

# editorial opinion

## Pride and small classes could be lost in merger

Most people support efficiency in governmental operations and services. If there is a way to save a buck without hampering the primary job at hand, then let's try it.

But the suggested merger of the Livonia and Clarenceville schools by Livonia school board trustee Thomas Davis isn't as simple as it looks at first glance.

Davis is in the finance administration end of Ford Motor Co.'s operations, and he spends most of his time looking for ways to save money. His talents have been well-utilized on the Livonia school board in its budget discussions.

The proposed "consolidation" of Livonia and Clarenceville districts, however, contains a number of problems which should be carefully reviewed.

Davis is really asking only for a start of discussions on the issue, and no one has really gone into the nitty-gritty details of any such consolidation.

AS A political matter, it may be a dead issue anyway, because the Clarenceville board is opposed to the consolidation in concept, and we could expect that most Clarenceville students and parents would share that view.

At present, Clarenceville has an enrollment, budget and tax base representing about 10 percent of the Livonia district's.

But if there is a consolidation, would there be any financial savings? If there is none, then there is no purpose to Livonia and Clarenceville officials even sending out invitations to a joint meeting to discuss the issue.

Purely from a money standpoint, there doesn't seem to be any real savings. Even if the consolidation becomes reality, which we doubt, the savings of central office salaries would be so slight in the consolidated budget of \$65 million that it would barely pay for stationery and paper clips.

But beyond the money question, there is the issue of a sense of community which Clarenceville has developed successfully over the years without the obvious symbols of a city hall or city limits of its own.

Clarenceville is really "an area" which is marked mainly by Livonia Mall and Botsford Inn. There are the schools, and Clarenceville United Methodist Church, but few other visual symbols of Clarenceville.

Parents have shown their pride in the school system over the years by approving virtually every financial proposal put on the ballot. Voters approved a school millage increase in a special election last January in a period when most tax boosts were overwhelmingly rejected by the public.

The Clarenceville music program has been a source of pride for students and parents, and the high school's list of achievements and honors is long and impressive.

A Clarenceville High student leader recently told a Livonia Rotary Club meeting that there is an advantage to attending a smaller school. Students and teachers tend to know each other more than in a larger school with more than 2,000 pupils.

If the Livonia school board thinks it had a hard time with parents when it tried to consolidate elementary or junior high school attendance areas and close a school, it will have a local civil war when it tries to consolidate a school district and eliminate the name Clarenceville as a separate school entity.

But Davis at least has a point in trying to discuss the money way for suburban schools which are losing students and state aid while finding their operating costs escalating faster than the national rate of inflation.

LEONARD POGER  
Livonia Community Editor

## We're in the same old shape

The dismal turnout in most school district elections recently reminded us of what was going on 200 years ago this week.

The free and independent states had declared their independence from the mother country a year earlier, and something resembling a war was going on.

Most history texts remind us that only about one-third of the Americans supported the creation of a new republic. Another one-third were still loyal to the crown and had not removed themselves to Canada. The final one-third were too indifferent, apathetic, uninterested, lazy or absorbed by the demands of work and family to participate. Even today, with the crown loyalists gone, only 80 percent of our registered voters

turn out for a presidential election, 40 percent for a partisan primary and 10-15 percent for a normal school district election.

Perhaps our low level of participation is a source of strength. With a small turnout, we can be relatively sure the most qualified, dedicated and civic conscious folks go to the polls, just as it appears the cream of the crop pushed us into independence and wrote a Constitution so enlightened that even today few among us appreciate it.

A minority of us will go to Fourth of July parades, staged for us by even smaller minorities. And only a small minority will stop for even a minute to reflect on what it all means.

A minority made our nation, a minority made it great, and a minority is keeping it that way.

## Teachers take a step toward regional contracts

There's more than meets the eye to last week's announcement by the Michigan Education Association that all collective bargaining will be halted in Oakland County during July because of the lack of a contract in West Bloomfield School District.

At first blush, it seems to be a paper threat. Little bargaining is done during July anyway, and the heavy season is from Aug. 1 until Labor Day.

