editorial opinion

Vandals should pay damages, clean up mess

Vandalism — malicious or ignorant destruction, especially of that which is beautiful or artistic.

That's how our friend Webster sums up the senseless damage which has plagued communities since that ancient Germanic tribe of the same name made the term popular.

Beats me what it was called before their time, but I'm sure there was a name.

The best part about Noah's definition is the "ignorant." A lot of folks realize that vandalism is malicious. Some of the misguided even think it's funny, at times. But too few take stock in how ignorant it is.

It also is expensive as the devil, but let's concentrate on the ignorant aspect for a minute.

SUBURBANITES have become hardened to vandalism. Sure it's annoying, but kids will be kids — right? Wrong.

Depending on the time of year, vandalism takes different forms. During the summer, it's cars running over mailboxes and lawns. It's baseball diamonds being mutilated beyond recognition. For good measure, throw in broken windshields, radio attenaes and burned picnic tables.

Beginning in the fall, the schools take the majority of the vandals' ire. Synagogues, for very sick reasons, get their share of the abuse.

But no matter the season, vandalism is very stupid and very preventable.

Actually, understanding the cause is the key to the solution. Once again turning to Webster, he tells us that ignorance is caused by a lack of education or knowledge.

IN SHORT, somebody along the line hasn't been doing his or her homework when it comes to vandalism prevention.

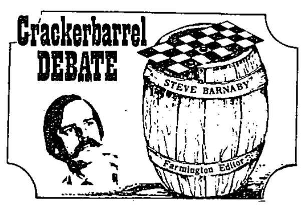
The responsibility, or lack of it, lays squarely in mom and dad's laps. They've got to do the teaching — nobody else will.

Now before everyone starts screaming that this is some pious punk pontificating, forget it. I'm a parent and feel just as responsible as the next guy.

Unfortunately, parents have an uncanny way of shifting the blame elsewhere. In too many parents' minds it's either the teacher's fault, the cop's problem or the kid's peers who are at fault.

The biggest cop-out, of course, is that vandalism is always done by somebody else's brat.

Crackerbarrel DEBATE



Oh, what a woeful surprise it is when the constable knocks on our door with little Johnny or Mary held firmly by the scruff of the neck.

"Where did I go wrong?" laments the parent.

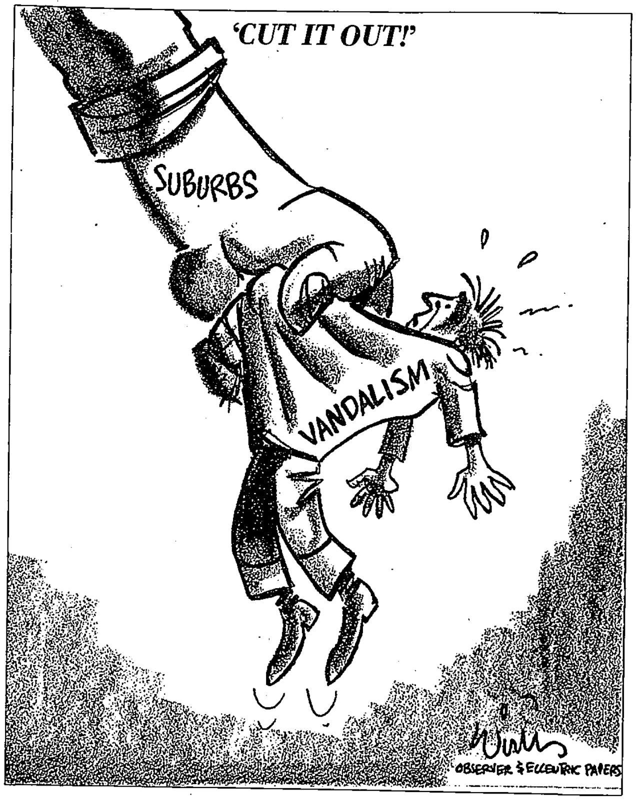
There are varying ways to teach a child why he or she shouldn't be beating up on someone else's property. Some work, some don't.

