

editorial opinion

Help future by voting for millage

Next Tuesday an important event will happen in the Farmington School District.

Most folks in town will be unaware of this special occasion, even though everyone 18 years and older is invited to participate, and those below that age will be the chief beneficiaries.

There won't be any parades to commemorate the event. No grand speeches will be made. It will all happen very quietly—almost too quietly.

The event—an election asking for renewal of 1.75 mills of property tax for nine years, yielding \$1 million for children's education.

Millage renewal elections have become pretty commonplace. Most pass—and that's good because they deserve the support of voters.

I certainly recommend that eligible voters turn out to give their approval to the millage renewal.

But a body doesn't need a crystal ball to predict

that few persons will go out and vote. And that's sad.

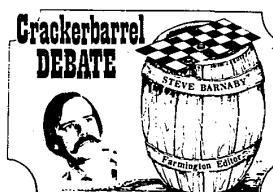
I used to get very indignant about low voter turnout. It still grinds me. But a very astute journalistic colleague reminded me once that implicit in the right to vote is the right not to.

It's sad, but true, especially when it comes to education.

About the only time residents get excited about school matters is when a millage increase is requested, a building is about to be closed or the sports program is going to be cut.

Otherwise, school business churns along unnoticed and unrecognized despite the value it contributes to a community.

Frankly, I couldn't think of any more of a thankless job in these times than being an educator or school board trustee.



In contrast to previous decades when enrollments bulged and a lot of money was floating around bolstering everyone's spirits, today's educational scene is plagued with too few bucks to educate a swiftly

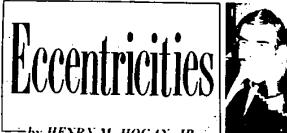
declining student body.

Today's educator is faced with boredom, frustration, neglect and resentment. But, on the other hand, that same educator is faced with the challenge of having one of the most important jobs in our society—educating for the future.

And that's why millages should be passed. It also is why more residents should pay attention to what is happening in their school district.

Forget that you may not personally like one or another of your children's teachers or your belief that perhaps too many bureaucrats are employed by the administration.

On Tuesday, do it for the kids. Show the community that you care enough to wander over to the voting booth and pull the lever down in favor of the millage—even if you don't have a child attending school.



It takes strong legs to fly

I've often wondered who designs airports.

They should be designed so that large flying monsters can be meshed together with many individuals arriving mostly by car and carrying large suitcases.

Obviously, the closer together you can put these elements, the more efficient you will be.

The father of airport architects must have been an out-of-work railroad station designer.

The problem with a railroad station designer is that he had fewer trains and people to deal with, and the passengers rarely left their cars at the station for any extended period of time.

The newer airports, instead of bringing passengers closer to planes, now have extended concourses with the planes gathered around at the end.

In the old days, only a few people had to walk all the way to the end gate. Now, practically everyone gets the opportunity.

THE OTHER DAY I was flying to Flint, and before I reached my gate I was already to Bay City.

If you ever have to change planes at an airport, you can be sure your next plane will be at the other end of the terminal.

Of course, this may be government's answer to getting people to exercise more.

The airline handling of people and baggage adds to the problem. Checking your bags in at the curb is a great improvement, but it still means you have to go back and park the car. This usually involves going back to where you first entered the airport and finding the parking entrances.

If you can find a parking space, you usually have a long walk back to the terminal.

The airline desks are very democratic. Each agent will handle any kind of problem from checking your bags to scheduling trips to Mars on a super saver plan.

THE PROBLEM is that the person in a hurry to check his bags is usually behind the guy who wants to go to Mars and is in no rush.

The airlines could learn from the grocery stores and have something like "Eight Items or Less" lines for late passengers and only issue new tickets in specified lines.

Once you pass the desk check, you still have to get past the X-ray metal detector desk which forces bodies of people into single lines.

Somehow, someone should be able to figure out how baggage and people can be moved quickly and efficiently into waiting planes without wasting all the time you are trying to save by flying.

Push, push, push

Michigan's secretary of state is sending out new auto license plates with his name, name—not once, not twice, but three times on every envelope. It amounts to using his office of public trust to promote himself, himself, himself. Shame, shame, Dick Austin, Dick Austin, Dick Austin.

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How much for free air?

"Every service station should be required to provide free pressurized air for tires."

So read the opening sentence of an editorial in the February issue of the official magazine of the Automobile Club of Michigan, an organization of more than 1.2 million members. Circulation of the magazine, Michigan Living—Motor News, is nearly 800,000.

Basically, I agree with Editor Len Barnes' assertion, but are there two sides to the coin?

It's ridiculous to find, when a tire goes soft—just soft, not flat—that one must drive with fingers crossed to as many as five stations before finding an available, workable air hose.

But that was exactly my experience recently. A noon luncheon appointment waited by necessity while I nursed my car at a cautious gait through January slop to the closest oasis.

When I got there, I made a bad mistake.

BROUGHT UP in the days of true SERVICE stations, I asked for the location of the air hose. I was told it was broken. I am not a regular customer there. I had no need to ask for gasoline, for the tank was full.

Four stations and two miles later, smouldering in high dudgeon and far off my intended route, I found that Fred Frady of a Sunoco station at Plymouth Road and Laurel believes in the AAA theory that "Proper air pressure is as important to a tire as oil is to an engine."

