

# Stalking the wild peccadillo in Farmington

A peccadillo, as many observers of political animals know, is a minor fault, a failing.

This odd word came up at the last Farmington City Council meeting during a pointed diatribe directed at this newspaper's reporting on the lack of public discussion, public deliberation and public vote in appointing Bayard Tupper to the unpaid term of his son Richard, who resigned last May.

Quoting a Newsweek magazine article on the post-Watergate mentality of many reporters, Councilman William Hartsok read a passage which stated: "Even when nothing substantial enough for legal action is unearthed, extensive press treatment of minor peccadillos can cloud an official's record."

In this particular case, maybe the more appropriate word would be armadillo, not peccadillo. Council members could use a thicker skin when somebody has the audacity to challenge the way they conduct public policy.

It's interesting that the loudest squawks coming

from the Farmington City Council in the continuing controversy over its secret selection of a councilman came from Hartsok.

Hartsok says this newspaper is unfairly accusing him and his colleagues of wrongdoing — figuring such exploitation of issues sells newspapers.

IT'S INTERESTING because less than seven years ago Hartsok, in his second term of office, criticized what he called the "club mentality" that prevailed on the City Council.

He was talking about the old system used in appointing a councilman as mayor each year.

"The decision of who should be on the council transpires for a couple of years ahead of time," Hartsok said at the time. "It's discussed who would fit in on the council. I think this perpetuates the idea of a club. I just can't buy these things (appointments) that are predetermined."

Mayor appointments are now done on a rotating basis, with persons who haven't been mayor previously getting priority based on the number of votes they received.

While that process has changed, the club mentality concerning other appointments hasn't. The only difference is that Hartsok is now a member in good standing of the club.

Unwilling to divulge whom they were backing for appointment, club members — make that "council members" — figured they would conduct a secret vote in public and thereby stay within the confines of the state Open Meetings Law.

Trouble is, Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley has said such secret balloting violates the state's anti-secrecy, sunshine-law reforms.

City Attorney Robert Kelly isn't sure if the opinion pertains to the city vote but plans to advise council members to announce their votes on the ap-

pointment publicly "to avoid any question."

That's a nice way of phrasing it. Bluntly, the council now realizes it made a mistake and needs to do its work over.

EVEN THE SECRET ballot vote — with two ties before someone changed his vote — was a concession. Last year, the last time the council appointed someone to fill a vacancy, only one name was brought forward at the public meeting even though a number of names were considered in private. All the public got to see was another 4-0 vote to confirm William Mitchell as the appointed elected official.

The Farmington City Council likes its meetings neat and untruffled. That's the way it has been doing things for decades — years before the middlesome anti-secrecy reforms were enacted. Now they have to obey the law. Join the club.

— Craig Piechura



Tim Richard

## Women gain a 2nd seat on SEMTA

EVEN AS WOMEN politicians lamented the defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, the active ones were winning a big victory. A woman last week was elected to the board of directors of the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA).

JoAnn (Jody) Soronen, Farmington Hills council member, is only the second woman on the 15-member board. (The other is Nansi Rowe, an appointee of Detroit Mayor Coleman Young.)

The Soronen election was personally gratifying. For some months, I have been advocating that public transportation be considered a "women's issue." Something like 65 percent of SEMTA's riders are female. In touch with kids, older folks and others with transportation problems, women tend to have a better grasp of how important public transportation is.

THE POLITICS of how Jody Soronen won that SEMTA seat are a trifle complicated, but comprehensible.

The mayor of Detroit appoints that city's five members. Macomb, Oakland and Wayne counties' boards of commissioners appoint most suburban members, with one hitch.

In Oakland, some SEMTA appointments are started with nomination by a caucus of representatives of cities, villages and townships. The caucus's three nominees are looked over by the General Assembly of the Southeast Michigan Council of Governments. In the instant case, the caucus nominated Waterford Township Supervisor James Seeterlin, a less-than-serious township candidate, and Soronen.

Both Soronen and Seeterlin have records of involvement in SEMCOG committees — she on the Council on Regional Development and he on the Area-wide Water Quality Board. There was nothing personal. There were no particular issues, such as the "subway." Rather, it boiled down to a male-female and township-city kind of issue.

Perhaps the SEMCOG delegates are more sensitive to women's concerns than the county boards are. Perhaps SEMCOG members were feeling guilty that no women are among the top officers. No matter. The SEMCOG General Assembly picked Soronen, 53-11.

A FEMALE SUPPORTER remarked that Jody Soronen "does her homework." Among women and studious men, that's the supreme compliment.

That's one reason I like to see women active in governmental boards. They tend to read all the agenda material, they ask good questions, they make up their minds on the basis of facts, and they play much less back-scratching good-ol'-boy politics.

Public transportation would be well served if there were six women on the 15-member SEMTA board, and I suggest that as a serious goal for them. Why not half or even two-thirds?

My feminist friends have a saying: "A woman has to work twice as hard to get half as far." The result is that women do work nearly twice as hard.

On a board like SEMTA, where background reading is important, a typical woman who does her homework can be approximately 1.7 times as effective as a man. I can't produce statistics to prove such an assertion. It's a judgment call, based on 22 years of covering local government in four counties.

And so if we can place six women on the SEMTA board and multiply that by 1.7 times as much work, we come up with 10.2 women vs. nine men. Women would then have an effective, producing majority.

Two in. Four to go.



