

Commissioners appeal to Lansing

County rips workers' comp abuses

In an attempt to cut abuses in Michigan's workers' compensation program, the Oakland County Board of Commissioners called on the state legislature to stop "piecemeal compensation legislation" and tackle the system's shortcomings.

The board joined Commissioner Robert W. Page (R-Birmingham) in opposing Senate Bill 479 which would shift funding of the Workers' Compensation Bureau and the Workers' Compensation Appeal Board from the state's general fund to a two per cent tax on compensation paid by insurance carriers and self-insured employers.

He said this new tax proposal would cost Michigan employers an additional \$5.4 million per year.

"Worker's comp costs have not leveled off or stabilized. To the contrary, they continue to escalate, and if the worker's compensation weekly benefit schedule is raised without first correcting the abuses of the system, it will be an economic disaster for business in Michigan," he warned.

Page said that business is hit by a "double barrel" effect because it

'We're at the point right now where almost anything goes. Workers' compensation is close to becoming a welfare experience all over again.'

-Ed Wolf, Budd Co.

must not only bear the direct increased cost of workers comp but must also share the increased costs of the program to government. He said much of the cost increases could be blamed on fraudulent claims.

Ed Wolf, corporate manager of workman's compensation for the Budd Company of Troy, said, "If a clear legislative mandate isn't forthcoming to eliminate abusive claims, our entire concept of workers' compensation is going to collapse."

"We're at the point right now where almost anything goes," he continued. "Workers' compensation is close to becoming a welfare experience all over again, with the honest worker who has a legitimate claim being short-

changed to pay for the guy who's ex-

ploiting the system to get a handout."

According to the Michigan State Chamber of Commerce, "Perhaps to an unprecedented degree, the future of Michigan's economic prosperity hangs on a labor relations issue that will be settled in the legislature instead of at the bargaining table. Business has indicated, in as many ways as it can afford to, that it is prepared to 'do right' by the legitimately injured worker."

SENATE BILL 479 is similar to a bill which was approved last year by the legislature, but was vetoed by Gov. William Milliken. In vetoing that bill, Milliken said he opposed the "piecemeal" approach to reforming workman's compensation.

"Worker's comp cost per employee in Michigan are so high they are ridiculous—even scandalous," Page said citing comparative costs for Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, and Pennsylvania. In 1976, he said, average workers' comp costs per employee in Indiana was \$57; in Ohio \$58; in Pennsylvania \$113 and in Michigan \$338.

Page chided, "The efforts of Michigan's pre-business offices to retain or attract new business will be difficult until the very serious cost problems associated with workers' comp are resolved."

"The state of Mississippi," he added, recently sent a delegation to Michigan to seek out new business prospects for their state, and they had plenty of ammunition when they pointed to our workers' comp."

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OCC gets addition to facilities

A last-second change of heart gave Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge campus a much-sought after addition to its new activities building.

The addition includes three handball courts and an exercise room adding \$203,355 to a project that has already run over budget.

Trustee Dennis Rodgers changed his no vote after the six board members present split on the issue. Board of Trustees President Gordon Henderson did not attend the meeting.

Rodgers said, "I labored and labored and labored over the decision."

When I came here tonight I was pretty sure I would vote against it. But I didn't want it to fail because of a lack of a definitive response from the board."

Had he not changed his vote, the addition would have failed. Four affirmative votes are necessary to approve any measure.

"I wish Henderson had been here. I would much rather had him make the decision," Rodgers said.

Trustees Earl Anderson, David Hackett and Suzanne Reynolds supported the additional construction and Barbara Willing and Lila Johnson

joined Rodgers in initially voting no.

Anderson said the handball courts and exercise room were needed "to round out the building and the total campus."

"If we want to build it at some later date it's going to be added on anyway — at a much, much higher cost. Then the voters are going to wonder why the devil they didn't build it three or four years when they were building."

Even though Hackett ultimately supported the addition he said, "That's a lot of loot for relatively limited usage."

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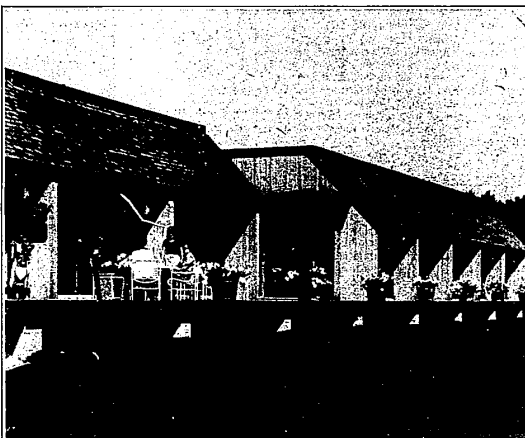
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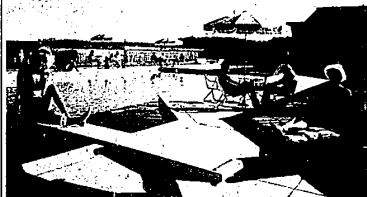
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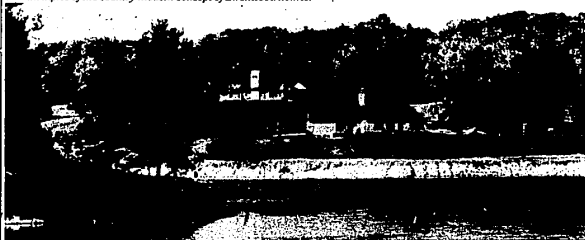
East elevation of the clubhouse that features a large deck overhang.



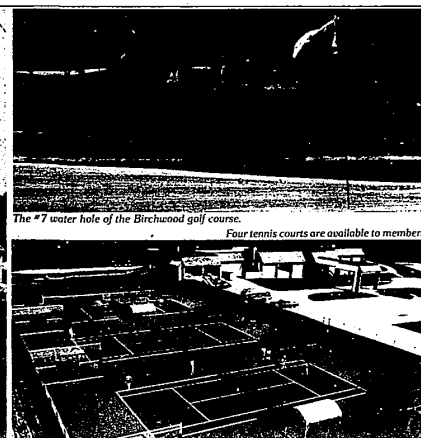
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