

# Rebuilding Jackson is a waste of our tax dollars

The last time I saw my friend, he was worn out and emaciated. As a youth he had been outgoing, always smiling, eager to pull a practical joke.

But this day he looked disillusioned and frightened. Everyday living had become a grim experience for him. His only interest seemed to be chain smoking and telling of his recent experience.

"It makes you hard — real hard. You just wouldn't believe the crap that goes on up there," he said, his eyes blankly staring at the ground.

My friend had just been released from Jackson State Prison after having served time for armed robbery. He pulled the job to support his drug habit.

It felt strange talking with this person who, just a few years earlier, had been a high school buddy. We had sat next to one another in classes, gone to the same dances, dated the same girls.

He didn't seem like a criminal then. And although he looked older and very haggard, he didn't seem like a convicted felon as I stood talking to him that day.



"You've got to play along with the rest of the prisoners or you don't get along. But once you catch on it isn't bad at all," he continued.

"DOPE WAS EASY to get, easier to get than on the street, sometimes. I got along real good," he said.

That was 13 or 14 years ago. I never saw my friend again. Never really found out what happened to him.

But I'll always remember the way he looked and acted. I remember thinking what a waste his life had been turned into. His stay at Jackson certainly hadn't improved his chances.

At that time, Jackson prison was just a place you read about in the newspaper. I had never known, up until that time, someone who had served time there.

Places like Jackson prison shouldn't exist. They are a waste of taxpayers' money in more ways than one. But for some inexplicable reason, many taxpayers would rather throw good money after bad when it comes to prisons.

Rebuilding Jackson with millions of dollars is like throwing money down a rat hole. We spend these millions and still are tethered with the same problems.

Better we spend our tax dollars on more, new and smaller prisons where better-trained guards have a fair chance at doing their jobs.

We need more prisons so criminals who should be retained for longer times won't be released because of overcrowding.

WE NEED new prisons where persons like my high school friend at least have a chance to survive without the social pressures from hardened criminals interfering.

Many want new prisons, but they don't want them in their communities. They would rather gamble that crime won't touch their lives. Every day the odds lean more against that gamble.

We must lift our heads out of the sand and see to it that this problem is addressed responsibly.

Otherwise we will be throwing more millions of tax dollars to the winds.



Tim Richard

## High quality at a smaller university

The first school closings in any K-12 district are a major trauma, sometimes followed by political bloodletting. After a few closings, however, the process, at least in civilized districts, is still painful but no longer traumatic.

The closing process has worked its way through elementary schools, junior highs and even into high schools. It has now reached the university level.

Moreover, it has reached the universities at a time when the Michigan economy is in a depression, when the outlook for an entire decade is dismal.

No institution is exempt, not even the University of Michigan, the supposed cultural center of the universe. An entire issue of the Michigan Alumni magazine was recently devoted to the trauma.

CENTER OF attention is the phase-out of the department of geography in the College of Literature, Science and the Arts. Geography has nine tenured faculty and five non-tenured faculty. They teach 800 students a year, including 38 seeking graduate degrees and 22 with undergraduate majors in geography.

Department Chairman John I. Nystuen and faculty members feel almost insulted. They raised charges that the university administration lacked good data in deciding to eliminate the department, that their degrees are under attack and that students will be left feeling they have worthless degrees.

In a news release prior to last Friday's Board of Regents meeting, Bill E. Frye, vice president for academic affairs, said, "The scholarly quality of the department . . . has slipped seriously . . . The productivity of the department is weak in terms of scholarly research and publications . . . The department has not established itself as having a strong central or essential role in the college . . ."

EVEN LARGER questions are at stake, however. One is research vs. teaching. U-M President Harold Shapiro, a brilliant economist in his own right, said that the public may put research "a distant second" in its thinking.

"However, if you take a look at the university historically . . . I think you will find that this knowledge-creation component is extremely important and perhaps equally as important as the training function," he said.

A second question is whether \$11.1 million in cuts in a \$150 million budget should mean across-the-board parings instead of dropping some programs. As one geography student put it, "Amputation is a poor treatment for obesity."

Shapiro's answer: "In order to maintain quality, the U-M will have to concentrate on doing less and doing it better." Some parings and shavings will take place, but some entire departments or programs will face the ax in the 1980s.

A third question is whether different Michigan colleges should divvy up academic programs to avoid duplication.

Won't work, Shapiro said. "You cannot, for example, have a program in psychology without having chemistry or biology," he said. "You cannot have engineering without physics; you probably cannot have philosophy without history."

NO ONE should demean the geography department any more than one should demean the parents of the kids in the first elementary school to be closed in the early 1970s. Their charges of "unfairness" or "poor data" or "a stacked deck" are made under great stress.

But it's tough to argue with President Shapiro's logic. Maintain quality while reducing enrollment from 35,000 to 30,000; maintain research as well as teaching.

This decade is going to be rough, and we had better get used to it.



## Why gold-silver bill takes back seat

This started out to be a column deploring the inaction of the Michigan Legislature in approving a proposal to curb gold and silver thefts.

