

editorial opinion

Some direction is needed

Farmington past and Farmington future got a bit of an airing recently before the Farmington City Council.

There was a decided air of pessimism about the long-term future of the downtown business district.

While the meeting ended with a positive note, the nucleus of a new association, the biggest problem was not faced directly.

That problem is basically deciding just what the city and the merchants want the downtown area to become. Currently in a kind of economic limbo, the area contrasts a modern plaza with a string of vacant stores across Grand River.

The problems facing the central business district are not unique. Competition from new, close by shopping centers with convenient parking, or even from other nearby cities with stronger downtowns, draws both customers and stores.

THE OLD Downtown Redevelopment Committee recognized these problems, as have the planning commissioners.

The problem has been the lack of a solution.

Should the area become a miniature office complex?

Go the route of Gaylord or other cities which redecorated into a common theme for their downtowns? Or possibly accept the role of a strictly local center for nearby residents, and concentrate of a basic "sprucing up" and minor improvements in services?

Answering these larger questions will generate a lot of the answers as to "how" the aims can be accomplished.

While the downtown area is pleasant, congenial, and often charming, an open eye can see the problems. If they are met squarely, the future can be bright.

The other drug

Alcohol was cited as the number one drug problem in Troy schools recently by a member of the board of education.

This marks a considerable change from the fall of 1972 when an undercover agent was placed in Troy High School to help curb a narcotics problem.

The situation in Troy is generally mirrored in other schools in Oakland County and reflects a nationwide trend.

YOU CAN almost pick out the stores and corners in the county where high school and junior high school-aged youngsters are waiting for someone to buy a carton of beer or a bottle of wine for them.

Hard drugs, say authorities, are being replaced by alcohol. Although one Troy official adds, "There's pot all over the place."

Alcohol is recognized as one of the nation's most effective killers and consumer of hundreds of millions of dollars worth of productivity.

AT THE STATE level, a five-member

subcommittee of the House Judiciary Committee has been appointed to conduct hearings on legislation which would make public drunkenness a treatable disease rather than a crime.

The bill (H.B. 4008) calls for creation of a Division of Alcoholism within the State Health Department to set up and maintain alcoholism treatment programs in the state. Under the bill, persons taken into custody by police for public drunkenness would be taken to an alcoholism treatment center rather than put in jail. Such an idea appears to have merit from a medical and humanitarian point of view.

Although such legislation may not have a direct affect on the problem of youthful drinkers, it would be a step in the proper direction.

A vigorous education and rehabilitation program has been most effective in the past against the abuse of so-called hard drugs. A similar approach may be advantageous in the case of youthful abusers of alcohol.

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Eccentricities

by HANK HOGAN



Never before in its history has the press been under such attack. It is accused of bias, sloppy reporting and outright conspiracy to "get" certain political figures.

The intensity of the attack on the press is probably directly proportional to the increased role the press has played in investigating public officials. Obviously, nobody can say that the press is all wrong, nor can the press say that it is all right.

While it is a fine institution, it is built on human beings, who have a tendency to err on occasions. But the press today is better than the rumor mongering, slanderous press of the 18th century, which existed when the framers of the constitution sat down to write.

AS THEY WERE being broadsided by yellow journalists, the writers of the constitution did not, in the first amendment, guarantee the right of a fair press. They did guarantee the right of a free press.

In other words, the fathers of this country felt that freedom is better protected by a free press than by a fair press.

If they had gone the fair-press route, it would have allowed the government to make restrictions concerning the press. History will show that one of the first steps leading to the demise of democracy has been government regulation of the news.

AN INTERESTING sidelight about the attacks on the press is that at the very time the volume of criticism has increased, the polls show that the

Free press or fair press?

public has shown greater confidence in the press. As a matter of fact, public confidence has increased 10 percent since the Watergate situation was first exposed. To be honest, though, the increase of 10 percent still does not bring the figure over 50 percent.

A free press plays a continuing role in preserving democracy. Many years ago the American people were very critical of decisions by the Supreme Court which seemed to hinder police officers as they dealt with criminals. As the press brought these things out, public sentiment crystallized and there was a public outcry that something had to be done about the courts.

ABOUT TWO YEARS ago there was a feeling that the administrative branch of government had reached its highest point of power in the history of the country and that Congress and the courts both felt that they were being dominated by the executive branch. If the public can remember, there was a feeling that the President had almost attained the power of a dictator and that his closely-knit associates were running roughshod over the government.

As unpopular as it was, the press exposed Watergate, which in the long run will be beneficial to democracy, because the people will be more interested in the type of people they elect to public office.

If there had been no free press in this country, the question is, how long would we continue to be a democracy?

