

editorial opinion

Crackerbarrel DEBATE



New board promises a fresh mesh

Hold on, political gaddies, the Crackerbarrel Debater is in a complimentary mood today. Newly elected Farmington School Board President Helen Prutow has sounded an optimistic note with the advent of three new members to the district's legislative body.

I share in her optimism. In case you've been away to a summer haunt and missed the recent action on top of Shawasssee Hill (school board headquarters), you've missed a lot.

Last month Janice Rolnick and Jack Inch won election to the school board. This week, James McGilney was appointed to serve out the term of Merv Ross, who has resigned in quest of stunner climes.

While the lack of interest shown by voters in last month's election was disappointing, it was encouraging to see six candidates, most very well qualified, apply for the one-year term this month.

The old guard, some of who served their community well, were becoming worn from the year's of economic frustration. New faces, with fresh ideas were needed.

ESPECIALLY ENCOURAGING was the election of Mrs. Prutow as board president. After serving only two years on the board, she has proven to be an effective member, who understands the needs of the students.

This newspaper heartily endorsed her when she ran for school board and I expect she will live up to her role as presiding officer in guiding the new members.

Her job will be a challenge, but with the aid of newly-elected board vice president Mike Shpiece, it will be easier.

It's about time that Shpiece was recognized for his service to the board. For years, he was blocked from advancing in the board hierarchy because of his youthfulness. As many know, Mike has been attending board meetings since he was a high school student. He also has worked alongside State Rep. Joe Forbess (D-Oak Park) as a legislative aide. This could be a good few years for the board. If it's not, I'll be disappointed, as will many members of the community.

Optimism on the road

Bit by bit, Michigan is making progress in reducing death on the roads. The trend shows through in the 1977 "Michigan Traffic Accident Facts" report by the state police.

Between 1976 and 1977, the number of persons killed dropped 0.6 per cent. Not much, but consider the overall trend: The death rate per 100 million miles hit an all-time high of 16.3 in 1935 and now stands at 3.0.

Thus, in a little over 40 years, the number of deaths per miles has been cut 80 per cent. We're traveling far more, but we're not killing ourselves so readily.

Another happy statistic is that the number of serious injuries has been cut in the last year. And this occurred while population and mileage figures continued to rise.

Who gets credit? Highways are being engineered safer. Autos are being designed better, both because the auto companies want to and because the federal government is breathing down their necks. Emergency medical service is improving. Police are studying statistics to spot trouble areas and work on them.

Maybe we in the information business played a role in preaching safer driving and reporting accidents and running pictures, when we can get them in time.

The bottom line is that our roads won't get safer over night, and no one factor will be responsible for making them safer. Everyone who has anything to do with roads must address the problem, all the time. The evidence each year, meanwhile, is that we are all getting a little better at it.

SIT ON IT!



Tell me a new DRC story

University of Michigan students needing a quick weekend buck may still be able to peddle an old suit to a type such as the sour-faced used-clothes dealer who prowled the fraternal section during the Depression.

But I doubt whether they can get a two-bit bet down on a horse at Narragansett as we could in those difficult days.

Thoroughbred racing and legalized pari-mutuel wagering had come to Michigan in 1933. Illegal bookies cropped up as naturally as butterflies in a rose garden.

Those of us who knew of the action in the basement of a cigar store in downtown Ann Arbor considered ourselves characters right out of Damon Runyon. A couple of 'em should have been.

Copies of the Racing Form were there for perusal. The guy behind the teller's wicket may have had a Ph.D.; at any rate, he was aware that to budding handicappers any bet was better than no bet at all. Unless it lost.

Just like in the movies, his buddy who wore the headset would give the telephonic call of the races from tracks across the country. Instant cash was the lure and it still is.

NEXT TUESDAY, when the Detroit Race Course opens for its 29th season in Livonia, one of my many friends in the sellers' windows will understand that the same appeal exists even yet when the stage-whisperers as I shove the \$2 wad at her, "I heard on the four horse."

