

OBSERVATION POINT

DISSENT

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Our Downtown: A Rockwell Dream

By Philip H. Power

Plymouth. A moonlight night. I'm walking through Kellogg Park, the heart of downtown Plymouth. The pale light glints off the newly-planted sycamores. The fountain gurgles in the background. Kids sit on the benches under the trees. A crowd comes out of the late show at the movie theater with a burst of laughter.

It is a scene right out of those paintings Norman Rockwell used to do for the Saturday Evening Post. Small town America, the kind we all keep in our mind as some sort of ideal.

Around the park, the stores of a downtown. Specialty stores, banks, small department and clothing shops.

The people in Plymouth know a lot of people are going to shop at the big shopping centers. But they think that the small town nature and the intimacy and convenience of a downtown area will continue to serve as an economic and social focus which will keep the city growing and developing.

City leaders keep saying, "The downtown and the park are our greatest advantage."

LIVONIA

Thirty-six square miles of city, incorporated wholly out of a township. More than 100,000 people, and the regional planning people estimate 193,000 by the year 1985 -- if the money market loosens up enough so that people can build houses.

It's hard to walk through downtown Livonia, mainly because there isn't one -- yet.

If there is a downtown now, it's at the intersection of Farmington and Five Mile Roads. The city hall and police station are nearby, and the headquarters for the school system. A small shopping center is on Five Mile east of Farmington. The rest is gas stations and hamburger places and small restaurants.

You certainly don't get any Norman Rockwell feeling from Livonia's downtown.

Sure, there is talk of developing one. They put in center islands with plantings on Farmington Road, and people keep talking about a high-rise city hall and municipal set of offices which would act as a focal point to pull people into a downtown.

But the fact remains that if one of the key things about a downtown is to act as a social center where people meet their friends and neighbors, creating a downtown in Livonia will be tough.

People already go to the two large shopping centers to shop and to see their friends. And no one thinking about Livonia's downtown has fully answered questions about what shopping facilities would draw people into the downtown in competition with the shopping centers.

If you listen to the downtown advocates, though, Livonia needs one, if only to give the city a heart.

FARMINGTON has a down-

town. It's centered at the intersection of Farmington Road and Grand River. It has a park, a city hall, and a wonderful 19th century Masonic Temple. It has some specialty stores and a downtown shopping center complete with a major department store, a movie theater and an ice cream parlor.

It isn't as concentrated as Plymouth's, but the existence of the shopping center nearby makes it perhaps healthier economically.

People in Farmington don't talk all that much about their downtown, although it's clear they think it is important.

Recently, Farmington City Councilman John Allen spearheaded a campaign against incorporating all four local government units in the Farmington area into one city. His major talking point to residents of the city was that consolidation into a larger town would spoil the small city they loved.

He was referring to the Norman Rockwell dream again. The pre-consolidation forces disagreed with him, trying to prove that in the long run his small-city posture would hurt the community, but they lost the vote in the city. Dreams defeated facts, in the minds of many.

DOWNTOWNS are clearly potent in the thinking of people here in the suburbs. They are impor-

tant in communities which have them, and they are equally important in cities without them.

They represent, I am sure, the kind of dream with which so many of us grew up. The small, quiet streets. The park and the trees. A sense of peace, security and order. A quality of community and a feeling of knowing your

neighbors.

The problem is that this dream may be just that. Only a dream.

For the communities in this area are not small cities. They are growing with explosive pace. They are now or will soon be large cities. People are moving in and out at such a rate that it's now rare to find people who have

lived in the same community for more than a decade.

And it's just the pace and nature of suburban life that makes the dream represented by the Norman Rockwell painting of the small town downtown so important and attractive.

The real problem is to bring together dreams and facts. That's hard, but worthwhile trying.



Tim Richard writes

Augenstein Death Creates Big Vacancy

When Robert Kennedy's life ended, there was George McGovern to carry on his movement, and when Robert Taft died, there was Everett Dirksen to maintain the institution of the Senate.

But I can spot no one who can take up the work of Dr. Leroy Augenstein, whose work was cut short in a plane crash south of Charlotte last weekend.

Sure, Gov. Milliken will appoint another face to the State Board of Education, the Republican Party will come up with a candidate for the U.S. Senate next year, and the new black president at Michigan State will get someone else to head the biophysics department ... but no one seems to be thinking the way Leroy Augenstein was thinking.

It was said: The Detroit News obituary missed the key idea of the man's career, and Channel 7 ran a minor thought of his on dope.

EVEN HIS OWN mother didn't understand what he was driving at. I saw her on an educational TV program with Leroy when they were talking about medicine's ability to keep more babies alive and people's reluctance to come to grips with the

problem of how to avoid breeding retarded human vegetables.

Mom Augenstein kept saying, "It's God's will," and Leroy, with a hopelessly retarded brother sitting a few feet away, kept trying unsuccessfully to tell her that man now had God's power.

Indeed, one of his favorite questions was: "Shall we live God?" The answer, of course, wasn't whether we could play God but how well we would use the ability we already have to make God's decisions.

Many of you, in your PTA groups and political gatherings and at my house, heard him ask these questions.

Suppose there were one possible heart donor but five possible recipients. One possible recipient will live, the other four will die. How do you decide which?

Suppose you have a brilliant criminal and the power to brainwash his evil tendencies and implant a whole new set of values in his mind. Too soon, that's going to be a practical question. How do you decide which values to put into this mind? And who decides? Who should be on that committee?

Suppose you can comprehend what will happen to the world's population if it keeps exploding at the current rate. What will you do about birth control? How will you handle the inevitable plea for an abortion?

