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Our fundamental purposes are to enhance the lives of our readers, nurture the hometowns we serve and contribute to the business success of our customers.

Don't just grease the squeaky I-275 wheels

It didn't take long for the Michigan Department of Transportation to trumpet a significant noise reduction as a result of this summer's I-275 diamond grinding project.

And while it's a good start, we fully support vigilant residents who say they'll conduct surveys this winter to determine whether quality of life is still affected by the roar of 200,000 vehicles zooming by at speeds in excess of 70 miles per hour.

After being hammered for months with letters and public testimony, the state agreed to redo the road surface between Five and 10 Mile roads, made unbearably loud by a combination of increased traffic and a process called "tining." Installed during a reconstruction completed in 1999, the grooved surface was supposed to improve safety and reduce noise.

When it didn't, residents suggested a variety of alternatives, from an asphalt cap to sound walls, both of which were considered too expensive. Instead, MDOT settled on grinding off a quarter-inch of the road's surface, removing the failed experiment and changing the direction of the times.

Last week, state officials said noise had been reduced an average of 5.4 decibels — which is significant. But they've also said the case is closed on I-275, leaving residents with noise levels that are still high enough to cause hearing damage over time.

"We have said all along that there is no solution that will provide total peace and quiet for people who choose to live near a freeway," State Transportation Director Gregory J. Rosine said last week.

We hate to break this to Mr. Rosine, but residents haven't been asking for total peace and quiet. They're smart enough to know that living near a freeway means they'll have to put up with some traffic noise.

What they want is to be able to have a conversation outdoors.

What they want is to open up a window now and then, without feeling like they're inviting all I-275 traffic in with the breeze.

This is one of the state's busiest roads,

Measures don't have to cost an arm and a leg. Trees and shrubs can be planted ... to deaden sound.

loaded with truck traffic and stressed by motorists who travel in excess of posted speeds. But there are still things the state can do to improve conditions for residents who didn't hire Jeanne Dixon to give them a 15-20 year traffic forecast before moving into their homes.

Measures don't have to cost an arm and a leg. Trees and shrubs can be planted or high berms landscaped to deaden sound.

The point is to develop a coordinated, well-researched plan, one that officials could implement wherever they've found the space and money to build bigger roads, without fully addressing the health and safety of residents who live nearby.

We applaud Livonia's State Rep. Laura Toy (R-Livonia) for urging MDOT to look for a "total solution," not only for I-275 but for the hundreds of other neighborhoods where noise standards have been exceeded. This is an enormous problem, one that will cost billions to resolve, and we hope Representative Toy and others who represent this area do more than pay lip service to it.

It's time state officials took a serious, comprehensive look at freeway noise, rather than just greasing the squeaky wheels.

Viejo, but still learning

I think that it was for my benefit that one of the first words we learned in my Spanish 1 class was *viejo*, meaning old. After all, at 76 I was, by far, the oldest student in the class. All the others were in their 20s.

When I enrolled in the class last September at Wayne State University's Farmington Hills campus, it had been more than 50 years since I earned a bachelor of arts at Wayne's main downtown campus. I realized that taking a regular college credit course would be a challenge for anyone who had not been in a classroom for more than half a century.

But being retired and involved in many non-academic activities, I felt it was time to do something that would require using my mind. The choice of Spanish as that activity was easy. I felt a language class was the way to go in today's world and, with most of our hemisphere speaking Spanish, that was the obvious choice.

So far, I've been keeping up with the youngsters, scoring A's, B's and C's on exams and other assignments with one exception of a pretty bad paper. I'm able to keep up with my class discussion except for the tendency to use an Italian word at times instead of a Spanish one.

Our professor, Sonora Pomodoro, has been very tolerant of my lapses into the other romance language. She keeps our class on our toes by insisting that we speak only Spanish at all times. The class is so structured that we not only learn the language but also the culture, geography and lifestyle of the many countries that are Spanish in origin.

