

Library, schools dominate news

LIBRARIES AND classrooms were big in the news this week, the first a cause for celebration, the second giving pause for contemplation.

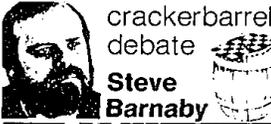
On the book side of the ledger, the community sighed a breath of relief and gratitude as the Farmington Community Library Board officially appointed longtime employee Beverly Papai as the library's director.

Great move, no doubt about it.

WITH THE RECENT financial audit into library operations and the accompanying resignation of former director Gordon Lewis, the library was taking an awful battering in public relations. Some folks were wondering if it was wise to donate funds to the library.

Library systems, as you may have guessed, are hardly the biggest receivers when it comes to dividing up the municipal tax pie. Cops and cleaning streets come first, you know.

Popular public support and the accompanying financial donations are essential to a healthy system. Libraries depend on contributions to buy those extra items which make a library special. And throughout the years, Farmington and Farmington Hills have built an exceptional community library system.



crackerbarrel debate
Steve Barnaby

Because of its reputation for excellence, the library draws persons from several surrounding communities.

Now, with the crisis at an end and with a new director in place, the community can feel confident that the tradition will continue. The library board, responsible for having the wisdom for hiring Papai, should be commended.

ON THE SCHOOL front, residents recently learned that for the first time in 24 years, the school population dipped below the 10,000 mark.

The question, of course, is how small is too small when it comes to economic and educational efficiency? It is a question which property taxpayers should at least contemplate.

It's true that districts can be too large. But few districts in Michigan, with the exception of Detroit, have that problem. The Farmington School District never again will see the nearly 17,000 school enrollment it experienced in 1971-72.

Little reason exists for Farmington to remain a district unto itself, especially when considering that next door, the Clarenceville district sits with a school population of a mere 2,000.

Combined, the districts would still be below the 12,000 or 13,000 mark. Combined, the salaries of an entire army of central administrative office workers could be eliminated. School superintendents and their accompanying cadres never come cheap.

The possibility exists of even closing down another building or two between the two districts. If you haven't noticed, some of our school buildings aren't exactly teeming with students.

Such suggestions always cause a little discomfort among the school group. But considering that the districts are contiguous, that educational options and opportunities could actually improve and that money could be saved, consolidation is a matter to give serious contemplation.

discover Michigan

The year 1837 was a big year in Michigan history. It was the year Michigan was admitted to the union as the United States' 26th state.

In that year, the Rev. John D. Pierce became the state's first superintendent of public instruction and Douglas Houghton was appointed the state's first geologist.

The first state prison was also established at Jackson, Michigan, and today it is the country's largest walled prison.

On the brighter side, laws were also passed establishing the University of Michigan and locating it in Ann Arbor.

It no doubt would have made a large difference to the development of the two cities if the prison had been located in Ann Arbor and the school of higher education in Jackson.

Courts don't belong in religious arena

SEPARATION of church and state is mandated by the U.S. Constitution. But a look at recent headlines might lead you to take another look at the First Amendment.

Our courts increasingly are being called upon to settle questions from the religious arena. And the most recent have nothing to do with abortion, capital punishment, school prayer or the teaching of evolution — the mainstays of previous court battles on religious/moral grounds.

Consider the following:
• A woman won a \$50-million fraud judgment against the Church of Scientology on the grounds that church teachings said Scientology could improve her weak eyesight and increase her IQ.

• Oakland County Circuit Judge John N. O'Brien dismissed a lawsuit aimed at preventing the closing of a Catholic Royal Oak high school by the Archdiocese of Detroit.

• The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in a Grand Rapids case that public school teachers may not teach in religiously affiliated schools. And in a New York City case, it ruled against the use of federal money for public school teachers to teach remedial reading in parochial schools.

HOW DO WE SEPARATE religion from state concerns when religion is so tightly interwoven in the lives of some and when matters of faith can't be judged in a traditional legal system?