Observation Point

by PHILIP H. POWER



It's very easy—and very self-serving—for new people to rail against secrecy in government.

Excessive preoccupation with secrecy produced the paranoid climate in Washington which made Watergate possible. Canny secret activities of lobbyists at times make a shambles of the law-making activities in Lansing. Secret school board or city council meetings in this area have been used as cover for unfair personnel practices or for curious backroom political deals.

True, and no secrecy makes a news person's job that much easier.

Which is why whenever the press gets up on its high horse about secrecy, it's always wise to take it with a big grain of salt.

BUT THERE are big chunks of validity to the argument against secrecy in the public's business.

First, if it's the public's business, why shouldn't the public know about it?

Second, if getting the facts out won't harm someone unnecessarily or inhibit the advancement of the public's interest, why not do it?

Third, usually it is only under the dark of secrecy that funny business, deals, payoffs, or what have you can occur. The steady light of publicity on the dealings of governments has a remarkably cleansing effect.

IN THIS connection, it's good to see the news coming out of Washington that a Senate Subcommittee has turned up a secret plan to link all federal computer files on citizens together into a huge system called FEDNET. It would coordinate all the 1.2 billion files on individuals currently held by the federal government, and as such probably represents a real saving in cost and improvement in efficiency.

However, it turns out that plans to put the system together were kept secret from the press and

FEDNET is watching you

Congress until recently, when the Subcommittee stumbled on them.

What is even more interesting is that all this secrecy concealed the fact that in many cases these files are kept with no legal authority.

I don't happen to like much the idea of big brother watching me behind the massed computers of FEDNET, nor do I like the feeling that somewhere in Washington there may be a file on me being kept with no legal authority and no safeguards against my personal privacy.

Now that the story is out into the press, you can be sure that this will be changed pronto.

EVEN MORE encouraging is the move here in the suburbs to do away with the common and illegal practice of secret city council meetings.

In Garden City, where they have been working on a new city charter, they decided this week to write a ban against secret meetings into the document itself.

Formerly, the charter language would have allowed secret meetings for topics which might defame the character of an individual. But, as Charter Commission Chairman Vincent Fordell says, "We were attempting to do something that words wouldn't let us do. Rather than build a loophole which might lead to misunderstanding, we wiped out the secret meeting clause."

He and the Commission merit congratulations for their precedent-making step. So far as I know, their proposed charter is the only one in the state with an explicit ban on secret meetings.

This does not mean as a principle that there should be no concern for the rights of privacy or of individuals or appropriately confidential information. What it does mean is that those proposing secrecy must make their case against a presumption against secrecy in government.

And that's as it should be.

From our readers

Prison time

To the Editor:

In response to the article (Oakland Press) in which Oakland County Prosecuting Attorney L. Brooks Patterson criticizes the handling of "Good Time" by the Department of Corrections, given to an inmate serving sentences.

I don't believe that Mr. Patterson or our many Circuit Court judges have visited any of the penal institutions in this state to see exactly what an inmate does in order to earn his "Good Time."

I believe the people, young and old alike, who pay taxes, should be aware that it costs them \$26 a day to support a person that our Mr. Patterson and our judges send to our prisons.

I believe that more emphasis should be put on the rehabilitation of a convicted felon, so that when he (or she) returns to the free society, he can lead a good productive life, without having to resort to crime. Reform is needed in our prisons.

What proportion of criminals could, if intelligently dealt with, return to society and make good adjustments we do not know. But there is reason to believe that the number would be much greater than it actually is if our prisons were better financed and better managed. In the long run the cost to the taxpayer might be less.

AMONG THE most serious faults still to be found in our prisons are: 1.) inefficient administration, 2.) the employment of incompetent personnel, 3.) inflexible routine, 4.) lack of useful employment, 5.) abominable and many

times unsanitary living conditions, 6.) poor and inadequate food, 7.) mistreatment, 8.) overcrowding, and 9.) postgraduate instruction from fellow inmates in vice and crime at the "expense of the taxpayer's maintaining these institutions." These dangerous and demoralizing conditions call for continuing efforts towards prison reform.

The price of better prisons, like the price of liberty, is eternal vigilance on the part of the taxpayer and the public. But such vigilance is difficult to achieve because the general public has little, if any, contact with prisons.

Whether the outside would recognize it or not, a prison is in fact a community. Perhaps the most important thing a prison can do for its inmates is to provide opportunities for education and for training in trades and professions, so that when a prisoner is released he can earn an adequate living.

Let's don't put so much emphasis on things as trifling as "Good Time." Let's reform and educate the people that are sent to the prisons.

If anyone should be interested to know what goes on inside of our prison, (it's not all pleasant), send our communication to: Bradford M. Inglesbee, a native from Bloomfield Hills, serving time for UDL. I enjoy receiving your paper.