SMACKING THE KID never works. It reinforces violence. Grounding a child and cutting him off from those evil friends only causes more resentment.

The trick is hitting 'em in the pocketbook. No hitting, kicking or screaming are needed. Another good one is a payback through physical labor — the scourge of just about any middle-class vandal.

If the kid runs over somebody's lawn, make sure he's the one down on his hands and knees laying the sod which he paid for from the nursery.

And after it's all done, tell him you love him. And smile when you say it.



Eccentricities

—by HENRY M. HOGAN, JR.—

Yule shopping in the catalogs

I really thought I'd have my Christmas shopping done by now. First the Neiman-Marcus catalog arrived, and I was all set.

I was particularly impressed by the His and Her gift for 1979 which the store describes as follows:

"Here's a gift that will have them floating on air — our colorful hot-air dirigibles to take them up and away from the maddening crowd to transcend traffic and slip away from stress — riding the wind into the sunset.

The passenger compartment is just right for two people (and a well-stocked picnic hamper). . .

"The airships are completely collapsible and portable, so you can pack them off to launch anywhere from Peoria to Pago-Pago. . ."

They were priced at a reasonable $50,000 each.

UNFORTUNATELY, THE Sakowitz (of Houston, Tex.) catalog arrived the next day, and they were promoting health.

For a mere $1.65 million, "Sakowitz and WZMH Habib Architects will design and build the ultimate home health center for you. You provide the 'back yard' and we'll provide his and her locker rooms; whirlpool; sauna and steam rooms; indoor track and gymnasium; universal exercise room; first aid room, and a health food lounge and bar."

For the less affluent, they offer: "One delicious red apple, air freighted in the continental U.S. and hand delivered to you each and every day of the year — and don't forget 1980 is a leap year!" The price: $20,000.

STILL ON THE health kick, Sakowitz captures the hearts of all thinking persons with the coup of the year. They describe it as follows:

"For more physical fitness in your own backyard, we have created a refreshing solution: A Texas-shaped swimming pool filled with Perrier, the natural refreshment, naturally sparkling from the center of the earth.

"The pool, designed by Cynthia Moon, is 734 square feet with a perimeter of 136 feet and a depth from 3 to 8½ feet and a 30,687 gallon capacity. The National Swimming Pool Institute will secure the builder of the pool, and upon completion, we will deliver the equivalent amount of Perrier to fill your pool. *A votre sante!* $127,174.32 for entire package, FOB Houston."

They probably didn't shape it like the state of Michigan because they would have to pay bottle deposits on all those little bottles of water.

Well, I've got to make up my mind soon or it won't be delivered in time for Christmas. That's the trouble with catalogs.

Al's scrip saved Detroit

When the public prints carried the news the other morning that Wayne County was broke and that employees might have to be paid in scrip, many folks shuddered in fear.

Just the thought of being paid in paper that was not negotiable at the bank caused many of The Stroller's co-workers to comment, "Wouldn't that be awful - getting so-called money you couldn't spend."

Well, being a survivor of the days of the great depression in the early '30s, The Stroller recalls that it was the use of this "paper" money that paved the way for one of the most interesting chapters in the history of Detroit and, indirectly, brought about our present freeway system and the urban sprawl.

IN THE DARKEST hour of the depression, The Detroit Free Press, where The Stroller toiled, announced three 10 percent pay cuts in a week. The following week, we got the news that we would be paid — half in cash and half in scrip that the company hoped would be negotiable some time in the future.

Things were in turmoil. There arose a question of how the city could handle its finances and what the future really held for the working man.

Finally, it was decided to set up a special group to handle the city's scrip and little Albert Cobo, who was the financial wizard of the Burroughs Co. on Second Avenue, was drafted for the job.

So well did he handle it that when the depression drew to a close, he was assigned a desk in the city treasurer's office and later took over as treasurer.

the stroller

W.W. Edgar

And by this time he had come to be recognized as a leader and later in 1949 had no trouble being elected mayor.

LITTLE AL, as he was affectionately known, didn't wait long to swing in to action. One of his first moves was to appoint what he called the Detroit Tomorrow Committee and gave it the job of designing a new convention hall and the entire civic center.

