

## Academic All-Stars instill faith in a brighter future

Every day it's a different story. One day we're diving fast into a recession. Company after company announces layoffs by the thousands. Our 401(k) statements keep moving backward instead of forward (and the date when Social Security collapses seems to get closer all the time).

But the next day, things are looking up. People are still buying consumer goods, just at a slower rate. The established companies seem to have enough resources to weather the storm. The latest quarter actually shows the economy grew, not a lot but it grew.

Half empty? No one seems to know. But we choose to think that a little optimism might carry us over into better times. After all we were riding extremely high just a year ago. The future has rich promise. One reason I know this is tucked inside this newspaper. It is The Observer's annual tribute to the best and brightest of our high school graduates.

Hugh Gallagher

One of the crucial issues that we face in public education. This became a prime topic during the last presidential campaign. President Bush calls himself an "education president." It is the one area where the conservative president believes the national government needs to take a more active role.

We decided to pick the considerable brain power of the Academic All-Stars about this subject they know first hand and which many of them will pursue as teachers, counselors, administrators and college professors. They don't offer a single view. Some of their ideas conflict. But they offer thoughtful contributions to the ongoing debate, which is what generates bold, new ideas in a strong democracy.

Kevin Filkiewicz of Canton and Catholic Central High School supports vouchers and corporate charter schools with lower tuition. "The families of children not in the public system should not have to pay taxes to support the public schools. This would not only help many promising children receive a better education, it would also force public schools to improve themselves in order to secure those precious tax dollars they

need to operate."

Brian Doughty of North Farmington High School would encourage students to realize what they have in public education and make the most of it. "Too often I hear students saying they wish there was something to do in this school, this town etc. I would try to get these students to open their eyes and get involved," he wrote.

Several students also urged more "involvement" by parents. Michelle Mammo of Redford Union High School writes, "I would establish new programs to involve parents in their children's education. One of the problems with our society is

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that the parents are not as informed or involved with their students as they should be."

Mammo and others who want public education to be more academically challenging. Kimberly Weaver of Canton High School wants to "make it easier for the top students to take more challenging classes."

Anne Bresler of Livonia Churchill High School wants more recognition for non-sports activities. "Losing sports teams get constant recognition while awarding winners in other programs and students go unnoticed and under-appreciated."

Students also stand up for their teachers, asking for more flexibility and creativity for individual teachers. Christopher Gansen of Livonia Stevenson High School writes, "Teachers frequently cannot teach what they deem necessary because the standard curriculum does not allow time for it. By allowing teachers to teach what they want to, they can expose students to a wider variety of materials and provide for more in-depth learning."

Our special section provides more thoughtful commentary from these young people along with heartfelt tributes to the outstanding teachers who provided them to give their best.

How can we be pessimistic with a future like this? **Hugh Gallagher is the managing editor of The Observer Newspapers. He can be reached by phone at (734) 953-2149, by e-mail at hgallagher@oe.homecomm.net or by fax at (734) 591-7275.**

## SmartZones may well be crucial to building Michigan

On first glance, it looked a lot like pork.

A state body (in this case, the Michigan Economic Development Corporation) announces 11 "SmartZones," carefully scattered around the state. The press release detailing locations of the various SmartZones quotes an aspirant for higher office (in this case, Lt. Gov. Dick Posthumus).

But a more careful look reveals something far more significant for the future of our economy than just another government program announced by an aspirant for higher office. So far as I know, the SmartZone program is unique in America: An integrated way to encourage links between research done in university labs to the business community to new high tech companies, importantly coupled with a method of financing the infrastructure required to make these "virtual business parks" really take off.

The one in Western Wayne County, "Pinnacle SmartZone," is designed to create a state-of-the-art real estate development that builds on and complements the new Metropolitan Airport. The vision is to transform around 1,200 acres of underutilized county-owned land around the airport into a high-quality mixed business and technology zone.

SmartZones will be allowed to capture the growth in property and school taxes as the business climate improves, much like the tax increment financing system used to fund downtown development areas. The revenues can be used to build infrastructure ranging from sewers to high-speed telecommunications, building incubators to house high-tech companies and creating support facilities like R&D and testing labs.

So what does it all mean? It means that Michigan for the first time in my memory is getting serious about putting together the elements that led to the development of high-tech powerhouses like Route 128 outside Boston and Silicon Valley in California. Both centers

were powered by proximity to great research universities, Route 128 to Harvard and MIT and Silicon Valley to Stanford. Each Michigan SmartZone is directly tied to one or another university or existing research center.

The emphasis on universities is not by chance. Michigan's universities are among the nation's leaders in research and development (U-M is number one among public schools). But the historic problem has been to leverage all this academic research activity into commercialization. SmartZones are aimed directly at this connection. And now that there are 11 SmartZones, it's possible to see how one area compares with another in linking research to the business world.

I asked Doug Rothwell, CEO of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation, what the criteria were for picking the 11 sites. "The business realism and viability of the proposals, mainly," he responded. "Of course, we were interested

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in the connection to universities and research labs, and we looked at amenities like incubators, lab space, even day care facilities."

Rothwell also stressed SmartZones as a way to rebrand the image and direction of Michigan's inner cities. "We deliberately tried to locate most SmartZones in traditional core cities instead of the suburbs. Michigan simply cannot achieve its potential unless our cities are vibrant. So this program links our ability to compete nationally in the technology sector with revitalizing our traditional downtowns. It's a real two-for-one."

The SmartZone program made it into the headlines for a day or two a couple of weeks ago. I happen to think it might just turn out to be of fundamental and lasting importance in building Michigan.

**Phil Power, in addition to being the Chairman of the company that owns this newspaper, is a member of the board of the Michigan Economic Development Corporation. He welcomes your comments on his column, either by phone at (734) 665-4081 or by e-mail to ppower@homecomm.net.**

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