



By
EUGENE MCKINNEY

While Publisher Philip H. Power is on vacation, guest columnists have been asked to comment on the long-range issues and problems facing suburbia. Today's guest is mayor of our youngest city, Westland.

Placing the right words neatly into sentences, the right sentences neatly into paragraphs and have them all come together with "The Message" is a punishment I haven't experienced since I left the public press almost five years ago.

The job is even tougher than I remember. And doing it under the pretentious title of "guest columnist" - which implies I'm suppose to have some profound thoughts - makes the job tougher still.

It's ironic - and perhaps a little discouraging, too - that I've been asked to comment on a topic many of us were commenting on five or more years ago:

The suburban fight for identity. Like the women's desire to be more than "just a housewife," communities still struggle to be more than another name on the map.

There's been some gain. But it's slow and painful, and in spite of dramatic population shifts to the suburbs, sociologists and urbanologists still hang on to the concept that "downtown is where it's at." And the New Town concept - actually planning and building communities from scratch - is heralded as a major new development in urban living.

YET THE NEW TOWN concept is exactly what many suburban governments have been grappling with for the past 25 years. For we have been given the improbable assignment of building towns around subdivisions of people brought into sterile territory for no better reason than a builder figured the price was right for the land.

The result: Thousands of people thrown together without the community roots needed to bring them together.

"Detroiters," become "suburbanites," simply because the wife happens to spot an ideal model home. Quite often, the city in which the home is located has little to do with the move.

The battle to change from that broad "suburbanite" label to the specific "Westlander" or "Livonian" tag affects how deeply people care about their community and what they're willing to do to get the services they want.

OBSERVATION POINT

New Town Concept Big Suburban Problem

If people don't have concern for the community they live in, they're not going to care much about what goes on outside their 60 by 120 lot. And they won't care about supporting community improvement programs - whether its buying park land, paving roads or building libraries.

ENCOURAGING PEOPLE to think of themselves as Westlanders instead of suburbanites and to want to "point with pride" at our community has been a major thrust of my administration. At a time when institutions are under great fire and distrust, we're asking people to take pride in their community and their government.

What's so important about community pride and community identity?

In practical terms, the two mean that citizens care enough about local problems to do something positive toward a solution; they mean that citizens care enough to want their community to stand on its own two feet and make the sacrifice necessary to build ice rinks, libraries, police stations, swimming pools and all the other facilities older established communities like Livonia have had for some time.

Without pride, without a wide-spread belief in the community, ambitious

programs of progress fall victim to a hand full of obstructionists who shout the loudest and the longest.

It's often said that everyone wants progress but no one wants change. But progress and change can both happen if a community stands up and demands them.

And before anyone does that, they have to have that certain feeling for their community as a home town - not just as a retreat after the day's work. That's really what community pride and identity are all about.

WHAT HAVE WE done to make Westlanders have pride in their community and identify with it as a home town?

First, we've emphasized citizen involvement through new commissions such as the Housing Commission, Historical Commission, Library Board and Environmental Quality Commission. We created two Mayor's Advisory Councils - one for senior citizens, the other for youth.

Our Historical Commission is currently overseeing the renovation of a 98-year-old building for a museum, where someday soon Westlanders will be able to take an active interest in their community heritage.

The Westland Civic Symphony Orchestra debuted this spring with some 500

Westlanders watching and listening.

Christmas tree lighting ceremonies at City Hall bring several thousand Westlanders to their Civic Center now - many for the first time. And we've started a Christmas decoration program on our main streets.

And perhaps the most successful program, the Spring Festival, has already focused wide attention to Westland in just two years. Hundreds of Westlanders worked six months on this year's festival that saw more than 50,000 come out in three days!

TO OLDER COMMUNITIES with longstanding sociological structure (Plymouth, Livonia and Farmington, for example) I'm sure these programs sound elementary. Possibly even unimportant.

But to cities lost in the freeway drive west from Detroit, or to a new city like Westland, I think these programs and more like them will give that much-needed spirit - yes, even roots - to suburban communities.

Our city's motto is "Pride, Progress and Promise" . . . and I would add to that, "People." We're making progress, we have great promise.

But it takes the people to bring out pride.



Leonard Poger writes

Entire Story Not Told

Political candidates usually start off campaigns with a flowery announcement of their intentions for higher office. In some cases, that is the high spot of the candidate's campaign which gets progressively worse.

But The Observer had that rare occasion last week in which the candidate more or less botched up the initial announcement.

THE CANDIDATE is Mrs. Kay Beard of Inkster who is

seeking the Democratic nomination for the newly-created 33rd House district, which includes Garden City and Inkster.