Is it the responsibility of government to subject religion to the same standards as business? Should we set up a consumer protection agency to guard followers against the preachings of their chosen faith? Should the state jump in as a re-



Marilyn Fitchett

ferree as soon as a church member perceives injustice? Should public dollars be shared with private causes?

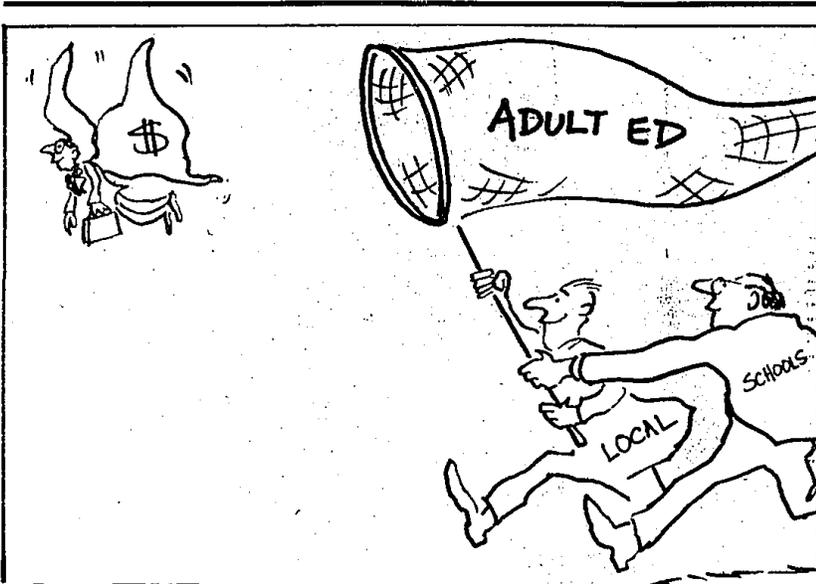
The Scientology ruling seems to say the courts should make such decisions. The Royal Oak, Grand Rapids and New York rulings seem to say no.

THE FILING of these court cases indicates a desire to have your cake and eat it too.

Services were sought from a religion — services that either are not provided by government or provided with a decidedly different emphasis.

In the Scientology case, when a woman's idea of what her religion provided differed from the religion's hierarchy, she sought restitution from the courts. In the Royal Oak case, plaintiffs wanted the court to uphold what they perceived as their right to keep a parochial school open. In the Grand Rapids and New York suits, complainants said they wanted a piece of public education's pie even though they in effect had rejected public education.

If separation of church and state is to remain a hallmark of our system of government, the courts need to reject suits that ask to mix public dollars for private causes or ask for public bodies to guarantee the morality of private religion.



Adult ed aid funds skewed

BUSINESSES ARE expected to make profits. But when the business is your local school district and the product is adult education, should the same principle apply?

That question is posed in a report by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan, a private, non-profit organization funded largely by business.

"The Financing of Adult Education in Michigan," released in May, explains the profit motive in educating adults with less than a 12th-grade education. In some cases, that motive was so strong that it led to abuses in the system of state aid.

RESEARCH FOR the report was done by Robert McKerr, who previously served 18 years as state associate superintendent for legislation and finance.

Ironically, McKerr as a state employee and the council's executive director had knowledge of reported abuses in the Wayne-Westland school district. That case prompted the council to review the "overall issue" of aid to districts that educate adults, McKerr said.

This report isn't about abuses. It shows that what's faulty in state aid for adult education is the system itself.

That makes it required reading for legislators, for educators in cheated districts and for taxpayers.

THE SYSTEM'S formula favors districts with low property values and high



Sandra Armbruster

enrollment. The more students enrolled, the more state aid to in-formula districts.

In years past, inflation and cuts in state aid ordered by Gov. William Milliken squeezed the general cost of kindergarten through 12th grade education. Some in-formula districts compensated by developing marketing strategies to boost their enrollments and, consequently, state aid.