In the past two years, the rates of these thefts have skyrocketed as prices of gold and silver quickly escalated. Fly-by-night operators have set up shop in suburban motel rooms and asked no questions as they purchased gold and silver. An easy accessibility of willing buyers has made it attractive for thieves to sell their merchandise.

Suburban homes have been easy targets for both professional thieves and local youngsters anxious to cash in on high gold and silver prices. For example, last year the value of silver and gold thefts was \$2.9 million in Southfield, \$224,754 in Birmingham and \$333,574 in Troy. Police agencies report gold and silver theft rates are even higher this year.

OBVIOUSLY, Michigan needs stiffer laws for the reselling of gold and silver.

After much publicity, legislation was introduced in Lansing in January. It was widely supported by police departments and homeowner groups.

The proposal sailed through the state House with little difficulty, drawing only five dissenting votes.

It was then sent to the state Senate, where it has



Nick Sharkey

linguished. Finally, last week there were reports that it may be in trouble.

As I read those reports, I was disturbed. It reminded me of attempts at a national level to register hand guns. After every attempted assassination of a national figure, a great cry goes out for improving gun laws. But nothing ever happens. Everyone seems to favor the idea, but powerful lobbies (in the gun case, the National Rifle Association) thwart any new legislation.

I WAS ANGRY when I called the gold and silver bill's author, State Rep. Ruth McNamee, R-Birmingham, to find out what went wrong.

To paraphrase Mark Twain, McNamee said reports of the bill's death had been greatly exaggerated. In fact, she hopes the bill will be approved by

the Senate this week and sent to the governor.

"It's been very slow moving through the Legislature because there's been other items taking the attention," McNamee said last week. She said the Legislature has been working on state economic problems and the Detroit income-tax package. Her gold and silver bill has taken a back seat.

"Many lawmakers are waiting to see how the Detroit election goes on Tuesday," she said last week. "Hopefully, once that's over, my bill will be approved."

If the proposed law is passed, it will require dealers to be licensed in the area in which they operate. A thumbprint must be made of any person selling gold or silver. Items must be held by the dealer for seven days after purchase before they can be resold or melted. Minors cannot deal in gold or silver.

"The whole process will build a trail of evidence for tracking down stolen goods," McNamee said.

Although she is optimistic about the bill's chances, McNamee keeps her fingers crossed. "I'm at the mercy of the (state) senators now," she sighed.

Suburban homeowners anxious about protecting their valuable during summer vacation months will have to wait, too. If this proposal is not acted upon soon, it may be a long summer in the suburbs.

## A fellow can live nicely without baseball

As the major league baseball strike drove on, we suddenly have become a nation divided.

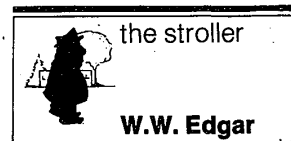
There are those who go about their daily tasks as if nothing happened and the game that once was called the national pastime is the furthest from their minds.

On the other hand, there are fellows like two of The Stroller's friends who don't hesitate to say, with some degree of alarm, that life won't be the same without the activity at Tiger Stadium and the opportunity to follow their favorite players through the columns of the daily press.

One of the dyed-in-the-wool fan whom The Stroller has known for years is Ralph Voorheis, who had the misfortune to lose one of his legs and now depends on the daily sports pages to follow the game.

"LIFE SURELY won't be the same for me," he moaned the other afternoon. "I virtually devour the sports pages and follow every figure detailing their performances. Now what can I do? The days in my wheelchair sure will be long without my chance to keep track of my favorite ball players."

It was the same with Bernie, the major-domo of the Famous Men's Wear Shop. He confessed at lunch that the only thing he reads daily in the pa-



pers is the sports page; and now, without baseball, the paper will mean nothing to him.

Well, The Stroller can't help feeling sorry for these fellows, but at the same time he can't help smiling at their so-called losses.

There was a time when he was a member of the press covering the Tigers, and the day came when he asked to be relieved because he had tired of them. And now he doesn't miss them too much, as witness the fact that he sees only a few games each season.

But other things have happened which were as terrible at the time as his friends' being denied baseball.

THERE WAS the night in the doctor's office

when The Stroller was told he had better give up smoking. At the time, he puffed away about two packs a day, and the first two fingers on his right hand were stained a deep yellow.

In those days, he felt he couldn't give up smoking. But would you believe it? He tossed his package of cigarettes at the doctor and hasn't had a puff since. And that was close to 30 years ago.

And the odd part of it is that to this day, he hasn't missed the habit of years ago.

When he confessed that he didn't know her, mother said, "That's funny. That's the girl you once thought you couldn't live without."

So you see, we can learn to live without things. The Stroller's two friends will find this out as the baseball strike lingers on.

THIS IS A reminder, too, of an odd moment in The Stroller's life. He had gone home to the Dutch country for a visit and went downtown on a shopping tour with his mother.

As we walked along, mother asked if he recognized the woman in front of us. She was a rather tall woman who was built along the same slender lines of a C&O box car.