As the story unfolded, when he took over the mayor's chair he found plans for an expressway through the city toward the north.

"Are these plans any good?" he asked. When told that they were, he countered, " Then why don't we use them?" Told that there were no funds, he pointed out to the state Legislature that the expressway could be built and financed with revenue bonds, And he specifically pointed out that the city's share of the tax and weight money could be used as revenue to back up the bonds.

Little Al won his point. And before long the expressway, now known as the Lodge freeway, was built and ran from downtown to Eight Mile Road and later up through Southfield.

AND IT WASN'T long until the Detroit Tomorrow Committee approved plans for the convention hall that now bears Cobo's name. It is because Detroit now has that spacious hall that the city is now one of the leading convention centers in the country and will host the Republican national convention next summer.

The convention hall and arena were the pride and joy of the little Mayor.

When they were finished and the freeway opened, he was told that they would be magnets to draw people down town. The Stroller recalls having said to him one day, " It will now be much easier for people to get down town."

Cobo smiled and answered "and it will be just as easy for them to get out of the city."

Tim Richard

Super-inflation in housing

Last week there was a demonstration against oil company profits because oil prices have led the inflationary spiral.

But right behind oil, month after month, has been housing. Nationally, while the consumer price index has been rising from 7.7 to 13 percent, the price of new single-family houses has jumped 17.2 percent, according to government statistics I gleaned from Time Magazine.

The effect of new housing inflation doesn't stop there because it sucks the price of existing housing upward with it. Unlike factories and machinery, which depreciate in value with age, existing housing prices continue to rise.

A COMPANY CAN absorb increases in the prices of materials and labor provided its productivity (output per work-hour) is increasing. But that is no longer happening in the U.S. — quite the reverse.

From 1947-77, real output per work-hour expanded at an annual rate of 3.5 percent a year. But in the 1967-77 period, productivity increases slipped to 1.6 percent, dropping 0.3 percent in 1978. Productivity actually decreased 3.3 percent in the first half of 1979.

Now get this quote:

"This slowdown has not occurred in every part of the economy. The mining and construction industries — particularly sensitive to regulatory requirements — have been especially hard hit. Mining productivity is down 23 percent; construction 19 percent. . . .

"By contrast, between 1971 and 1976 the hosiery industry achieved annual productivity gains of 11 percent — largely resulting from advanced technology." (Italics mine).

This indictment comes not from a Nader, a Fonda or a Hayden but from the National Association of Manufacturers, the bluebloods of free enterprise.

WHY ARE PRICES increasing and productivity declining in construction generally and housing particularly?

The NAM blames government regulations. Builders tell me the same thing — building codes, more inspections, delays. A house that used to go up in three months or so now takes nine months.

Builders also blame material costs. Their association announced last year that many builders are even writing contracts allowing them to pass on material cost increases between the time of signing and the time of completion.

That's only the supply side of the housing question.

ON THE DEMAND side are the inflation psychology and the availability of money.

Otto Eckstein, nationally known economist and former member of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, has calculated that 12 to 14 percent — at least — of U.S. housing purchases are made not because people need houses but because they speculate that they can sell them at high profits, Time says. In a report on the spending rush on tangibles (Oct. 15), Time adds:

"The real risk of the tangibles scramble is the impact that it has on the economy as a whole. By encouraging an attitude of buy now before the price goes up, panicky consumers are making further and even steeper price increases virtually inevitable."

It's standard procedure to blame federal deficits for pumping money into the economy, in effect fueling the fires of inflation with gasoline. And certainly the federal government needs to get its fiscal house in order.

But there are growing comments that the American people, business, sellers and workers must share in the blame. A New York banker was quoted recently as observing a "near collapse of restraint in most elements in society." Others talk of the selfishness of the "Me Generation."

These terms describe demand in our economy generally. But they don't get to the heart of housing demand in particular.

But now we are drifting into the area of money supply. And that's a topic for another day.

A Division of Suburban Communications Corporation

Philip H. Power, Chairman of the Board

Richard D. Aginian, 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