

Opinion

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Farmington: A tale of 2 cities

LIFE IS FULL of surprises. One happened to me last week. I walked into work as Redford Observer editor, and left that evening for a stint as editor of the Farmington Observer.

I'm excited. First things first — proximity. In practical terms, my West Bloomfield home is 12 — count them, 12 — minutes from the Farmington Observer office. I can almost go home for lunch! However, most likely those runs to home will be to cart my youngest to the orthodontist — at least until she gets her driver's license come December.

Familiarity. I know a little about the area. It's certainly where I — like many others — do some of my shopping, eating and recreating. Loehmann's, Tally Hall, Fitness and the Orchard Lake Baskin-Robbins are certainly part of my experience. And no doubt the two city halls, school administration building, library, and police and fire headquarters will soon be part of my life as well.



Judith Doner Berne

Impression. I was always impressed by my sister-in-law's house. It was an traditional center hall older home with a contemporary addition at the back. So she had paneling and fireplaces to make it cozy and lots of glass to make it bright and exciting.

That's how I think of reporting on this area. There's the warmth and tradition of Farmington coupled with the excitement of change and expansion in the Hills.

People. Well, I've talked to both Farmington school Superintendent Lewis Schulman and Farmington City Manager Robert Deadman — though they may not remember — in doing stories when I was a reporter on the West Bloomfield Eccentric.

discover Michigan

THE NEW Tahquamenon Logging Museum in the upper peninsula town of Newberry will stage the third annual Woodcraft Fair and Lumberjack Festival Aug. 24-25. The logging museum is on M-123 a half-mile north of Newberry, once a center of the lumber industry in the eastern UP. The fair is operated by the Hiawatha Nature and History Association.

The annual Ypsilanti Historic Home Tour will be from noon to 5 p.m. on Sunday, Aug. 25. Cost is \$4 general admission, \$3 for senior citizens and \$2 for children under 12. For information, contact the Ypsilanti Heritage Foundation at 485-2155.

And, in that capacity, I also have interviewed school board trustee Janice Rolnick. I have a long way to go, but I'm looking forward to meeting the people who make this community work, whether they are in government, education, civic groups, sports — or just doing their own thing.

Since I'm about to discover you, let me give you my background: native Detroit, married, three children, B.A. in English from University of Michigan, 12 years with the Observer & Eccentric, worked on daily and community newspapers in New York City, New Jersey and Texas. Hello.

U.S. highway board defangs energy rule

IF YOU can find a better energy policy, adopt it.

But since Lee Iacocca knows Washington isn't going to tackle the energy issue, the Chrysler chairman is campaigning for Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole to keep the teeth in one of the few energy policies this country follows.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration last month cut 1986 mileage standards from 27.5 mpg to 26 after Ford and General Motors complained they could not meet those goals without curtailing the sales of their profitable large cars.

Dole could reverse NHTSA's change.

CHRYSLER, UNDER Iacocca, downsized its products and folded its large-car line. Among the Big Three, it stands alone as being able to meet the original 1986 Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards.

Ford and GM have continued to produce large cars that are again popular with the public now that the price of gasoline has stabilized. Without reduced CAFE standards, Ford and GM face huge financial penalties.

Chrysler sees itself as being penalized for building cars achieving mileage ratings it believed the government would demand. Ford and GM say that because they offer a full line of cars and trucks, they can experience more dramatic shifts in their CAFE ratings from year to year.

THE AUTO COMPANIES are notorious for building cars achieving mileage ratings it believed the government would demand.

They won't admit it, but they probably can thank CAFE standards for forcing them to face up to the Japanese challenge even as belatedly as they did. GM now boasts that it has more than doubled its fleet average from 1974 when its cars averaged 12 mpg.

Japan, by the way, set 31 mpg as the standard for its manufacturers last year. But the U.S., with 6 percent of the world's



Marilyn Fitchett

population gobbling up 33 percent of the world's energy, doesn't see the need for sticking fast to fuel economy regulations, even though transportation accounts for about 40 percent of our energy usage.