The numbers are significant. In the 1983-84 school year, adult students accounted for 24.52 percent of enrollment in the Redford Union school district, according to the report. That district operates an adult ed program for the two Redford districts and Livonia, which gets no state aid.

Percentages of adults in Wayne-Westland and Garden City districts were 11.41 and 13.71, respectively. In at least one district, adult students accounted for 30 percent of enrollment.

IN DISTRICTS WHERE the illiteracy rate is low — such as Troy, Farmington Hills, Southfield and Livonia — one wouldn't expect them to operate such programs.

But the report found 75 percent of adult students concentrated in 59 districts which accounted for only 32 percent of all aid-eligible memberships.

That's important because state aid may not be going to districts where the greatest need is. Despite Redford's high percentage of adult students, it nearly matches the need in that area, unlike Grand Rapids with 9 percent of the adult students and 2 percent of statewide illiteracy.

The result is that the principle of equalizing resources has become skewed.

LEGISLATORS NEED to set priorities in distributing aid to educate adults.

The 1980 census showed that families headed by adults with less than a high school education have a high rate of poverty, especially if the head of the household is a woman.

Since state figures show that twice as many women graduate from those programs, the question has to be asked: Who is most likely to benefit — a) a senior citizen finally able to go back to school, b) a person in a nursing home or mental health facility or c) a woman with a family to raise?

It's too late to expect changes in the 1985-86 school aid package, but legislators and their constituents have a full year to decide whether they want some districts to profit from serving adults.

Manipulating the market

MICHIGAN'S attempt to tinker with the auto insurance market will go down in the economic history books as another classic failure at political manipulation of the free market.

In 1981, the Legislature passed a law requiring every motorist to have insurance — the so-called "Essential Insurance Act."

Someone figured out that many Detroiters with high theft and damage losses, couldn't afford essential insurance.

So instead of letting insurance companies use actual losses to set premium rates, government decreed that there could be no more than a 10 percent differential between one rating zone and the next. Thus, if the rate in the central zone of Detroit were \$1,000, the rate in the next zone would have to be \$900, then \$800, etc.

There was another political proviso: The lowest rate charged by an insurer could be no lower than 45 percent of the highest rate — or \$450 in our example.

THERE WERE three interesting effects. First, suburban motorists got socked because their rates were tied to Detroit's.

According to Sen. Doug Cruce, R-Troy, Detroiters pay \$40 million in premiums



Tim Richard

and collect \$80 million a year in benefits. Suburban customers pay the \$40 million difference.

Second, the Michigan insurance market was broken into two separate markets — the metropolitan area and outstate — because of the 45 percent rule.

Insurers with realistic rates in Detroit couldn't afford to charge 45 percent of that rate in the hinterlands. The auto theft rate in Traverse City, for example, is only 2.3 percent of the theft rate in Detroit.

Companies had to make decisions about which market they would deal in. Four companies became dominant in each market. Thus, political manipulation of insurance rates reduced competition between companies.

THE THIRD effect of the Essential Insurance Act is a little more difficult to pin down. It appears the insurers are trying to reduce their losses by avoiding the Detroit market.

Sen. William Faust, D-Westland, quotes state administrative officials as estimating that up to 40 percent of Detroit drivers aren't insured — even with the heavy subsidies paid to them by suburbanites.

Detroit lobbyist William Ryan, former House speaker known for thinking up ways to subsidize Detroit, declared a "subtle form of redlining" is in effect. Rep. Matthew McNeely, chairman of the House Insurance Committee, tells his Detroit constituents with complaints to travel to the suburbs to seek out an insurance agent.

CALL IT "redlining" or any deplorable term you want — the fact is that insurers are acting logically in avoiding markets where losses are high (Detroit) and concentrating on markets where losses are lower (suburbs).

We should have learned the lesson from ancient Rome's failed price control. We should have learned the lesson from the 1776 revolt against the mercantilist policies of King George III.

People won't be forced by law to engage in lines of work that cause them to lose money.

The Michigan Legislature has amended the act. Gov. Blanchard should sign it.