## In '82, 'Nobody stands for nothing'

WHO ARE YOU going to vote for as governor?

If trophies were given for most commonly asked question, the aforementioned would win in a walk.

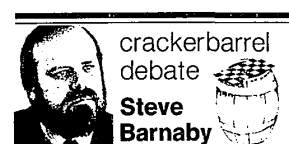
Those asking do so in hopes of gleaming a morsel of sense in this year's gubernatorial sweepstakes. But most persons answering have little to offer.

And it's no wonder. After more than a decade of having one of the most popular state chief executives, voters are at a loss. It's like when you were a kid. After countless summers of buying ice cream from the same guy, he up and quits. You were left with making a choice from the ice cream men you just knew sold an inferior product.

And like the ice cream men, you just know that this gaggle of gubernatorial jokers is peddling an inferior product.

As a friend of mine used to say, "Nobody stands for nothing." And although that may be an exaggeration, it's close enough for concerned voters to take note.

Even the usually feisty Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson is having a hard time standing out from the crowd. The perennial candidate traditionally has stirred up the electoral pot with a diatribe or two on capital punishment, man-



Steve Barnaby

crackerbarrel debate

datory sentencing or dirty movies. You might not have agreed with him, but he stood for something.

APPARENTLY, BAD ECONOMIC times brings out the dull in all of us.

The other day, a Patterson-for-governor press release floated across my desk extolling the virtues of candidates releasing their personal income tax statements to the public.

As you may have guessed, Patterson has done just that, from 1978 through 1981, and is challenging his opponents to do the same. Big deal.

The release pompously tells us, "Patterson remains the lone Republican gubernatorial candidate to make public his tax statements."

What drama, what suspense, what total nonsense. Here we sit in a state with the highest unemployment rate since the Depression, and these guys want to argue over whether it is nobler for the candidate to release his personal income tax statements.

Now c'mon, you guys. This isn't a public television auction to see who can outbid whom. This is a political campaign that could very well determine who will run the state for the next decade.

Voters want to know how the gubernatorial candidates plan to get us out of this mess.

Frankly, I don't care if Brooks Patterson made \$50,000 or 50 cents last year. I want to know what he proposes to do to get this state working again.

NOTHING PARTISAN intended here from the Crackerbarrel. The Democrats are acting just as silly.

They're having grand luck in avoiding the issues by arguing over whether it's more honorable to get a union endorsement or if such endorsements make a candidate a lackey for labor.

The "lackey" in this case is James Blanchard, who is best known for being unknown and trying hard to stay that way until he wins the primary.

It's really quite disgraceful. We really should demand more from our candidates, you know.

## What glory for adults in a kid's game?

DRIVE BY ANY suburban park at night and you can see them. They all are dressed in uniforms and look like they're running in a field.

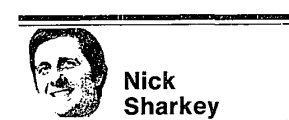
I'm talking about softball players. They're taking part in a recreational activity that dominates this area for three or four months every year.

Softball players come in all ages and sexes. There are leagues for women, men, youths, over-35-year-olds and over-50s. Most leagues are organized by city or township recreation departments. Some are sponsored by churches.

In some cases, softball has become a business for the entrepreneur. Rochester's Suburban Softball Inc. and Softball City at the State Fairgrounds in Detroit are businesses aimed at earning a profit for their owners.

THIS IS THE peak of softball season in the suburbs. Softball teams in Oakland County cities are pointing toward their championship playoffs, which will start in a few weeks. The top two teams in Livonia, Redford, Garden City, Westland, Plymouth and Canton will compete in the Massey Tournament on Aug. 12-15.

Playing softball does not merely mean picking up a glove and bat and going to a game once a week. It requires staying in reasonable shape during the winter months. During the season, it means practi-



Nick Sharkey

es, team meetings and exercising between games. The glory is minimal. The only spectators at the games are girlfriends/boyfriends or family members of players. No one except the players know who is the best hitter on the team. A small line in this newspaper every week may record which team is leading the league. But that's it.

Or as a friend of mine bluntly asks, "Why do a bunch of out-of-shape men run around trying to play a kid's game?"

THE ANSWERS are as many as the players. I can only answer for one.

Playing softball motivates me to stay in shape. That means jogging and light weight-lifting during the season. It makes me keep my weight down during the winter.

It's also a reminder of the simpler joys of youth. Years ago, a summer day for me consisted of sev-

eral baseball games and a refreshing run through someone's yard sprinkler. Sometimes when I'm out on the softball field, I can remember those days very well.

Softball is sharing fun with a group on a regular basis. Friendships develop on the field that may last a lifetime.

Finally, softball is a time to forget about the cares of the normal day. It's a chance to run in the open air (although a little slower every year) and feel good about the world.

WHEN SOMEONE asks me about softball, I'm reminded of an incident a few years ago in a retirement community in Florida. Some energetic residents approached recreation leaders about starting a softball league. They wanted an over-65 league.

There was much consternation about the dangers of folks over 65 engaging in such a vigorous activity. Finally, a league was started.

One day it happened. A man of 90 years hit a single. He ran to first, called time out and walked over to the first base coach. He put his arms around the coach's neck and died.

His teammates mourned him, but they did not worry. As one of them said, "If you have to die, that's the way to go. He died while having fun playing softball."

That's the spirit that makes softball thrive.