## Michigan charter schools are largely a failed experiment

and that limit
was reached in
1999, there's no
cap on the number of charters
that can be
authorized by
community colleges. So the
Michigan Association of Public
School
Anademies
(that's the lobbying group repre-

ing group repre

Well, well. Just in time for the new year, the charter school folks have unveiled a new wrinkle to get around existing state law.

Although the number of charter schools in Michigan oper-ating under uni-versity oversight is capped at 160 and that limit

ing group rep senting charter schools; nifty name, eh?) is ur ing community colleges to hire universities to help set up and manage charter schools.

help set up and manage charter schools. Charter schools in Michigan get \$6,000 in tax-payer money per student annually. They've been the subject of hot debate since they were authorized by state law in 1993. There were eight charter schools in 1994; 79 in 1996; 139 in 1998; 173 in 1999.

173 in 1999.

The legislature capped that number after complaints arose that universities — mainly Central Michigan University, which runs what looks a lot like a charter school mill and makes a big profit thereby— were authorizing charters too quickly and without serious oversight. Gov. Engler tried last year to got the cap litted, but the legislature refused on grounds charter schools need to demonstrate more accountability before more are started.

Supporters claim charter schools offer alterna-tives to deficient public schools and offer a com-petitive spur to improvement in the "monopolis-tic" public schools. Some also say charters respond more to parental preferences than pub-lic schools.

lic schools.

So far, the evidence of the great charter school experiment does not inspire much confidence.

A Michigan State University study found charters are in fact neither more innovative nor more successful in student achievement than public



percent of Michigan's charter schools last year were operated by management companies, compared with only 10 percent nationwide. The vast majority of these companies run schools as a profit-making enterprise.

Moreover, the WMU study found charter schools are selecting only the easy (and cheep) students; the practice is celled "creaming." Admission is unually by interview, rather than by district-wide recruitment, which appears to be required by federal law. Charters don't provide transportation and tend to offer only elementary grade classes, which are less expensive than upper grades.

In particular, students gatting special educations and the students of the second control of the second contr

than upper grades.

In particular, students getting special education services accounted for only 3.7 percent of Michigan charter school enrollment, compared to 12.5 percent of public schools kinow full well, special education is expensive. Those charters run by for-profit companies have an obvious motivo for making sure kids needing special ed services are kept out.

Until his retirement, Tim Richard ran the statewide news service for this newspaper. In a note to me last week, he expounded on this subject:

Clearly, coachied low format a special education of the services of the serv

"Clearly, one-third (my figure) of charter schools are excellent, and two-thirds are below the neighboring public schools. We should be closing many of the letter before we think of tak-ing over Benton Harbor, Inkster and Oak Park," says Richard.

"Charter schools were started in New York City and most other places to be specialized quality schools - e.g. performance arts, science, whatever. In Michigan, the charter association says charter operators never intended to be inno-vative. That's dead wrong, We're wasting a ton of money on mediocre academies to satisfy authori-tative parents' whims for control. Michigan's charter schools are largely a failed experiment, a lost opportunity," Richard concludes. Remember the old definition of government?

Remember the old definition of government?

"A large pot of money, surrounded by people who
want some of it."

Want some of u.

The charter school lobby is one of the best
examples to date of the phenomenon. Their latest attempt to end-run state law offers a perfect
example of the point.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Communications Network Inc., the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 958-2047, Ext. 1880, or by e-mail at

## Name change means saying good-bye to the memories



Say it ain't so, Targeti First Berry Gordy moved Motown to Cali-fornia so he could make

novies.
Vernor's is
now made in
Texas, Stroh's
stopped making
beer on the
Detroit River and then stopped

Hugh Gallagher altogether.
Sanders, where we all went as children for hot fudge sundae cream puffs, closed its

Chrysler got taken over by (sorry, merged with) a Chrysler got taken over by (sorry, merged with) a German company, and DaimlerChrysler headquar-ters is now in Stuttgart. And, now, Hudson's will take on the name of a Chicago department store and become Marshall Field's.

And, now, Hudson's will take on the name of a Chicago department store and become Marshall Field's.

Bit by bit, piece by piece, all those things that have been distinctively Detroit are being worn away in the general homogenization of America. I have nothing against Marshall Field's. It's a fine, upscale department store and, unlike its corporate cousin Hudson's, it still has a wonderful store in the heart of Chicago's beoming downtown. It has been at fine institution in the city of Chicago for deendes, just as Hudson's has been an important part of metro Betroit.

I believe Target Corp. (formerly Dayton-Hudson) when they say shoppers won't notice a difference, that the stores will continue to offer the same quality of merchandise and high level of service that Detroit shoppers have come to expect.

But it isn't just a name. 'Obviously, Target believes they will prosper more on having one name for all their upscale stores and that Marshall Field's its the brand they want to use.

But in Detroit, the name J. I. Hudson's has always meant something special, from its beginning in 1881.

When I was a student at Wayne State University in the late 1960s, I worked for a couple of years as a waiking measenger for the Detroit Prec Press. It was my job to go to stores and da agencies in the city and collect ad copy and art work. I became well acquainted with the downtown and its many cores and fell in low with the fantasy called Hudson's.

Woodward was still humming along in those years before and just after the devastating riot of 1967.

Detroit's main street was still a thriving commercial area with Grinnell's, Himmelhech's, B. Biegel's and other stores, from Hughes & Hatcher's on the north (where Hockeytown is now) to the Spirit of Detroit in front of the still new Gity-County building. The heart and soul of that business district was the block dominated by Hudson's.

Kern's was gone, an unsightly vacant lot that gave warning of what was to come. Crowley's sat behind Hudson's in a far less attractive building with a rickety antique escalator.

But Hudson's was a constantly changing showcase, a reminder of times past when life moved more slowly and more elegantly. Elevator operators with gloved hands took shoppers to the many floors, stocked with the best the world had to offer. An elevator captain assigned passengers to different elevators with polite efficiency.

Each month a different theme was featured, played out in window displays, in store specials and appropriate entertainment. One month, usually May, a mariachi band would play to promote fashions and folk art from Merico. In March, Iriah music would lead shoppers to linens and wools. In June, beach fashions would be showcased to the music of jangly surf guitars.

And, of course, best of all, during Christmas, the

would lead shoppers to linens and wools. In June, beach fashions would be showcased to the music of jangly surf guitars.
And, of course, best of all, during Christmas, the 7th Floor would become a child's dream come magically to life. Everyone knew that the red Santa Claus was at the downlown Hudson's.
Hudson's had been one of the first stores to go suburban when it opened its Northland store in Southfield, but the downlown store was still a destination, a special trip well worth taking.
My parents would shop other places but they, and it seemed everyone else, always said that Hudson's was different hudson's offered quality products and stood behind those products. Hudson's meant quality, service, something special.
That seemed to be the theme in Hudson's public events as well. The Thanksgiving Day parade was a Hudson's event, and every year we all agreed that Macy's put on a good show, but Hudson's put on a better parade. Every Fourth of July, Hudson's would appead out the world's largest American flag across its mighty face and join hands across the water to celebrate freedom with Canada.
That once-fine building was allowed to deteriorate until it could be imploded. Now it's a ghostly, empty spot. The ghosts of Kern's and Hudson's are now together.
And soon, the name J. L. Hudson will be a lost, distant memory of another century.

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