Farmington Observer
Successor to the Farmington Enterprise

a division of
Suburban Communications Corp.

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Farmington, MI 48024
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City rams it to Hills restaurateur

The Farmington City Council's decision to enforce a 1 a.m. curfew on the new Ram's Horn restaurant is shortsighted, unwise and demonstrates an incredible streak of ungratefulness on the city leaders' part.

Gus Kapsapis, a respected restaurant owner, did this city a big favor by taking over the burned-out hulk which used to be the Glass Onion on Grand River.

For more than a year, the building has stood vacant, a scar on the city's business climate. Kasapis, owner of 18 other restaurants, buys it, fixes it up and provides a badly needed restaurant for the downtown Farmington area.

He requests just one thing — to stay open 24 hours a day. Every other of his establishments does so. Kasapis has gained a reputation for knowing how to run all-night establishments with a very minimum of trouble or inconvenience to neighbors.

But the stodgy city fathers have given him a kick in the teeth by denying his simple request.

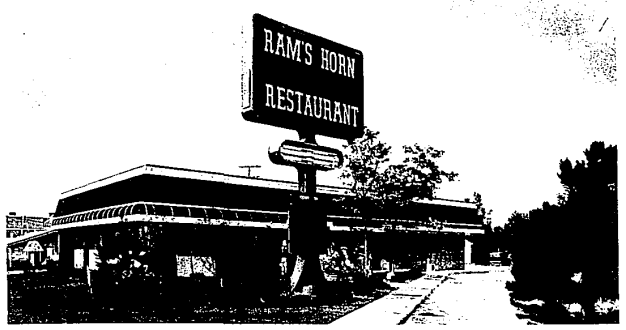
Certainly, Kasapis isn't opening the restaurant for strictly altruistic reasons. He wants to make a buck. But businessmen as successful as Kasapis don't need Farmington as much as Farmington needs businessmen like him.

The council has done a disservice to its residents. The word on such unbending conduct toward business surely will spread.

KASAPIS WAS GRACIOUS enough to stick with Farmington, to remodel the restaurant and open it and do business in a town where the city leaders gave him a less-than-open-armed welcome.

But other business persons who hear the Kasapis story may chose to locate their businesses elsewhere. And that would be a loss to the taxpayers of Farmington.

STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor



Tim Richard

Blanchard, Headlee shut wrong door

BOTH MAJOR gubernatorial candidates get a rap on the knuckles today for their stands on openness in government. Jim Blanchard doesn't grasp the issue. Dick Headlee grasps it but is plain wrong.

Hiring a president, superintendent or city manager is the most important single thing a college board, school board or city council does. Doing a performance evaluation annually ranks as one of the other most important tasks.

Michigan's Open Meetings Act requires that both types of meetings be conducted before the public. Unfortunately, the school board types and other believers in official paternalism sold the State Senate a bad bill of goods this year. The Senate passed a bill allowing performance evaluations to be handled in secret.

Blanchard and Headlee were asked before the Oakland chambers of commerce whether they would sign or veto such a measure.

BLANCHARD CALLED it "a step in the right direction."

The Democratic congressman said, "Most all personnel matters, especially on performance which could help encourage productivity, ought to be closed."

Blanchard confused charges against an employee with standard personnel matters. State law has long made personnel matters public business.

Now "charges" can be handled in closed sessions if the employee requests a closed session. But a performance evaluation isn't a charge, like taking money or sexually harassing a secretary. A properly conducted performance evaluation addresses the questions: What were the top official's goals? How well did he/she come to achieving those goals? And what goals should be set for the coming year?

After his brief and bungled answer, Blanchard used his time to ramble off about number of state jobs added by the Romney Administration, which was totally irrelevant.

HEADLEE FOLLOWED. "I still don't know whether he'd sign it or veto it. I'd sign it," the Republican nominee said. "He didn't tell us where he stood on day care or flextime either."

Headlee's willingness to conduct secret performance evaluations is troubling because he has advocated more openness in government in two other areas where I doubt it's needed.