A very interesting occurrence was when Sonora Pomodoro took us to a Spanish restaurant, Allegria, in the Farmington Hills Holiday Inn, for dinner. We had to order in Spanish or we would not eat. As far as I know, nobody starved. We were entertained by flamenco dancers, whom I joined when they asked for volunteers from the audience to come up on the stage.

How does the 2001 version of Wayne State compare with the university of more than 50 years ago? The late 1940s was when veterans were returning to college under the GI Bill of Rights. It was a non-sensory period when the veterans were anxious to get an education in order to make up for time spent in the service during World War II. The classes were

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exciting as persons who had been all over the world participated in the discussions.

The students in my class seem to have more pressures put on them, with several working, at least one married and others planning to do so.

What hasn't changed is the cumbersome registration system. In fact, I feel it has gotten worse, since you can no longer

In the 1940s, you had to wait in line to register, but when you got to the front, you could talk to a person and both register and pay tuition. No more.

register and pay your tuition at the same time. Last fall I was able to register at the Farmington Hills campus, but I had to spend nearly three weeks to pay the tuition. Now I had to spend two days on the phone registering for the spring semester. They no longer take registration in person at the Farmington Hills campus.

In the 1940s, you had to wait in line to register, but when you got to the front, you could talk to a person and both register and pay tuition. No more. You are forced to get on the phone and hope that you don't have to talk to four or more persons, most of them "away from their desks," or "busy on another call."

Despite these inconveniences, I am thoroughly enjoying my class, am looking forward to the second semester and would recommend a similar experience for senior citizens looking for a challenging experience.



LETTERS

■ Murphy critique

Mr. Tom "me-thinks" Murphy's critique of my letter about President Bush's erroneous pronunciation of the word "nuclear" has all the aura of legitimacy about it as that of a three-dollar bill.

Kenneth Kemp
Farmington Hills

■ Saving money 101

Before the Farmington Public School District lays off teachers, cuts transportation, or eliminates high school sports, it must look into privatization of secondary services (Schools may face \$5-M deficit, 11/29/01).

Wages and benefits make up the largest part of the school budget.

While taking bids on district projects saves some money, millions of taxpayer dollars can be saved by hiring private companies to provide transportation, food, and janitorial services. By using private companies, the district will have fewer employees.

That means it saves the costs of wages, benefits, and administering benefits and union dues for non-teaching employees. Privatization saves taxpayers money and provides equal or better service.

Auxiliary jobs can be transferred from the district to those private companies. With the elimination of the food, janitorial, and transportation departments, some administrative positions can be eliminated — saving even more money.

Another major drain on school finances is the MEA's insistence on using MESSA for health benefits. The same benefits MESSA provides can be obtained for much less. And if the union goes on a rampage (and they will), a spotlight on the MEA's use of non-union employees for their auxiliary services should shut them up.

Using proven curricula and teaching methodologies means fewer children

will need costly special education professionals. Special education service costs have risen dramatically over the past decade here in Farmington.

The school district should request help from the Mackinac Center for Public Policy. The Mackinac Center has helped other districts find the savings they needed and they can help us, too. Wages and benefits are the areas that cost the most. They are the first areas that cuts should come from.

Patricia A. Alapach
Farmington Hills

■ Gov. needs principles

The governor of Michigan lives in a nice house, receives excellent benefits and will be honored with a portrait hung in the State Capitol for the next 100 years. Currently, only those with dubious qualifications are campaigning for the job.

David Bonior has extensive experience in the House of Representatives, but some of this is best forgotten. He charged Newt Gingrich with 70 offenses, all of which were found false.

Jim Blanchard increased taxes the last time he was governor. He survived a large recall effort by backing off.

Jennifer Granholm pursued Publishers Clearing House and small gas stations that overcharged. She joined class action suits against Microsoft and tobacco companies. Airport corruption was not on her agenda — that management is an influential supporter.

