

Opinion

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Kids take action

DESPITE ITS upbeat tempo, the high school graduation season always has had an ominous undertone — alcohol-related driving deaths.

Every year we read about teen-agers killed, either the victims of someone else's overindulgence or of their own drunkenness. Many of us have known the victims, sometimes intimately.

"What a waste," we mumble to ourselves. But soon the season ends, our lives go on, and we forget. Well, we forget until the next season and another slaughter jars our collective conscience.

But something fascinating is happening this year — something different. Students, parents and teachers, disgusted with past deaths and fearful of what the future holds, are taking action.

Throughout the area, high schools are joining in a drive to help students make it through graduation alive by sponsoring all-night parties. A media blitz has been launched by television and radio stations to stress the importance of finding alternative ways to celebrate this memorable occasion. Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD) members also are pushing for alternatives.

BUT THE MOST EXCITING part of this new-found concern is the overwhelming enthusiasm shown by the students. Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD) is becoming a more high-profile group on campuses.

As we all know, peer pressure, the bane of adolescent existence, for once is having a salutary impact. Groups are organizing. Students are talking to one another about actually staying sober during graduation or, at least, staying out of the driver's seat. And they are talking about this concern with their parents. That's right, their parents.

Under a program called "Project Graduation," students and parents are signing contracts stipulating that if the students get drunk, parents will give them a ride home with no questions asked.

Now you've got to admit, that's certainly a new twist in parent-teen relationships.



Steve Barnaby

Teen-agers also are agreeing to help one another out by establishing escort groups which will give overindulgent peers a ride home. Teens also are agreeing among themselves that at least one person will stay sober so driving home won't become a wholesale tragedy.

To promote safe driving on graduation night, WDIV-TV (Channel 4) is airing an honor roll of schools where more than 50 percent of students have signed a contract.

TO GET A SAMPLING of what this is all about, you'll want to turn to WTVS-TV (Channel 56) this week. Last evening you might have seen "Both Sides Now" where a panel of students discussed drunk driving.

But if you missed that, there is more. On Friday, at 7:30 p.m. and 1 a.m., "Friday Night Special" will tell three stories about teen-agers and drunk driving. "Detroit Week in Review" at 9 p.m. on Friday will host high school journalists who will discuss drunk driving.

Finally, at 11 p.m. the rock video program "The Beat" will spotlight a song written and performed by Detroit-area high school students especially for "Project Graduation." Students from five high schools composed, arranged and performed songs. The song selected was Roy-ol Oak Dondero's "Hell of a Price to Pay."

Sure, students will die this graduation season, the victims of drunkenness. But with the growing effort by a lot of different groups and individuals, a lot of folks' teen-agers are going to live to adulthood.

Private charities can't take up slack

THOSE WHO espouse conservative government spending frequently contend that the government should cut back on aid programs, that private resources can best be used to help those in need.

Yet it is more and more evident that private resources are not enough, that it is up to the collective will of the people, in the form of government, to ensure that something is done to alleviate the conditions under which a good percentage of the population suffers.

A new case in point is the Salvation Army's 300-bed Harbor Light Center in downtown Detroit. The national organization has said that either its \$600,000 deficit incurred by operating the center has to be eliminated, or the center will be closed.

Even with a state contribution of \$12 per day, the center has been going deeper in the hole. There are presently some efforts in the state Legislature to increase the state's contribution to the center to \$17 per day.

DURING THE last year the center served 4,805 people. What will happen to the hundreds of unfortunate who found shelter and sanctuary at the Harbor Light? The center was for many a means of staying alive, at least for a time, often until some form of rehabilitative help was available.

Are we to allow them to go out on their own to seek refuge and understanding in a world where the refugees are strained and dwindling?

We are at the same time approaching a point in our society where the poor, the unskilled and the disadvantaged have fewer and fewer opportunities.

According to a University of Michigan study completed by a former deputy assistant secretary of U.S. Department of Health, Education and Welfare, more and more Americans are slipping into poverty.

Nancy Amidel, adjunct professor of social work, said: "The numbers are sobering: 35 million people — nearly 40 percent of them children — live below poverty while another 12 million have incomes just above the poverty threshold."

According to Amidel, who is also former director of the U.S. Senate Select



Bob Wisler

Committee on Nutrition and Human Needs, "It is just that the poor are increasing and that more of the poor are women. Since 1978, the government's own statistics show that the percentage of full-time workers who are poor has gone up by one-third."

CALCULATED in inflation-adjusted dollars, Amidel said, roughly one-third of the nation's poor families needed less than \$1,000 to escape poverty in 1978. Today that's true for only 15 percent of the poor families. The majority would need more than \$3,000 to get over the poverty line.

This is understandable if you consider that there are now more minimum-wage jobs in the fast-food industry than in manufacturing.

Amidel suggests that while economic indicators are looking better than they have in months, many social indicators are looking worse than they have in years.