We're all longing to be touted in this world—bet a horse, sign a political petition, con a broad, do anything to cash a win ticket instead of being stuck with place, show or that out-of-the-money tag.

The usher may have given me more accurate information. Or even the kid who parked my car. Undoubtedly one of several bartenders did. Perhaps I handicapped the winner myself.

But the character who offers me the popcorn last sells the package.

It's like a used car lot, but that's another yarn for another time.

That Ann Arbor scene of the student '30s is just one of many racing-related vignettes that come to mind as we prepare once again to do homage to the political maneuvering which turned agricultural Livonia Township into an incorporated city.

There are other vignettes that offer a lot more class. Some even were tinged with luck.

LOOKING BACK, one of the most enjoyable was the weekend when about 40 of us from the Detroit area toured the breeding farms of the Blue Grass country surrounding Lexington. Our host was Dale Shaffer, then owner of the DRC. Earlier, Dale had been the leading money-winning breeder in the world, had served as president of the Thoroughbred Club of America and had been chairman of the Kentucky Racing Commission.

We never asked what anything would cost on that weekend. We just ordered.

Most precious memory for me remains leaning across the top of a fence at famed Calumet Farm and talking personally with the greatest race horse of his time, Citation. The picture to prove it hangs on the wall of my den. Then come the wife and kids.

IN LIGHT OF the man's many accomplishments professionally in the newspaper field and of his great public service for the Observer & Eccentric area it would be unfair to give you the identity of the person of whom I next speak.



But as I prepare to don the blindfold and bet whichever horse gets the brunt of the slosh from my scotch and water, I'm reminded of a friend. I should say "late, revered" friend. Many of you knew him.

His favorite phrase, sitting in press headquarters before a race, was, "Tell me a story."

As he pored over the past performance charts, what he wanted most was for someone to give him a reason that would substantiate his own thinking in backing a horse, any horse.

THE DETROIT RACE COURSE never has reached the pinnacle of national thoroughbred prestige of which its various owners have dreamed since it presented its first afternoon of racing at Schoolcraft and Middlebelt on May 25, 1950.

This summer, a new chapter is opening under the ownership of two real estate development tycoons, Herb Tyler and Bernard Hartman. They are based in Southfield, but their apartment chains spread through Detroit, Southfield, Troy, Bloomfield Township and what have you.

Individually, they are winners. Big winners. They also have made a big winner out of their other Michigan racing property, the track at Hazel Park.

They plan many physical improvements in the DRC plant for the pleasure of spectators, and in a few years could elevate racing on Michigan's only one-mile track to the quality enjoyed at York, Chicago and Los Angeles.

That they will try to do this is the one thing on which you can bet whatever your family jewels are worth. But if you hock those jewels for the dough to bet a single horse, no matter what the blood line, ask first of someone, "tell me a story." Racing luck never carries a guarantee.

Horatio Alger of industry

Last week a living legend passed from the scene. Ernie Breech, former chairman of the board of Ford Motor Co., died at the age of 81.

The Detroit automobile community remembers that the son of a Lebanon, Mo. blacksmith, a man who finished college via correspondence courses, left General Motors at the end of World War II and rescued Ford Motor Co., which was losing \$10 million a month.

Breech was a trouble-shooter for GM during the 1930s when the automobile business was just starting to mature. Had he been born 20 years earlier, he probably would have started his own auto company and had a car named after him.

He became an officer of GM at age 32 and a vice-president 10 years later.

IN THE EARLY 1930s, General Motors had a subsidiary called General Aviation Corp. Through investment and merger, General Aviation put together Western Air Express, Transcontinental Air Transport (Charles Lindbergh's company), Standard Air Lines and Pennsylvania Aircraft Industries to form the pioneer transcontinental airline—Transcontinental and Western Air, Inc., the predecessor of TWA.

Ernie Breech was GM's representative on the TWA board.