Dick Posthumus first supported — but then abandoned — policies that revived business. So many jobs had left the state when John Engler became governor that a popular joke was, "The last one to leave Michigan please turn out the lights!"

Attorney General Frank Kelly destroyed a nuclear power plant ready to come online because, "We will not need that much electricity in the foreseeable future." Within a year we were

purchasing power from Canada.

These candidates are all alike. Bonior claims to detest oil and gas drilling more than his opponents. Blanchard says he halted slant drilling when he was governor. Attorney General Granholm uses her office to impede lawful drilling rules. Republican Dick Posthumus left his party's common-sense position to join the scramble against drilling.

Michigan needs a governor with principles. Anyone too weak to support energy development may need to "turn out the lights" at the end of the term.

Hank Borgman
Farmington

■ Change elections

I'm all in favor of putting our local school elections under the jurisdiction of our municipalities' clerks.

At present the city of Farmington Hills sends out absentee ballots to all senior citizens, but the Farmington school board refuses to do the same. This disparity is not acceptable.

It's time to change the system to increase the percentage of voter participation in these school elections.

The comments attributed to school board members in your Nov. 11 article are disturbing. Changing the system will not discourage people from pursuing public service.

Cathy Webb's concerns over the potential increased partisanship of the situation are unfounded. Furthermore, they are silly when it is considered that Ms. Webb tried to parlay her school board background into a run for partisan office, as a Republican, and lost in 1996.

Ms. Webb and Linda Enberg have come across to me as opponents of progress, and are apparently scared of bringing the school board elections into the fuller light of a more participatory democracy.

Christopher M. Cummins
Farmington Hills

Wayne State gives senior students a big tuition break

A little known secret needs to be told!

If you are 60 years or older, Wayne State University offers a 75-percent discount on graduate or undergraduate education. This is a better discount than most of the universities and colleges in Michigan.

This bargain has existed since 1999 and very few people (about 300 per year) have made use of it or know about it. Prior to 1999, the discount was 50 percent.

Why Wayne does not promote and publicize it more remains a mystery to me. Given the large number of people retiring early and have other educational benefits as retirees, it is a shame that people learn of this discount only by "word of mouth."

This bargain recognizes that education is truly life-long. People once turning 60 can go finish the education they never completed, or start higher education they were never able to begin. People can also take courses they never had the time and opportunity to earn credits toward a degree. This allows the curious mind to explore areas of education that spark the ages least interest to know and to learn.

Let's take one example. A 76-year-old Farmington Hills resident, Aldo Vagnozzi is taking Spanish. He started this September at one of Wayne's sub-

urban campuses. The tuition cost would have been \$640 for the four credit hours. With his 75 percent senior discount his cost is \$160. Now that is a real savings.

Why is he taking Spanish? Well, Aldo graduated from Wayne in 1948. He didn't take a foreign language. From his knowledge, he knows the population of America is changing. He'd like to be able to read and speak Spanish. He is convinced that learning this language broadens his horizon, helps him to understand the sweeping global changes, and communicates with many Spanish-speaking residents in the metropolitan area.

This discount says something about the great asset that Wayne really is.

Many spend their time talking about Wayne as a great research university. They talk about Wayne's great medical school — one of the best in the nation. They talk about Wayne's role in the sciences and in the cultural aspects of the Detroit area. All of this is true!

But the heart of Wayne is and must continue to be the undergraduate education it offers to all ages — two thirds of Wayne's students part-time and full-time. Thousands work while going to school.

All ages include senior citizens. This special out reach to those over 60 with this 75 percent discount is a great

idea and one of the many waves of the future. Wayne has every reason to be proud of this approach and people in Michigan, who can, should use it. It is never too late to learn!

Paul Massaron is a resident of Southfield, a member of the Wayne State Board of Governors, a consultant, and a retired official of the International Union, UAW.

Share your opinions

We welcome letters to the editor. Please include your full name, address and phone number for verification. We may edit for clarity, space and content.

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