

# Merging of school districts remains a possibility

By BARBARA UNDERWOOD

Merger of the Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills school districts may be simmering on the back burner but apparently has not been permanently shelved. Although a consolidation may never happen, or may be many months or even years in the future, the door is still open for an investigation into the pros and cons of such a move. Lawrence Flora, president of the Bloomfield Hills board of education, said last week, "I don't think anyone on our board really wants this but I think we should look at it regardless of our emotions. "We are not on the board to make emotional decisions," he added. "We have to make decisions that are the best for everyone in the school district."

Flora admits that he may so far be a voice in the wilderness, but he believes other board members will see the wisdom of investigating the issue. "WE HAVE only heard the negative feelings about this," he said. "It would not be wise to shut the door without looking in. "The subject of a merger of the two districts has been raised two or three times during this decade and each time has been put aside. Most recently, Birmingham Board President Donna Hartwig proposed another look at it in May. The immediate reaction of most Bloomfield Hills trustees was, "Who needs it?" while the general reaction in Birmingham was hardly enthusiastic. Last month, three trustees from each board met and returned to their full boards with a proposal that a consultant be hired to draw all the facts together for additional study. The Birmingham board gave a qualified go-ahead to the idea but the Bloomfield Hills board tabled the proposal to await "more persuasive information."

## FLORA HOPES to be the persuasive influence that will move the plan ahead.

"I don't feel we can put the matter on the shelf," he said. "The issue has been brought up again and the last thing I want to face is the accusation that we won't look at it because it might do us out of a job. "That is not the feeling of any of our board members but if we drop this where it is, we would be suscep-

tible to that accusation," he continued. "The question has been raised but we can't really reply. We are in no position to do more than argue so we have to go ahead and investigate it." Some Birmingham board members voiced concern recently that to proceed with an investigation at this time might adversely influence potential candidates for superintendent of the district.

THE BOARD has set a Sept. 30 deadline for applications for the position and expects to name a successor to Dr. Donald Peckenpaugh by Dec. 1. Peckenpaugh notified the board in

May that he would not seek an extension of his contract beyond his June 30, 1978, expiration date. The superintendent's search was not a factor when the subject of merger was brought up in May although it is now, Mrs. Hartwig said last week. She does not believe embarking on a study of the feasibility of a merger would be a problem in terms of a new superintendent because of the vast amount of time that would be necessary before a merger could be accomplished. The first step would be to hire an outside consultant to study both districts. A merger or consolidation of dis-

tricts must be approved by the county superintendent, then petitions must be circulated and a special election held. The total process could take as long as three years.

"WE NEED a qualified outside person to come in and look at the two districts as a hypothetical single district," Flora said. "He should look at the population density with no regard to where schools are now but where schools would be needed." Flora said he envisioned an overlay which the consultant would prepare to show where schools were needed, based on student population, and "see

where he would put them in relation to existing schools." Declining enrollment has not hit the Bloomfield Hills schools as hard to late as Birmingham. Only one elementary school has been closed in Bloomfield Hills. Birmingham has closed three elementary and one junior high. "For the study to make any sense at all, we would have to be told there would be a cost savings," Flora said. "It would have to be substantial enough to benefit individual taxpayers." A ceiling of \$5,000 had been suggested for the proposed study, to be shared jointly by the two districts.

# Doctor fights infants' unseen enemy

By MARILYN BETMAN

Eighteen years ago, a deputy chief medical examiner in Wayne County was confronted with six little bodies brought to the morgue for investigation by the medical examiner. That deputy was Dr. Clara Raven and the incident caused her to become actively involved in the study of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome. "It was a cold winter morning in December of 1959," she recalls. "I was my sad duty to interview six bereaved mothers prior to performing autopsies and subsequently to counsel them."

Dr. Raven had just arrived in Detroit after serving as a pathologist in the Armed Forces during World War II and the Korean Conflict. "Although I had experience with crib death during my residency," she said, "I had never faced so many cases in one sitting." The interview was particularly heart-breaking for her because it reminded her of her own mother's story about her first-born who died unexpectedly. "The large number of deceased infants that morning galvanized my de-

cision to undertake a study of this baffling problem," she said.