He pulled a long snake of a hose from within his heated repair area, put air into that suffering right front oval which holds to this day, and didn't even ask about the petrol.

The gracious deed seemed so much Frady's nature that I doubt he even remembered face or vehicle when I drove in some days later just for gasoline.

MY EXAMPLE is a case of extremes, but it did happen.

I can change a flat if I must, and have a number of times over the years, but damned if I enjoy the bloody knuckles that inevitably result.

Just offhand, there seems to be a growing minority who either ignore one's need, or point to the

through bifocals



device at the edge of the property where four units of pressurized air become available upon deposit of 25 cents.

Contrary to your expectations, I don't complain about the latter a whit.

Somewhere I once was taught that repeat business is a necessity for economic survival in these lines of endeavor. The keynote is spelled s-e-r-v-i-c-e. Whether it's with a smile or a growl really isn't the point.

If Fred Frady never turned away a tire begging for infusion, neither did Elton McAllister nor so many other SERVICE station operators whom I know only by first names—Jack, Ray, Don, Paul, Cal et al. No doubt you can add dozens more of your own ken. More power to 'em.

CHARLES SHIPLEY, executive director of the Service Station Dealers of Michigan, now rises to be heard, and deservedly so. Shipleys does so at my request, for this is the other side of the coin.

All we discussed was Len Barnes' required to provide free pressurized air for tires."

No unreasonably, Shipleys shifts some of the responsibility for the growing concerns of tire inflation safety to the customers.

He feels keenly about, and not friendly toward, motorists who fill their tanks at self-serve stations and then tap the nice traditionalists down the street for extra—without putting any nickels on the drum.

"Would you ask a restaurant for a napkin and glass of water and then eat your lunch out of a brown paper bag in their parking lot?" Shipleys has a point.

"AIR IS FREE, but compressed air takes effort or money," he continued. "It costs more for a service station to maintain an air compressor than it does to operate all the appliances in your home."

"Yes, this is a thing and we have become deeply involved in it. Gasoline now is being sold by many outlets which, in fact, are not service stations. Their reduced prices attract many customers."

"There is no obligation to non-customers. No one has an inherent 'right' to free service. But where you are a customer, I don't know of a single station that wouldn't put in air for you."

My conclusion:

Where you're not known, where you don't drive in regularly, perhaps the best answer is always to get at least a dollar's worth of gasoline for air, two for a clean windshield, and three if the rest room calls.

Tim Richard

Clout may not save subway

There is an underground in suburbia. The underground consists of those of us who thought rapid transit was an excellent idea.

Not only were we for rapid transit, we felt no qualms about putting it underground—a subway, if I may use that dirty word in print. You only had to drive up Woodward Avenue from Jefferson to McNichols to see that an underground line was the only thing that made sense for rapid transit.

If that position put us in the position of agreeing with Detroit Mayor Coleman Young—well, suburban Highland Park felt the same way.

BUT IT LOOKS very much as if no rapid transit line will be built, on the surface or underground, at least for some years. The Urban Mass Transit Administration, part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, is frowning a clear no.

Despite that, Mayor Young says "yes." He doesn't care what a second line fellow in UMTA says. Young says he has the ear of the man in the White House and of DOT Secretary Brock Adams. Cost-benefit analyses be hanged.

Is Young right? Should he go ahead and fight? Should he remind Jimmy Carter of his political debts and go after the big bucks it will take to build a rapid transit line under ground?

I doubt it. Political clout won't be enough to get that rapid transit line. Too many other factors are against it.

IT BOILS DOWN to the fact that, even if Young has the clout to pry more federal bucks out of Washington, the southeast Michigan region's house isn't in order, in the jargon of the day.

Consider:

• The region has two bus systems. The Southeast Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) has been unable to affect a merger with the Detroit Department of Transportation. Who is to blame? Let's not get into that. The point is that the region should have a single, consolidated system if it's to bring a rapid transit project.

• SEMTA has no tax base of its own. Voters here have never had an opportunity to vote on SEMTA funding, and if they did, the odds are we would lose the taxpayers' revolt and all that. Other regions

—Miami, Buffalo and Denver—have adequate transportation support through sales taxes.

Having a major source of local funds is as important as having the federal bucks. Uncle Sugar doesn't pay for everything—just 80 per cent. If SEMTA puts up \$600 million, the SEMTA region must come up with \$150 million. The auto license fee increase of two years ago yields only about \$13 million a year.

POLITICALLY, rapid transit is in trouble.

SEMTA is a creature of the Michigan Legislature, not a home rule function. It depends on the legislature for the meager funding it has, and the legislature has made it clear it wants to be consulted before SEMTA builds a subway.

It wants to be consulted because it wants a chance to say no. The votes aren't there.

There is good reason to believe the 15-member SEMTA board itself can't come up with 10 votes to build a transit line under ground. Young has only five votes on his back pocket, and there aren't enough favorable suburbs—members of the underground underground— to provide a two-thirds majority for capital projects.

All of Young's clout with the Carter Administration can't overcome those obstacles. Not when UMTA's cost-benefit analysis also says no to an underground rapid transit line.

Letters to the Editor

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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