Some 10,000 teachers in more than a dozen districts would be covered by contracts that are in the process of negotiation. Among area districts are Birmingham, Farmington, Southfield and Troy, with a wage reopener under discussion in Clarenceville.

BUT THE MEA action must be viewed in light of other actions and policies.

MEA makes no secret of its desire to bargain regionally. It's clear that Oakland County is perceived to be one region; it's almost as clear that suburban Wayne County is perceived as another (Detroit and Dearborn's contract being with the American Federation of Teachers).

Moreover, MEA's local affiliates are seeking to negotiate contracts that end on the same day.

Consider further that the MEA structure provides for regional guidance of local bargaining units.

Add to that the fact that school boards have ways of getting together to exchange strategy tips if not to set common policies.

Finally, across the state, MEA affiliates have vowed to seek regional bargaining. The goal seems to be common language in contracts across the region, with local variations for local issues and perhaps economics.

FROM THE TEACHERS' point of view, regional bargaining makes sense.

Legally, teachers unions have no right to strike.

The "blackboard fly" tactic—closing down a

couple of schools for a day—is a pale imitation of a strike.

In West Bloomfield, teachers worked the entire 1976-77 school year without a negotiated contract. The same thing happened in Garden City.

If the teachers in a single district went on strike, Crestwood would happen all over again—the teachers would be fired, and it would be fairly easy, given the surplus of labor, for the school board to replace them.

But firing 10,000 teachers in a dozen districts—well, that would be quite another matter. Law or no law, that would be an impossible strike to break.

Consider what would happen to a West Bloomfield or a Garden City under something resembling regional bargaining. If the school boards there should balk at proposed contract terms, not only would they have their own teachers sore at them, but the school boards and residents of all the neighboring districts would be putting on the heat too.

FOR ALL THE militancy of their leaders, teachers have a tendency to practice something less than union solidarity. Whether 10,000 teachers would hit the bricks if no contract were reached in a West Bloomfield or a Garden City is highly problematical.

Yet there's no doubt that unions of government employees in general and teachers in particular are on their way to becoming some of the most powerful in the country.

Regional bargaining is looming as a more distinct possibility in the future, whether the public likes it or not.

Meanwhile, Atty. Gen. Frank Kelley must review his opinion that it's all right for a teacher to be a union member in District A and a school board member in District B. With regional bargaining, that kind of conflict of interest will be unconscionable.



## Local questions tell Carter what's on folks' minds

I attended my first presidential press conference last Friday.

I was one of a group of 25 newspaper publishers, editors and TV news directors from around the country who were invited to Washington, D.C. for on-the-record interviews with the likes of Esther Peterson, assistant to the president for consumer affairs, and Robert Lipshutz, counsel to the president.

The high point of the day was a 45-minute press conference with President Jimmy Carter, limited to our group of 25, with the regular Washington press corps excluded.

We were ushered into the Cabinet Room in the White House, a modestly scaled but beautifully proportioned room facing out to the Rose Garden, with a portrait of Harry Truman over the fireplace. We sat around the cabinet conference table, in high-backed leather chairs, jostling with press secretary Jody Powell.

"President Carter walked in. Modestly, he said, 'Pardon me for interrupting.' Powell: 'Oh, no, Mr. President. We were just finished.' Nervous laughter. A short statement from the president, and we let at him with our questions.

THIS BRIEFING was one in a regular series the White House is putting on. One obvious purpose is to get the administration's message out to the editors and news directors in the sticks, as part of the usual PR routine.

Another purpose, according to the people in the White House press office, is to give President Carter a sense of what's going on in the minds of people outside of the narrow world of Washington, as reflected by the questions put to the president by local news people.

I have never attended a regular presidential press conference complete with the Washington press corps, but I have watched enough of them on TV to get the idea that the questions are both very well informed and in many cases almost entirely irrelevant to the lives of ordinary people living outside the pressure cooker of Washington. "Mr. President, does the fact that a comma was dropped between the second and third phrases of your recent statement indicate a shift in the administration's position on the Republic of Surinam?"

Good stuff, no doubt, but hardly the thing you're going to talk over with your wife when you come home from the office.

