

Beardmore worked for betterment of education

Readers of this column with good memories will recall how much I admired Dorothy Beardmore, who was probably the single most distinguished advocate for schools of her time. I am sorry to report that Dorothy died of cancer May 2 at home in Rochester Hills. She was 66.

She told me she originally got interested in schools while raising her children. She was elected to the Rochester school board in 1967, to the Oakland County school board in 1974 and to the state board in 1984. She served as the state board's president, vice president, secretary and treasurer; she never missed a meeting in her entire 16 years as a board member.

During her time on the state board, she was instrumental in pushing the Legislature to adopt Public Act 25, the first Michigan school law that required school accreditation, annual school improvement plans, a comprehensive school curriculum and annual public reporting of educational outcomes. School reform had been a subject of talk but relatively little action from the 1980s on, but the passage of Public Act 25 put school improvement front and center of public policy in Michigan.

She received a ton of awards, including the Distinguished Service Award from the National Association of State Boards in 2000 and the Michigan Education Association Distinguished Service Award in 1999. She was elected to the Michigan Hall of Fame in 1996.

In April, the State Board of Education unanimously created a new award in her honor, the Dorothy Beardmore Service to Education Award, which annually will honor a person for outstanding work in education.

All this recital of impersonal fact is fine, the sort of stuff that keeps reporters and columnists employed and busy. But it misses the real point of Dorothy Beardmore's life and career. She was one of those rare people who became enormously involved in public policy and got a tremendous amount done, but who did so not out of personal ambition or aggrandizement, but from a sense of commitment to internal values and public responsibility.

Here's an example. I have from time to time written columns on things educational. Nearly every time I did so, I would receive about a week after the column was published, a perfectly written, literate and clear letter from Dorothy, commenting on the column over several single-spaced pages. Errors were gently corrected; illogical



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conclusions pointed out; omissions in the public record rectified. Never once did she ever inject herself or her ego into the discussion. She was entirely focused on education and how to make it better.

A good story in the *Eccentric*, Dorothy's hometown paper, began: "Independence, not ideology, underscored Dorothy Beardmore's days on the Michigan Board of Education." Her longtime friend and fellow state board member, Kathleen Straus, told me, "Dorothy was interested solely in making things better, getting things done, improving education for kids. She was selfless and entirely without political ambition."

According to Lyn Bankes, a former 14-year state legislator and friend, Republican Dorothy Beardmore "had a harder time with the (party) nomination process than with the voters. She didn't believe in litmus tests." In Michigan, candidates for State Board of Education are nominated at partisan conventions. Both political parties have litmus tests at their conventions, but the GOP test includes pro-life and pro-charter schools. Dorothy was both pro-choice and (largely) anti-charter school. She told me she ultimately decided not to run for a third term because she figured she couldn't make it through the Republican convention.

Although a staunch Republican, Dorothy wasn't afraid to take on even tough guy Gov. John Engler (mostly over charter schools). And she didn't toe the line of the MEA, Michigan's largest teacher's union, either. "She truly was an independent thinker," Bob Harris, former secretary to the board and now an MEA official told the *Rochester Eccentric*. "For her, what was best for the kids always came first. She really walked a tightrope between her beliefs and party ideology."

Dorothy was a person who was terrifically effective at the political (small "p") process of setting public policy, but who was never the least bit partisan. She enjoyed service in the various offices she held, not as an ego trip but as a point of leverage to affect the making of policy. She never once in our long acquaintance talked about "higher office."

Dorothy Beardmore was the archetype of the citizen politician who puts herself forward to get something done, not from personal ambition but from deep commitment to make things better for all of us. Somehow, she always seemed to me a figure out of a more principled time, one who excited trust and who won admiration both for her career and for the rarity she exemplified in the sorry political system of today.

Phil Power is the chairman of the board of the company that owns this newspaper. He would be pleased to get your reactions to this column either at (734) 953-2047 or at ppower@hometownlife.com.

Facts back up vote on shoreline legislation

I am writing to provide facts omitted from the letter by Chris Cummings that you published under the headline of "Shoreline" on May 1.

Chris said that "from a local perspective" he was curious how our local State Rep. Aldo Vagnozzi voted on House Bill 4257 allowing property owners to remove wetland vegetation from the shores of the Great Lakes.

We don't have any Great Lakes shoreline in Farmington or the Hills. It seems this is an issue that most residents know nothing about.

Lake levels have declined over the past five years. This may be part of a cycle of fluctuating water levels that seems to repeat itself every 30 years or so. Some areas, most notable near Bay City, now have large exposed areas of mudflats where wetland plants thrive. Many lakefront property owners are upset about this.

The federal government, under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, regulates the Great Lakes shoreline. This law has been in place for over 25 years. With this law, Lake Erie has made a spectacular comeback from near death.

The Corps of Engineers, the federal agency designated to enforce Section 404, allows mowing of wetland vegetation without a permit. Before a riparian removes wetland plants from public lands below ordinary high water, he or she must receive a permit from the corps.

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality allows property owners to mow vegetation if the location is not a designated environmental area, otherwise DEQ regulations forbid mowing vegetation without a permit. DEQ is proposing to allow mowing a 100-foot wide path in front of each lakefront home without a permit. Together, neighbors could create up to a 200-foot wide path.

HB 4257 makes it legal under state law to do much more than "grooming." It allows running a till through the lakebed. However, the corps is unlikely to permit this for many reasons. One is that tilling the mudflats allows invasive species to spread faster and farther.

A task force of environmentalists, state lawmakers and shoreline property owners was created to address this issue. HB 4257 passed only a few days before their report, Shoreline Task Force Consensus, was released.

The report can be found on the Corps Web site at www.lre.usace.army.mil under the "hot topics" icon for Saginaw Bay.

The EPA has already notified the state that beach grooming practices approved by the House violate federal coastal zone laws. The EPA indicates they may revoke \$3 million of their grants to the state, if this bill becomes law.

Rep. Vagnozzi voted against HB 4257. He may have objected to holding the vote before the imminent release of the Task Force's Report.

He may have been concerned about the obvious conflict with federal law or anticipated the potential loss of federal funds now threatened by the EPA.

He may have been concerned about the spread of invasive plants.

Chris wondered if Rep. Vagnozzi doesn't like private property rights because of his vote on an issue that affects public property. I wonder if Chris is misreading your readers. Partisan attacks seem to work best when the audience doesn't know the facts.

Joe Manley is a water resource economist and a resident of Farmington Hills



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