In 1933 he became president and chairman of North American Aviation, which built the P-51 fighter plane and B-26 bomber during World War II.



Tim Richard

Ike and Zolton called it right

The 1950s decade was more than "Grease," more than growth. Some fundamental changes went on in American government and private life that affect how we live today and what we will vote on in November.

The '50s was the decade of great suburban growth and the decade of an explosion in state and local spending on schools and communities.

Recall: Few new schools or public buildings were put up in the 1930s because of the Great Depression and in the 1940s because of World War II. These were followed by postwar adjustments and by the Korean conflict. The action in America was in the federal government.

DWIGHT EISENHOWER saw the need for change. As president, he made a fundamental decision to sit on the federal budget and hold it in check.

The other side of the coin was that state and local governments were told to play "catch-up"—to take care of the needs they had been neglecting for 20 years.

In the meantime, returning veterans had been buying new housing in the suburbs for several years. Those residential neighborhoods needed to be transformed into communities with paved streets, sewers, local schools, libraries, city halls, fire departments, local planning commissions, high schools, community colleges.

Eisenhower was sometimes called a "do nothing" president. It's the blummiest rap a politician was ever hit with. He said something to the effect that one must choose between "big government or big people" and he had chosen big people.

What he meant was that big government referred to the federal government and big people meant people as individuals, people as business and people as local communities.

PROPERTY TAXES and assessments were levied cheerfully by the "big people" to take care of community needs in the '50s. In many American communities, the biggest, most modern, most expensive and proudest structure in town was the new high school.

(The one major federal monetary contribution to all of this was the interstate highway program. And as we in metropolitan Detroit well know, the freeways are as much intercommunity as they are interstate. They helped the new, growing communities.)

Eisenhower's critics interpreted this as "private opulence" and big tail fins on cars and contrasted it with public squalor. It was far short of the truth, but it did sell.

By the end of the 1950s, Americans were beginning to be positively neurotic about what they had done for themselves and their communities. They became so neurotic were they that they began paying serious attention to "prestige polls," in which Third World peasants were asked whether they liked America a) very much, b) a little or c) not at all.

In came John F. Kennedy and up went the federal budget.

TODAY THE federal government's favorite charity is cities. Lumped together, American cities get something like 25 per cent of their funds from the feds.

The last time I looked at a University of Michigan budget, it looked more like a federal university than a state university.

And today the taxpayers are in revolt. The trouble is, they are revolting against their state and local governments, not against the Washington Gargantua.

President Eisenhower was right in the 1950s, and gubernatorial candidate Zolton Ferency is right today: Sit on the federal budget, and let the state and local units do their thing; reform state and local tax structures, and solve problems at home.



North American Aviation, with Breech as head, put together what is now known as Eastern Airlines and appointed Eddie Rickenbacker general manager.

Later Breech formed the Aeroproducts division of GM.

IN 1937 HE became GM's representative on the board of Bendix Aviation Corp., now Bendix Corp., which was then losing \$250,000 every month. He was also serving as group head of Frigidaire, Delco Appliance and North American Aviation.

He eventually became president of Bendix, which made millions of dollars during the second world war.

After his Ford experience, he went back to TWA, as chairman of the board at the request of the insurance companies that had lent money to Howard Hughes, controlling shareholder of TWA.

Ernie Breech led a full and complete life. He certainly deserved to be one of Horatio Alger's heroes.

But more importantly, he was a good man, a kind man and my hero since early childhood.

A Division of Suburban Communications Corporation
Philip H. Power, Chairman of the Board (on leave of absence)
Richard D. Aginjian, President
Chief Executive Officer

Farmington Observer
"Successor of the Farmington Enterprise"
Steve Barnaby, Editor
22170 West Nine Mile, Southfield, MI 48075 (313) 352-5400
John Reddy, General Mgr.
Thomas A. Riordan, Executive Editor
George J. Hagan, Advertising Director, Fred J. Wright, Circulation Director