Her actions - or omissions - concerned the lack of candor about her school financing activities the candidate bragged about in her press release.

Mrs. Beard wrote about her 11 years of campaigning for "quality education and educational financing for Michigan schools" and her testimony before congressional and legislative subcommittees on "behalf of her educational efforts."

THIS SOUNDS typical of a PTA-type who has marched on the state capital demanding tax reform for public school financing.

But the impression Mrs. Beard tried to impart in her announcement didn't square with what actually happened in the past decade - particularly in the 1969-70 period.

She is a member of the state board of directors for Citizens for Education Freedom. The group is foremost in the fight to raid the public tax box for support of parochial schools in Michigan.

The parochial battle was the most emotionally-charged controversy in the state until busing came along and C.E.F. was in the front lines.

WE DON'T question the group's right to work for programs or ideals they feel are justified but Mrs. Beard feels that the parochial issue is a "dead issue" now and asked The Observer to omit that part of her background in her announcement for the state house election.

Whether parochial is a dead issue or not is a matter of opinion but if sufficient candidates who share the same feelings of Mrs. Beard on parochial get elected this year, we get the feeling that the issue will be resurrected in Lansing.

WHAT'S EVEN more important is that Mrs. Beard felt that the voters in the new district shouldn't know about her parochial background.

We don't blame her - particularly in view of the fact that Garden City voters two years ago approved a state constitutional amendment banning public funds for parochial schools by a 2-1 margin.

Now that she knows how the community feels about parochial, she prefers to doctor her past history to avoid letting voters know her background.

We feel that the voters should know as much about political candidates as possible - not as little as the candidate is willing to get by with in a press release.

Tim Richard writes

Roth Decision Has Suburbs Seething

The suburbs are in an ugly mood over Federal Judge Stephen Roth's ordering of cross-district busing to achieve racial balance, a decision opposed by 80 or 90 per cent of the populace.

Roth is directly responsible for a movement to tinker with the 14th amendment of the U.S. Constitution, a movement to eliminate lifetime appointments of federal judges, talk of massive parental resistance to his order, the defeat of school tax measures, the redneck Wallace's shocking presidential primary victory, and the threat of the worst breakdown in public order since Prohibition.

Personally, this writer is opposed to all those measures. My reason is that Roth's findings and orders are so defective,

so short-sighted, so arbitrary that a good lawyer should be able to win a reversal in the appeals courts.

SOME EXAMPLES:

Roth's Sept. 27 ruling declares Detroit schools are financially hampered by the state and that suburbs can spend more per pupil with "less tax effort." He's just plain wrong.

Detroit in fact has a greater tax base per pupil than Livonia, Farmington, Clarenceville, Wayne-Westland, Redford Union and Garden City, to cite a few local examples. Moreover, every Observerland school district levies a considerably higher millage rate than Detroit. How Roth reached his incredible and utterly false conclusion is beyond me.

Roth sarcastically notes that the intervening suburban school districts chose not "to assist the court" in determining an area to be desegregated. It's like inviting a condemned man to choose his method of execution without letting him argue his innocence. It's unfair on the face of it.

Roth condemns the state - and thus the suburbs - because the Legislature passed a Detroit school decentralization act. He thereby insulted suburban legislators who voted in favor of the bill at the request of blacks. The legislators are thus in the position of being damned by their black colleagues if they had voted against the bill and damned by Roth for voting in favor.

BY A WILD twist of logic, Roth declares his goal is to "achieve the greatest possible

degree of actual desegregation" and "to enforce constitutional rights, not to act as schoolmaster."

And in a footnote, he cavalierly disregards evidence that massive integration would bring only the most trivial benefits to black pupils.

Yet Earl Warren's 1954 Supreme Court relied on educational evidence for outlawing "separate but equal" school segregation in the first place. Roth is emphatic that his god is desegregation, not good education, and he has perverted the Warren Court's system of values.

Michigan conducted a 7½-month Constitutional Convention and millions of dollars worth of studies on how to improve its educational system. Now Roth gives the superintendent of public instruction a mere 45 days to make recommendations on "governance, financial and administrative arrangements" for a metropolitan system that would mark a far more radical change than anything ever before contemplated. Talk about the "instant satisfaction" syndrome of the television mind! Roth is more demanding than any cranky four-year-old ever thought of being.

Roth refers to the Richmond, Va. desegregation case, but astoundingly makes no note whatsoever of the 4th Court of Appeals decision reversing it. And so, after inventing his "facts" and twisting his law, Roth simply disregards a superior court's decision that doesn't match his own notions.

THAT RICHMOND case,

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher

The Livonia Observer • The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer • The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer • The Southfield News & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer

Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.
36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth, Plymouth Township, Canton
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Bingham Farms.