As governor, Headlee would open his budget meetings to the public. I doubt whether opening such an administrative procedure would help. When the Michigan Legislature gets the chief executive's budget proposal, one column shows the "agency request," and the next shows the governor's recommendation.

HEADLEE ALSO advocates opening up school district collective bargaining.

Just who on earth besides the negotiatoing teams would sit through them all is uncertain. Then you have to recognize that there are five sets of meetings: 1) the plenary sessions of both teams, 2) the management caucus, 3) the union caucus, 4) the tete-a-tetes of the two chief bargainers and 5) the union ratification meeting.

Numbers 3-5 involve unions, which aren't public bodies under the Open Meetings Act. State government has no business telling unions to open their meetings.

As for the plenary sessions of the labor and management bargaining teams — well, I've been i them. The union chief negotiator put on a show fo the union committee members. The company law yer puts on a show for the management committee members. If the public were invited in, the grandstanding would have been intolerable, and it would have taken four times as long to negotiate a contract.

FOOTNOTE: Two years ago, the Legislature passed bills allowing secret meetings to interview top job candidates and to evaluate them. Gov. William G. Milliken vetoed both, rather emphatically. It looks as if our next governor won't begin to measure up to Bill Milliken.

Bigotry shows ugly face on Main Street

crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

Sorry, folks, I've got some disappointing news for you. Bigotry still is part of the American landscape.

Until a few weeks back, I'll have to admit, I was lulled into a false sense of security that bigots were joining dinosaurs on the list of the extinct.

But the laws of bigotry seem to be as sure a thing as the earth revolving around the sun — put a hood over some people's heads and the revelations can be frightening.

We all remember the Ku Klux Klan. From time to time, the white supremist gang of thugs experiences a resurgence in popularity — especially during strained economic times.

Us pompous Northerners like to point to the South when talking of the Klan mentality. We can fool ourselves even more that way.

In recent years, the black civil rights movement has taken a back seat on our agenda of social perogatives. Other issues have become more pressing.

Sometimes it's even easy to fool ourselves into believing that such prejudice really doesn't exist anymore. We look around the metropolitan area and see blacks and white shopping, worshipping and living in the same neighborhoods.

Rarely do we see television news reports of the lone black family home being burnt by irate white neighbors.

THINGS ARE GETTING better, we tell ourselves.

But take a closer look. Ask yourself, ask your neighbor. That fear of the unknown, the different, is creeping in to our mentality and our everyday conversation.

Recently, the Farmington edition of the Observer & Eccentric launched a new feature which would allow readers to call in anonymously and respond to a question we published in the newspaper.

For our first question, we queried readers about the biggest eyesore in town. While the majority of answers dealt with the expected vacant buildings, unkempt yards and neglected storefronts, a few responses revealed another side of suburban America.

Listen to these responses.

"I've got to believe it's all the colored people driving around Farmington and stuff, a lot of break-ins and stuff. I'm not saying it's them, but colored people, certainly a lot, don't live here."

Try this one on for size.

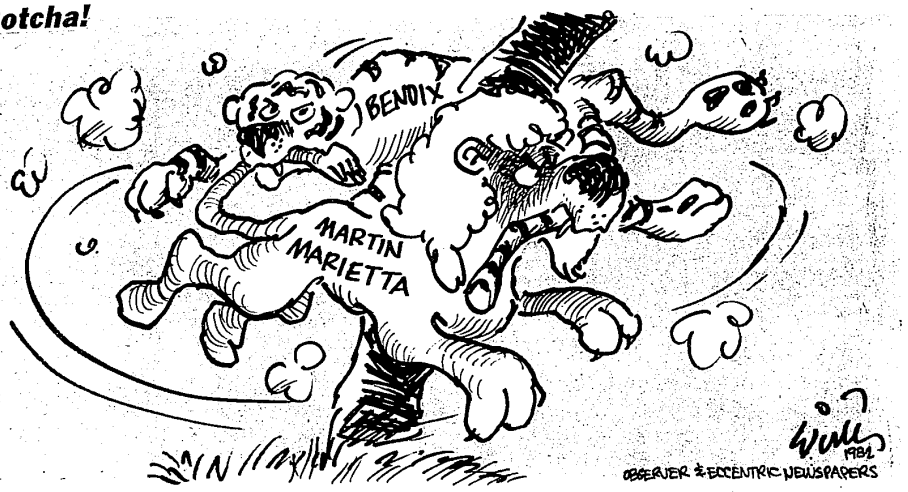
"TJ Maxx is a black man's store in a white man's community. A white man can't even go into the store without being stared down by the black people."