Bradford M. Inglesbee BS 131894
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Ionia 48846

May 29, 1974

More resources

To the Editor:
The Birmingham School District appreciates the assistance received

from The Observer & Eccentric in the recent millage election. Your help in giving information, in urging the public to vote, and in supporting the millage editorially is deeply appreciated.

The public now has given the school district some additional resources to continue a quality educational program in our community. In turn, we pledge to intensify our efforts to improve services to the citizens of the district. We shall dedicate our time, our talents, and our efforts to maintain financial integrity, to improve educational offerings, and to enrich the lives of all students.

Thank you for your help. The entire community benefits through strengthening its schools and providing more educational opportunities for its children.

Donald Peckenpaugh
Superintendent of Schools
June 11, 1974
Birmingham

'Write-in' thanks

To the Editor:
This is an insufficient and necessarily impersonal means by which to convey my gratitude to all those who supported me in last Monday's school board election in Bloomfield Hills. It is the only way that I can reach so many people.

Even though I lost, the vote was close, especially considering that this was a last-minute write-in campaign. Therefore, all who can take an objective view must realize that the number of votes cast for me indicates that many voters are eager to support a candidate who is free to act and think intelligently and independently.

These election results should cause our present board members to reexamine their complacency and reeval-

ate their thinking. If this election has also persuaded some of the other well-qualified people who might have run this year to shed their reluctance and appear as candidates next year, then our entire effort will not have been in vain.

Those who truly value our school system, but who seek to make it even better by improving the one vital area that has heretofore been neglected, should indeed be encouraged, because the election results have given us the added incentive and the determination to continue to work until the music curriculum in Bloomfield Hills is as strong and as excellent in quality as any of the other fine academic programs in our schools.

To all who worked so hard in my behalf, to all who voted for me, my sincere thanks. The experience of meeting many new and wonderful people during a very short time, plus the reassurance of receiving the loyal support of so many long-time friends, have made this entire episode personally rewarding and very worthwhile.

Joan (Mrs. William C.) Berndt
Bloomfield Hills
June 11, 1974

Grass roots action

To the Editor:

For the past four weeks, I have stomped the Birmingham School District as a candidate for the board of education.

The moments have been full of excitement, hope, education, anticipation, disappointment, exhaustion and great satisfaction—a mixed bag of experience. All of them enlightening. I wish to extend a great big "Thank You" for their moral support and for their great efforts in politics of the grass roots. They were wonderful and I am grateful beyond measure.

I would also like to point out that, since the election, another opening has appeared on the board due to the resignation of Mr. Jenkins. The position will be an appointed one, and the board on preceding occasions has not appointed the runner-up, a possibly understandable policy when time has elapsed.

But when a hard-fought campaign is only one week past, when the election totals did not indicate gross dissatisfaction with any candidate and when the campaigners have the added benefit of fresh contact with the grass roots ideas of citizens, it is a matter of great concern to voters as to the reasons behind any new appointment, indeed a matter of accountability.

Therefore, I am in great hopes that the new appointment to the board will be decided in open session and that The Observer & Eccentric will publish the details so that the efforts of the losers and their supporters will not be totally disregarded without clear reasons. This action would make it much easier for one to tackle another campaign with hope — the essential ingredient of grass roots politics.

Morale-booster

To the Editor:

As a member of the Executive Board of the Farmington Chapter of the Michigan Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, I wish to thank you for the excellent article featuring the Perceptual Motor Development program which this chapter sponsored.

The subject was well researched and written with honesty and understanding. The pictures were outstanding.

It is a real boost to the morale of people such as Jim Glasgow, the instructor, his assistants, and

those of us who handle the organizational aspects of this program, to find such a well-written article in newspapers which reach out to such a large segment of the population.

It is our hope that parents reading this article who suspect their child may have a learning disability, or those who already know it, will contact the Michigan Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, for referral to a local chapter.

Chapters offer a wide array of services, from programs featuring professionals in the field of learning disabilities to Gym and Swim Programs, to publications on the subject, to the most important of all—a listening ear from someone who understands because he or she "has been through it."

Mary Ann Coyle
June 13, 1974
West Bloomfield

Welcome, WBLD

To the Editor:
I'd like to welcome the newcomer to the FM air waves—West Bloomfield's own WBLD.

I think the Friday evening, June 7, radio program with host Chuck Seiman and hostess Sally Victor interviewing the West Bloomfield school board candidates was informative and very well presented.

Congratulations to these students for a superb job. We would like to encourage the discussion of local issues on WBLD in the future. This type of programming makes a real contribution to the community life of West Bloomfield.

Wil Muratzki
June 14, 1974
West Bloomfield