

Chrysler honcho staying active since retirement

By JEANNE WHITTAKER

Cartoonists make their living by stereotyping people. Consider the retiree. We have seen him as a portly gentleman hanging a "Gone Fishing" sign on the door of his executive suite.

The caricature does not suit retiree Lynn Townsend, of Bloomfield Hills. A more appropriate picture of the former Chrysler Corp. chairman would feature an athletic figure, Hawaiian shirt tails flying, behind the wheel of a reconditioned convertible.

Retired for the past three years, Townsend and his wife Ruth are busier now than before. Instead of one job as the chairman of the number three auto maker, Townsend is chairman of two local civic enterprises and president of a condominium association in Hawaii.

Of his decision to end a 20-year association with Chrysler, Townsend said:

"I hadn't particularly thought about or planned for retirement. The idea just came to me. We were going to Alaska right away so I didn't spend much time thinking about it after it happened. I just made up my mind to get out of that situation."

These days, Townsend said he maintains a detached posture toward the corporation.

"I terminated with Chrysler. No, I'm not on the board. I raised both (Chairman) John Riccardo and (President) Gene Caltero and I have great confidence in them."

"I never believed that a person who has been honcho should look over the shoulder of the top cat. He should have the run of the alley. I think it's the fairest way."

"I've never been one of these hard driving, had-to-do-it-all myself people. I was more of a delegating type. Ruth (his wife) used to say 'If you keep on, you're going to organize yourself out of a job.'"

He has a variety of interests currently, including the chairmanship of the Michigan Opera Theater, co-chairmanship of the Economic Growth Corporation, and the presidency of a condominium association on Maui where they own property.

The two former jobs, he said, are a pleasure. The latter is another story.

"I spend a lot of time with Michigan Opera Theater," he said. "The organization is the 13th largest of the 50 regional opera companies affiliated with the National Opera Institute."

Under Townsend's conservative fiscal leadership, the theater's budget this year reached \$1 million. An interesting sidelight to the association, he said, is that he receives piano lessons from Karen DiChiera, wife of the director of the opera company.

TOWNSEND is also co-chairman of the Economic Growth Corporation, which he and former GM chairman James Roche helped found this year. The organization, he said, is an ideal partner to New Detroit and Detroit Renaissance.

New Detroit was created following the 1977 riot to improve communications and fund projects that aid education, minority employment, criminal justice, and community life.

Detroit Renaissance was formed in 1971 to assist with downtown development. The Economic Growth Corp., Townsend said, was founded to retain existing business and encourage new business within the city.

"It's quasi-public private corporation," Townsend said. "Everyone is involved in bringing Detroit forward."

"Everyone is pitching in to help," said Ruth, who is no stranger at pulling groups together to aid civic and charitable activities of the city.

The one job that he holds, which neither of them tries to hide a distaste for, is the presidency of their condominium association on Maui.

"Working on condo boards is something else again," he said.

"We meet four times a year, but we are always there for one problem or another. In a way it's more difficult than being chairman of Chrysler."

The problem with his association, he said, is that there is no way he can regulate his peers.

Why assume such responsibility, not to mention the amount of work it involves? He shrugs and admits he had no idea the job included this many headaches.

WATCHING him stroll through the

garden, pointing out which trees need attention, it is evident that Townsend has great vitality.

"For 40 years I worked every day. I have not had a lot of time to do the things I like. I still don't."

"When I was with Chrysler, I had 150,000 people helping me."

Now, without secretary or staff to help him organize daily activities, he has more respect for the amount of time it takes to get routine things done.

"I'd say I am better adjusted now than I was three years ago," he said. "I had one of the toughest jobs around. Would I go back? No."

Ruth Townsend also said she is better adjusted now than at the time of her husband's retirement.

When Townsend announced he was leaving the corporation, she decided to retire from many of her civic responsibilities, including the chairmanship of Children's Hospital of Michigan.

"I've changed quite a bit," she said. "Mainly because we are away so much. But still, life expects you to get in line morning."

Both agree that one of the benefits of Townsend's retirement is the ability to call a halt to activity in the middle of a morning and sit down for a cup of coffee together.

And then, there is more time for traveling together. They went on an 18-day tour of China two years ago.

At the time, there was speculation that he was traveling there as a guest of the Chinese government to consult on automotive affairs.

Townsend said that wasn't true. The trip was the result of a request for entry made by the Lexington (Ky.) China Study Group, of which they are members.

"It was a terribly hard trip," Ruth recalls. "Everybody was sick. I certainly wouldn't recommend it to anyone who has health problems."

"We did so much traveling when he was with the international division, but we never had time to study where we were going. This time we really studied. That's the way we are going from now on."

Regarding speculation over motives for the trip, Townsend said the one automotive factory he visited produced trucks that looked like American models of the '30s.

"There just is no reference for comparison," he said.

THOUGH THEY have spent little more than two months of the year in Bloomfield Hills since his retirement, the Townsend residence retains the aura of a much cared for home.

Built in the '50s, the house is a modern, multi-level structure. Judicious pruning lets light filter through trees to the house and a terrace hillside leading to the edge of a nearby lake.

Inside, the living and bedroom portions of the house look out into the tree tops.

A lower level contains a swimming pool that Townsend uses every day that he is home. Everywhere there is evidence of the couple's interest in Oriental art.

"We've done a lot of talking about living out of two homes," he said. Their involvement with the association on Maui makes it increasingly hard to maintain two homes.

Seven years ago, he explains, they and their three children invested in 13 condominiums being built on the island.

The care needed to keep the five they still own ready for rental keeps them there much of the time.

"We decided to sell the others when we realized this investment was supposed to be fun, but wasn't," he said.

Another acquisition is a 15 year old Dodge Dart convertible, which belonged to his late sister.

They flew to Florida last January to collect the turquoise colored car with plans to renovate it. Within the next few weeks they plan to drive it west for transportation on the island.

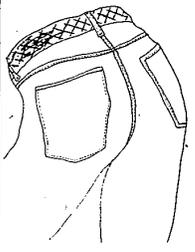
Ruth recalls the trip from Florida. "We were kind of nervous. It looked just like a tramp deal."

The perils were many, she said. After they got underway Townsend told her that the car had barely passed the state inspection, and then only with the help of a nearby Chevrolet dealership.

Considering the time that it generally takes to complete repairs, did Townsend consider using his name and former title to speed the job?

"No," he said with a smile. "They thought I was just another tourist in trouble, which I was."

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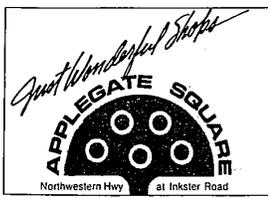
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Enrichment classes set

Enrichment classes designed especially for junior high students are being offered by the Birmingham Schools community services department.

Instruction will be given in hunters' safety, cross-country training, bicycle tune-up, photography, guitar, yoga, and multimedia first aid, art, typing, speed reading and study skills, wrestling and many others.

Registrations are now being accepted at the Birmingham Center for Continuing Education (BCCCE), 746 Purdy. Classes will start Saturday.

Further information about classes and registration may be obtained from the community services department, 662-4010.

Registrations also are being accepted for the school district's Super Saturday program for kindergarten through sixth grade students. Classes will run from Oct. 21 to Dec. 2.