WITH THE help of several bereaved young mothers, Dr. Raven founded the Michigan Association for Sudden Infant Death. The primary goals of this organization were to supply grief-stricken families with information about crib deaths, educate the public about the sudden death syndrome of infancy and raise funds for research.

The group and others in Connecticut, New York, Baltimore and Seattle were the forerunners of two national organizations known as the National Foundation for Sudden Infant Deaths and the International Guild for Infant Survival.

"Through these organizations," said Dr. Raven, "bereaved parents can voice their concern about the handling of sudden infant death by coroners, medical examiners and police agencies. "Also, through public opinion and political action, they've succeeded in obtaining governmental funding for research, education, information and counseling."

The doctor noted that excluding prenatal and neonatal death, Sudden Infant Death Syndrome is the number one cause of death in infants in the postneonatal period.

"Yet I am constantly amazed at how little is known even among pediatricians about this serious infant loss," she said. "Perhaps this may explain the apathy and lack of research funds."

She attributes the apathy to the fact that most pediatricians have very few cases brought to them since crib death is rarely preceded by illness serious enough to require a doctor's care.

"UNLESS YOU see an incident in your own private practice," she said, "you don't pay that much attention to it."

In 1959, Dr. Raven presented an exhibit on crib death during a convention in Chicago and the topic caused a stir among doctors there.

She said the term Sudden Infant Death Syndrome was established at a conference in 1963. The term was defined as "an occurrence when a child up to six months old with little or no previous sickness is put to bed, and when next checked, found dead."

The tragedy strikes most frequently from late fall through February, and some of its contributing factors are thought to be prenatal influence, poor nutrition, illegitimacy, juvenile preventative medicine.

These are the same factors that result in fetal deaths, she noted.

As a result of recent research Dr. Raven has been conducting with members of the Department of Epidemiology at the University of Michigan, she contends that there is much evidence that crib deaths are caused by virus.

"When an infant is born," she explained, "it is protected by immune bodies from the mother. Around two

months of age, these anti-bodies have diminished, and the infant is susceptible to infection."

She noted that at least 40 per cent of the deaths have been in cases of low birth weight, premature birth or birth injury.

Dr. RAVEN is currently in the process of preparing to publish a book that explains her theories on the tragedy of crib death which will be titled: "DIDS or Crib Death: A Study to Delineate Some Common Factors Among a Group of Children Who Died Unexpectedly."

The Oak Park resident has also completed a paper on the same topic which is scheduled to appear in the January, 1978 issue of "The Journal of Forensic Sciences in Washington, D. C."

Both publications are the fruit of years of research and experience and may bring comfort to large numbers of parents who have experienced the tragedy in Sudden Infant Death Syndrome.

# Unitarian church resumes services

Northwest Unitarian Universalist Church, 23925 Northwestern Highway in Southfield, will resume services at 10 a.m. Sunday after a two-month summer hiatus.

Minister Frank Dana Gentile will preach on "The Lifelong Task of Learning to be Human."

Gentile bases his sermon on a quote from T. H. White's final volume and previously unpublished "The Once and Future King."

Gentile will speak to what it means to be really human). New officers who will lead the congregation at Northwest are Dorothy Amberger of Detroit, who will serve as moderator or presiding officer and Richard Gielow of Warren, vice moderator.

Others are Wilber Williams of Southfield, chairperson of the board of managers and board members John Amberg, Janis Decker, Morris Goodman, Doreen Myers of Detroit; Louis Espo, Theda Smith, Marga Zieger of Southfield; Sally Gaines of Farm-

ington and Tom Sheldon of Ferndale.

Serving on the policy making council are: Better Chessin of West Bloomfield, Ted Danielson, Johanna Kobran, Arthur Peracchio, and Walter Williams of Detroit; Rohn Goldman, of Orchard Lake; Gerry Reilly of Southfield; John Woods, Kitty Stokes of Birmingham, Lenore Upton Storer of Royal Oak and Joan Thomas of Southfield.

Ann Williams of Detroit is the recorder and Jane Williams of Southfield is treasurer.

Members of the church as well as Rev. Gentile took part in the 16th Annual General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association in June.

Among a number of significant stands taken by the general assembly delegates were resolutions supporting the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment; a stand against the initiation of a constitutional convention on abortion and for the establishment of a gran food bank with Canada.

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