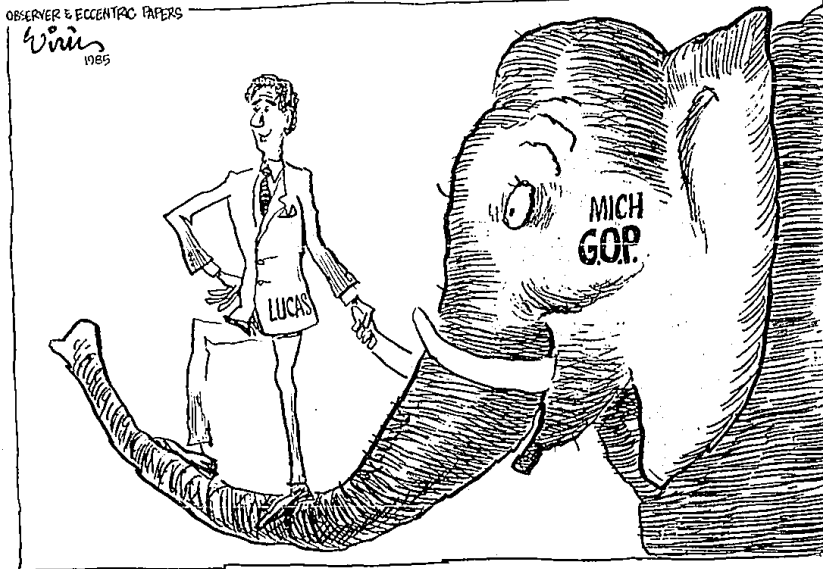
"In the face of mounting evidence that poverty and its consequences are growing, the president and Congress have cut back on help, without taking any steps to assure that other sources of help — local, private, voluntary — had been put in place first."

Amidel says the best solution to the problem is not handouts but adequate wages from paying jobs. But for people who work but earn too little, or who aren't employable, "we must be prepared to help with the basics: food, housing, medical care."

The study bears out what many contend: Cutting government loose from social welfare programs and hoping that private programs will take up the slack is so much wishful thinking.

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Race won't hurt Lucas

"THE LESS written about Bill Lucas' race, the better. It will be a minimal factor, at most, if and when the Wayne County executive decides to run for governor.

If the Democrat-turned-Republican is defeated in the attempt, it won't be because he's black.

The interminable discussion of his possible candidacy reminds one of the 1960 presidential campaign when there was endless speculation on how Protestants would take to a Catholic named John F. Kennedy.

It made little difference because another Catholic named Alfred E. Smith had drawn the fury in 1928. The bubble of anti-Catholicism had been pricked by the time JFK rolled onto the scene. Protestant Americans no longer believed Catholics were horned devils.

DETROIT WENT through the throes of speculation about black politicians until William T. Patrick Jr. broke the ice by being elected to the city council back in the '60s.

The ice was melted by Richard Austin who became the first black nominee for mayor in 1989. He paved the way for Coleman Young's victory in 1973.

Statewide, Otis Smith calmly chilled the racial issue by being elected to the Michigan Supreme Court in the '60s. Austin's race caused barely a ripple when he was elected secretary of state in 1970. It was raised briefly when Austin sought the U.S. Senate nomination in 1976, but the truth is



Tim Richard

that he was a dull candidate compared to Don Riegler.

The novelty of a black running for statewide office in Michigan has pretty much evaporated.

No black person has been governor of a state since post-Civil War Reconstruction days. If Lucas makes it, surely it will be news. But a critical factor to white voters? Not in Michigan.

LUCAS IS warmly accepted by whites. One reason is his speech — articulate, with a West Indian accent, not the hyped-up southern rhetoric of the Rev. Jesse Jackson. Indeed, if you should happen to catch a Lucas speech, ask yourself afterwards: What did he say?

Lucas uses a lot of words but says nothing of substance, certainly nothing threatening to whites. He simply can't be compared to Coleman Young, who still seethes with hatred about his Detroit high school days when kids from Grosse Pointe were bused in.

Another reason is that as sheriff, Lucas took care of his white constituents in the townships of western Wayne County. Un-

like Oakland County, which made townships pay for the sheriff's road patrol, Lucas insisted on a free ride for the Wayne County townships. Many Wayne County rednecks forgot they were rednecks with that kind of free ride.

He was a hero in Plymouth's holiday parades. If he can be a hero there, Kalamazoo and Escanaba will have few qualms.

In 1982, Lucas won the Democratic nomination for Wayne County executive against several far better candidates with records of advocacy of county reform. He cut very deeply into the white vote. The black vote was 95 percent in his favor.

THAT BRINGS us to the real significance of the racial factor. The white backlash will be insignificant, but will blacks cross over to vote for a black Republican?

I honestly can't answer that one. Certainly, Young helped Republican Gov. William G. Milliken's 1978 campaign by holding back on criticism of the governor and by not busting his tail for the Democratic nominee.

There is no question that blacks will give 95 percent support to black non-partisan and Democratic candidates. But Republican Lucas doesn't need monolithic black support to be elected governor — just 12, 15 or 20 percent, like Milliken.

These speculations on race overlook one thing: Michiganders may not vote for or against Bill Lucas. They may just decide to vote for Jim Blanchard.

Parents need to tax own time



Marilyn Fitchett

education experts only telling half the story? I wonder what the reaction would be if parents were told that their time and not their money is what is needed for their children to make the most of their education.

We're willing to pay for better teachers, better classes and better facilities, but are we willing to give what it takes to be better parents?

WE SEEM to have the attitude that after we've plunked down our tax dollars, we've met our end of the deal, and we're content to let the professionals take over.

Once we get past nursery rhymes, we stop reading to our kids. Maybe we stop reading for ourselves too, so our kids never see an adult who finds pleasure in

propping open a novel or a biography. And after our kids get too old for library story times, we stop taking them or even encouraging them to go on their own.

Rather than discuss their homework, we're content to believe that it can be done in a half-hour in front of the television. After we help with the mandatory science fair project, we kiss that off for another year and hope our kids go back to watching "Dukes of Hazzard" reruns instead of urging them toward "Nova" on public television.

We sign them up for Little League, but overlook enrichment classes the community college offers for kids.

AND PARTIALLY because we feel guilty about our lack of contribution to our child's development and worry about their making the grade, we buy them a home computer and then let them play video games on it.

We love our children, and when we want to show them how much we love them, we open our wallets. But the stakes are too high, the repercussions permanent.

A better education begins at home.