

Touting Hines Park's history should yield future dividends

History is all around us. It's where we jog, bicycle, play baseball and picnic.

History is alive in Hines Park, a jewel that winds its way through western Wayne County from Dearborn to Northville, following the path of the Middle Rouge River, providing both a flood plain and a beautiful multi-use park.

At one time, it was also a place for thriving industries.

Wayne County Commissioner Lyn Bankes, R-Livonia, has become so excited about Hines' many potentials that she has become the park's chief cheerleader.

She's been escorting everyone from County Executive Ed McNamara to school administrators to this newspaper editor, urging them to share her vision for the park as a combination tourist attraction and indoor-outdoor schoolroom.

On Friday, a fully booked bus will take a large group of county officials and area club members along the same route.

The commissioner's enthusiasm is infectious, and she has a good product to promote, though it takes a certain vision to see beyond the years of accumulated deterioration.

This scenic park has been a place where history was made and where nature still thrives.

Hines Park was a meeting place for Native American tribes, a stop along the Underground Railroad that spirited slaves from harm's way and the site for several mills, eventually brought together by Henry Ford to become small factories in a bucolic setting.

Bankes has created a tour based on a book by Nancy Darga of the Wayne County Parks Department and Julie Stewart, a local historian, that they created on the Ford Village Industry Mills for the Auto National Heritage Area.

But the mills are just part of a story that stems to touch on every area of important American history, all in our backyard.

She begins her tour at the Nankin Mills site at Hines Drive and Ann Arbor Trail. The county has created a history and natural science museum in the mill building.

This was the first mill that Henry Ford bought in 1918. Across from the mill is a clearing along the river where the Potawatomi, Ottawa and Ojibwa tribes would gather annually in the spring.

The county has set up a canoe livery near this site. Bankes has an idea for teaching students about the gathering of the tribes and then having them experience traveling in canoes as the Native Americans once did.

Also near this site is Perrinsville School (Farmington and Ann Arbor Trail). A modern school surrounds the original one-room school built by Henry Ford, after he caught a wayward young man throwing rocks at his mill windows and found the area didn't have a school.

As you drive along the park, which was developed by the county in the 1920s, you pass the

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other mills that Ford acquired - the Newburgh Mill, which is now a sheriff's office where the mounted patrol's horses get to graze by the recently refurbished Lake Newburgh; Wilcox Mill, which Bankes envisions as a possible site for a lake-side restaurant; Phoenix Mill, which Ford turned into an all-female factory to produce electrical parts and which Bankes promotes as a monument to women workers; the village of Waterford, now part of Northville Township, which was the site of Mead's Mill, where escaped slaves worked and many lived in the small village on the hill above the mill. There is also a fascinating old cemetery here.

In addition to the mills, Hines has other attractions, natural and man-made. Case Benton park was the state's first arboretum and has 325 varieties of trees.

Unfortunately, they are not labeled nor is there an easy path through the trees, something that Bankes would like to see corrected.

The comfort stations are another highlight of the parks, with their attractive brick design and tile roofs. Some are in need of repair and some are beyond repair. A couple are architectural gems that would provide not only rest rooms but attractive game rooms in the park.

Bankes is urging schools to get students involved in researching and writing the history of this very interesting "backyard." She would like to use those student compositions as an attractive guide to Hines Park for visitors.

It's a great idea, a wonderful way to get students involved in their own rich history. We're looking forward to reading the results.

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Mike Malott

Parent comes up with 'smoking gun' in state rule changes

Mitzie Lee Cowl, a resident of Centerline and parent opposed to the state's proposed changes in rules regarding special education, says she's

than lump kids into groups and categories of disability.

The memo, Williamson said, discusses special education law. Addressed to state House and Senate leaders, it urged legislation to change legal requirements.

That's very different than the currently proposed rules, Williamson contended. The law has been set in place and these rules simply imple-

come up with "the smoking gun."

It's an October 1995 memo from Mark Murray, then director of the Michigan Department of Management and Budget, urging changes the requirements for special education to provide "greater local flexibility" and to "limit the state's future liability under the Headlee constitutional language."

That's significant because the state Department of Education and the Engler administration insist the rule changes on the table now for special education have nothing to do with the so-called Durant lawsuits.

Beginning in the 1980s, Fitzgerald school board member Donald Durant led 84 districts to victory in a suit that claimed the state had underfunded special education, lunch programs, drivers education and bilingual education. The gist of the case was that the state was failing to fund programs at a level needed to meet its own requirements, in violation of the Headlee amendment.

Who won the second Durant lawsuit is still disputed. And now, even though Donald Durant passed away in March, a third case pending in the courts is often referred to as Durant III.

Not surprisingly, state officials argue the significance of the 1995 Murray memo.

"They want to say it is a smoking gun," Department of Education spokesman T.J. Bucholz said, "but it is not. There is no smoking gun."

The memo dates back three jobs for Murray, now in the Treasury Department, Bucholz noted.

"There is not anyone who says these rules don't need to be changed," Bucholz said. "These rules have not been looked at in three decades."

Mike Williamson, state assistant superintendent, sees it a bit differently.

"There is always somebody that, no matter what, says, 'Don't change. Don't change.' There are probably some rules in this list that everyone could agree need to be updated."

To Williamson, the real issue is that Michigan's rules on special education are 28 years old and the federal government updated its rules 20 years ago.

The state is left with two sets of rules that are redundant, inconsistent, often contradictory and confusing.

Williamson argued the proposed changes will make it possible for programs to be crafted around the individual needs of each child, rather

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ment it.

They carry out the intent of that legislation. Nothing in these rule changes can alter the law, Williamson said, nor can they affect funding for special education.

One issue about the memo is not in dispute, its authenticity. Cowl won't say how she managed to get a hold of a copy, but no one in the state administration is disputing that it's a real memo put out by Murray in 1995. Bucholz agreed that it is authentic.

Cowl has posted it on the Internet. Readers who are interested in taking a look for themselves can find it at <http://www.ameritech.net/users/feabreen/index.htm>. Cowl said that Web site has become a center for information for those opposed to the rule changes.

Click on "What's New," then go to "Memos and Reports that Show the Durant Influence."

I'll leave it to your judgment about whether it is a recently fired pistol.

To me, the memo indicates two things quite clearly. One, a high ranking member of the Engler administration has indeed proposed "to make clear that the state's requirements for special education shall not exceed federal requirements" as a result of the Durant case.

Secondly, changes to the rules that generally match a description of what the Department of Education is trying to do now would have the dual effect of both providing "greater local flexibility," which the administration says is the goal, and "limit the state's future liability," a purpose the administration denies.

Mike Malott reports on the local implications of state and regional events. He can be reached by phone at (248) 634-8219 or by e-mail at mmalott@homecomm.net.

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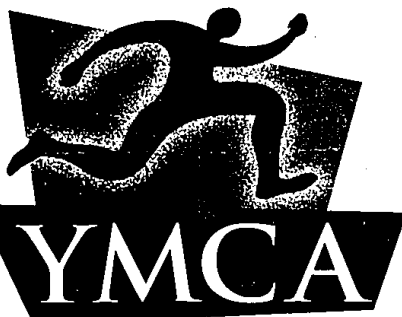
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