I should explain that TJ Maxx is a reputable clothing chain in the area which is frequented by persons of all races. But for some reason, the area bigots have targeted it. One caller even suggested it be closed.

BIGOTRY frightens me.

It's harmful for all of us no matter its target whether it be against black, Jew or Palestinian. And it's time for us who believe in a higher standard to speak out rather than just keeping quiet when our neighbors or friends start spreading their venom.

Gotcha!



Make drunk driving a crime, not joke

DRINKING IS A national joke. Comedian Foster Brooks made a career out of doing an imitation of a drunken man. Drunk jokes are as popular as ethnic jokes.

Johnny Carson has his audience rolling in the aisles as he describes his antics after an arrest earlier this year on a drunk driving charge. He is scheduled to go on trial this week.

Not laughing, however, are the families of victims killed in accidents involving drunk drivers. Oakland County has an active branch of the national group MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving). Wayne County Assistant Prosecutor Marty Krohner of Farmington Hills is the president.

Many words can be used to describe driving while drinking, but "humorous" is not one. Consider that during the past two years, more Americans have died because of drunk driving than were killed in the Vietnam War. Drunk driving accounts for 26,300 deaths every year, or half of all auto fatalities. More die because of accidents caused by drunks than die in any other type of accident including falls, drownings, fires and poisons.

Safety experts state that 50 percent of us will be victimized by drunk drivers sometime during our lifetimes. Also, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), up to 10 percent of all drivers on weekend nights are legally intoxicated.

A LAUGHING matter? Hardly. This week, the Michigan legislature is considering three bills that would significantly strengthen drunk driving laws.

The bills were introduced by Sen. Steve Monsma, D-Grand Rapids. They passed the state Senate on June 2 and are now being considered by the House Judiciary Committee.

Nick Sharkey

Some of the provisions call for:

- Suspending a driver's license for six months for a first conviction of drunk driving. A second conviction would mean loss of driving rights for one year and a 10-day jail sentence. A third conviction is a felony punishable by one to five years in prison.
- Permitting on-site preliminary breath tests so a police officer can determine if there is "reasonable cause" to arrest a drive.
- Making a 0.10 blood alcohol content reading automatic proof of guilt of the crime of "operating under the influence of alcohol." Under current law, the 0.10 percent reading is only evidence, and it may be rebutted.

MICHIGAN IS NOT a pioneer in enacting tougher drunk driving laws. Already, 27 state legislatures have passed such laws. Results have been impressive.

Under the new law in Maryland, highway fatalities are down 20 percent. Maine has had a 47 percent reduction in alcohol-related deaths.

Oregon began its crackdown in 1971. Since then, the fatality rate has declined 35 percent although the state has 46 percent more drivers and 62 percent more vehicles on the road.

Impressive statistics don't matter if a crackdown on drunk driving doesn't result.

New drunk driving laws always have their difficulties in being passed. In Michigan, the proposals have been criticized by the State Bar of Michigan and the Michigan District Judges Association as being "too costly" and "too much of a burden to the court system."

ASK ANYONE in one of the 26,300 families affected last year by a drunk driving death. Judges, juries, prosecutors and legislators — mostly social drinkers themselves — identify with the drunken driver. Unfortunately, the victims and their families tend to be forgotten. Drunk driving has been called "America's socially accepted form of murder."

It is now time to act to make the drunk driving laws stronger. If these bills do not get out of committee this week, they may never become part of Michigan law.

Communicate today with your legislator in the state House of Representatives.

Drinking and driving should not be a joke. It should be a crime.