THE LOCAL EDITORS and news directors in our conference asked a lot of questions of local importance.

A guy from Tennessee asked when Carter



PHILIP H. POWER

would appoint a new chairman of the Tennessee Valley Authority. A man from Arkansas asked about prospects for a new breeder reactor to be located in his state. An editor from the coal mining country in Pennsylvania asked about the recent United Mine Workers election. I asked about Project Seafarer, which is of concern to Michigan.

None of these questions was on a global subject, but they were more important to the local people living in Michigan or Pennsylvania or Arkansas than some recondite question about Surinam. Which is why I think the kind of press briefing we had is a good idea. I certainly wouldn't know how to ask a question about Surinam in the way the Washington press corps can, but I do know what's important to people in Michigan.

It's like our local reporters and editors. It's their jobs to know what's important to people living in Birmingham or Rochester or Plymouth, or other communities we serve, rather than what's going on world-wide. Our "press corps" writes for very local newspapers, and in its own way does just as good a job as the Washington press corps, which writes for world-wide distribution.

BUT THERE'S an important difference. When our reporters walk into the mayor of Livonia's office or run into the superintendent of Southfield schools, we don't rise and say, "Good morning, Mr. President." We are more inclined to saunter in and say, "Mornin'. Ed" or "Hullo, Carl."

Even when Gov. Milliken spent two hours with our editorial board last year, our talk was an informal conversation with a certain amount of bull shooting) with Bill rather than a formal set of questions and answers.

When you are interviewing a president, even one who makes as much of an effort to make you relaxed as Mr. Carter, you still cannot escape the feeling that you are talking to the president, not good ol' Ed, the mayor.

Of course, that's the difference between a local mayor and the president of the United States. But that's a difference which needs to be understood and, within the appropriate range of proper respect for the office, overcome wherever possible.

## If we communicate

## Corporation can respond

It seems common these days to hear people railing against big business or big government or big unions because they claim the little guy doesn't have any way of influencing these organizations.

But it's not really fair to these institutions to criticize them unless you've really tried to influence them and have been unsuccessful.

To prove my point, I'll tell a story. Most of you know our newspaper group also publishes newspapers in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Over the years I have flown to Cincinnati once a week by leaving Detroit early in the morning, spending the day down there and flying back. I have usually taken a Delta flight, leaving somewhere between 7:30 and 8 o'clock in the morning.

Over the years Delta has served orange juice, a sweet roll and coffee on the flight going down, which means I don't have to breakfast before I leave for the airport.

When daylight saving time came in April, for some reason the sweet rolls disappeared from the Delta flight.

For the first two weeks I asked the stewardess if they were serving sweet rolls, and she said that they were no longer scheduled for this flight. The third week I purchased a sweet roll from the snack bar and put it in my briefcase and when the stewardess came around and didn't serve sweet rolls, I had my sweet roll anyway.

THE FOURTH WEEK I noticed that they were loading sweet rolls onto an Indianapolis flight leaving from the gate next to ours. So I guess I felt like the rest of that massive crowd of people, that I was being discriminated against.

What did I do? I wrote a man named Peter Garrett, the president of Delta Air Lines, and explained to him about the change.

A week later I got a call from Peter Garrett, the president of Delta Air Lines, and he said he had received my letter and was going to see the president.



HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.

A couple weeks later I got a letter back from Mr. Garrett thanking me for the letter and explaining that if he didn't receive letters like mine, he wouldn't know how the Delta customers feel about his organization. He also indicated that he would check with his head of dining service department for review, to see if they could get the sweet rolls back on the flight.

Yesterday, when I arrived at the airport to check in on the Delta flight, I asked the ticket taker whether they were serving snacks aboard. He said that there were none scheduled for the flight but he had just seen them being put on the flight anyway.

As the plane was gaining altitude after taking off from Detroit Metropolitan Airport, the stewardess came along and distributed orange juice, sweet rolls, and coffee.

NO ORGANIZATION will continue very long if it doesn't keep in contact with its customers. These people who complain that big corporations are not interested in what their customers think are actually using if they themselves make some attempt to communicate with these large organizations.

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