and to be historically accurate. And in so doing, all the student of Farmington Public Schools will be more enriched and prepared to enter the international workforce.

As a parent with three children in Farmington schools, I am proud to support Priscilla and her colleagues in their efforts to be inclusive of all children. At the closest level, I appreciate her influence on my family's

education and as a community member and co-chair of the MCMR Council, I appreciate the direction she gives the community.

Karen Bolsen
Farmington Hills
Co-chair MCMR Community Council

Not mentioned

In reading your account of the Memorial Day Parade and the ceremonies in downtown Farmington, I wonder if your reporter was really there.

I saw our state Rep. Andrew Raczkowski in his Army uniform marching in the parade and then act as MC along with Mr. Wally Christensen as the parade passed through downtown.

Andrew was also a speaker at the ceremonies honoring our veterans. I

am not sure why these facts were not reported by your newspaper.

We are fortunate to have a representative in Lansing who not only serves the people of the Farmington community, but also serves his country through his military service.

Thank you, Mr. Raczkowski.
Bill Smith
Farmington Hills

To the source

Since the announcement of Mr. Vagnozzi's intention to run for the House seat, I have seen many editorials bashing our current Representative Andrew Raczkowski. Let me take just one point on the positive side that should be considered before going to the polls this November.

Ask yourself the last time you had a government official who was/is as accessible as Andrew is. He has regu-

lar office hours in the district, a responsive staff in Lansing and unbelievably, freely gives out his home phone number in Farmington Hills.

Andrew encourages us to call him at home with concerns or problems. Who else do you know who does that? Would you be willing in your own job, to give your home phone number to your customers to call you? Thinking of it that way really puts it in perspective.

I would encourage you to take Andrew up on his offer. If during the campaign, an issue is raised which concerns you, call Andrew. He's our neighbor down the street and will be glad to discuss or explain his positions. You can't get that through news snippets. Go to the source!

Tom Glossop
Farmington

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