SEN. PHILIP HART worries every six years about the consumer issue that can get him elected. Sen. Robert Griffin worries about legal skulduggery on the Supreme Court.

Leroy Augenstein worried about a whole different set of

problems -- 21st century problems, questions about the quantity and quality of human beings. A Lansing newsman sniffed that Augenstein was a "theoretical feller," but the questions he raised weren't theoretical.

You must play God, he insisted. If you turn your back on the problem, then you were endorsing retardation, overpopulation, the sickening increase in abortion and misery.

He was a scholar, but he didn't arrogantly try to storm the political system in just a few months, in the style of the McCarthyites. He was learning the political game and learning it well when he died.

I can't imagine a replacement offhand.

There are those who tell me his death may have been God's will. If so, God made a mistake.

R.T. Thompson writes

Try And Keep Up With Livonia Council

Recent activities of Livonia's City Council leave one in a quandary. Take the decision, approved by the councilmen, on a Monday to shift meetings to Wednesdays.

The announced reason for the change was to give more electors an opportunity to sit in on the sessions and have a chance to let the city fathers know exactly how they felt on some of the issues.

It wasn't so long ago that the council did meet on Wednesdays, and there were interested residents in the audience.

THEN THE COUNCILMEN decided to shift back to Mondays -- a night when the Livonia Board of Education meets in direct competition.

This meant that when important matters were scheduled to come up before the school board and the council, residents had to make a choice. There wasn't any way for them to get to both meetings.

This situation existed for several years and resulted in very little attendance at either meeting.

But the school board became a focal point of considerable attention last spring, and the meetings were jammed. At the same time, the councilmen were practically holding executive sessions, judging from the few persons in the audience.

With half-day sessions, sex education, a hot election for posts on the board, parents and others with more than a mite of interest in the agenda, the weekly Board of Education meetings were wild and woolly affairs.

It took all of the thunder from the councilmen -- and who wants to be a member of the body that can't agree on anything, even a motion to adjourn, if there isn't an audience to see if the performance?

PERHAPS THE CITY fathers decided it was time to take a bit of heat off the school board and get a little more attention themselves. Whatever the reason, a councilman made a motion to change the meetings from Monday to Wednesday.

It passed by a split vote. Once again the school board was to have Monday to itself for the

weekly meetings and the council could meet without competition on Wednesdays.

It was a fine gesture with the exception it didn't last that long. The council met on the following Wednesday, and lo and behold, one of the first items on the agenda was a resolution to consider changing the meetings back to Monday.

One would think that any august body of such wisdom as a city council would ponder quite a while before making a reverse switch in a matter of a few days.

But then one has to remember that the Livonia council is something else. It has been split on just about every issue since rural Livonia Township became a city.

There was a decided split this time but it was only 4-3 and the majority wanted to meet on Wednesdays and now they are.

So once again, a council has refused to reckon with the wishes of the electors. Perhaps there will be a time when Livonia will name a council that can agree -- the one that calls signals for the city at this moment can't.

Mom Finds Boys Aren't That Bad

By MRS. MARY DAVIO
Plymouth

This is being written in defense of the young people living in Lake Pointe Village, Plymouth Township. There has been so much written lately in the area publications and Observer regarding the "punks" and "hoodlums" living here that I feel I must inject my opinion.

I am a divorced working mother and have lived in Lake Pointe for the past six years. During this six-year period, I have never felt that my life or my property was endangered in any way. Having three boys of my own, there is always a group of youngsters around my home.

Through my own children, I have come to know many of the "young adults" of the neighborhood. I feel that the phrase young adults is much more fitting for the teenagers whom I know than the terms punk and hoodlum.

Upon arriving home from work at night there is always a group of boys either in my yard or inside of the house. On many occasions I have needed help with such things as having groceries carried in or furniture moved. These kids are always ready to pitch in with a helping hand.

I have yet to drive down the street without a cheerful "hello" from the kids in the neighborhood. In general, they are well-bred, polite, nice kids who respect adults and have every right to be shown respect from these same adults.

To be told by the author of the article appearing in the Lake Pointe Lingo that I "should watch out my windows for unfamiliar children who might look suspicious and to call the Sheriff's Department" is an insult to my intelligence and shows a definite lack of respect for every single young person in the area.

I have yet to see a gang standing on the street corners of this subdivision and have only heard of two or three destructive incidents during the time in which I have lived here. It seems a tremendous injustice to categorize all of our teenagers because of a handful of troublemaker ones.

I believe that articles like the one appearing in the Lake Pointe Lingo could do much to lower property values here and could cause panic selling in our community. If this happens, possibly we will know what it is like to really have hoodlums living in our community. Is this what the author of this article is hoping to accomplish or is he just an unhappy individual who would have a problem getting along with people regardless where he might live?

With regard to the rate of speed with which cars go down our streets, take notice, one and all -- the greatest percentage of the cars exceeding the speed limit are driven by adults who are in a big hurry to get where they are going without giving ample thought to the speed at which they are traveling.

As a last comment, I would like to commend the Sheriff's Department for the prompt and courteous manner with which they handle our problems. The attack upon them is completely unwarranted.

P.S. When the time comes that I feel it is really necessary to form a neighborhood militia, I may as well take my family and move back to the inner city.

Sense And Nonsense

With fanfare unprecedented in the history of the Michigan Supreme Court, Chief Justice Thomas E. Brennan last Friday called a press conference, complete with television cameras, to announce a court decision affecting half-days in the Livonia School District.

Just about everyone was called, it seems, except the community paper that serves Livonia.

We'll remember that, Tom, when you run for the Senate.

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