Energy conservation has become a quaint idea, something that went out of fashion as soon as the OPEC nations resumed flooding our markets with crude. Car pooling, gas lines and dialing down are reminders of the bad old days, so we dismiss the fact that non-renewable energy sources are being tapped dry.

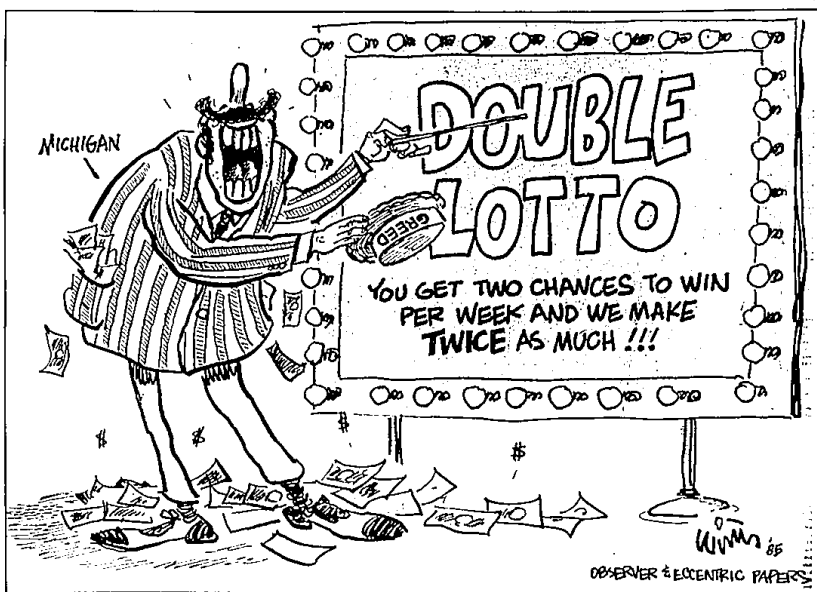
And we look the other way when the United States is mentioned as becoming a major debtor nation, thanks, in large part, to the oil we import.

WHEN A HARVARD panel was asked a few years ago to evaluate energy conservation, the panel concluded that conservation was important for two reasons: We not only reduce our energy consumption, but we save on our balance of payments.

If the powers that be in Washington stay cool to the idea of saving energy, maybe they can warm to getting our import-export ratio back in kilter. Then Iacocca can target the treasury secretary in his cause to get lower CAFE standards.

It would be the right decision even if for the wrong reason.

The Senate killed a resolution opposing NHTSA's plan to reduce mileage standards from 27.5 to 26 mpg. See Roll Call Report in today's edition.



Jackpot state strikes again

THE BOOKSTORE that I used to go to has a lottery ticket sales cash register next to its regular register. The store features a wide variety of books, magazines and newspapers.

On Saturdays I liked to browse through the store selecting carefully. But no matter where I went, I could hear the annoying sound throughout the store — chuka, chuka, chuka, chook; chuka, chuka, chuka, chook.

It was the lottery register constantly spewing out its tickets. People who wanted to hit it big milled around the register with pieces of paper, pencils and sometimes booklets in hand.

ON SATURDAYS, the final day of the weekly lottery, the purchasers have a desperate quality. They act like bettors at race track windows just before the bell goes off — intense, agitated, almost perspiring despite the air conditioning.

The lottery ticket buyers never look at books or magazines. The book buyers never go near the lottery ticket register. It is as if they are from two different worlds.

What in God's name are these people doing in a bookstore? Bookstores should be for people who like books. Lottery tickets should be sold somewhere else.

I have similar feelings about governments being involved in selling lottery tickets. Government should provide ser-



Bob Wisler

vices to the public, not lottery tickets or gambling casinos.

THE NEWS that the state Lottery Department will begin holding two Lotto drawings a week, instead of one, did nothing to relieve my disquiet.

True, the bookstores and drug stores which sell tickets won't be as jammed on Saturdays because there won't be the same last-minute surge (the state lottery commissioner says). But we will be treated to the spectacle of drawing the Big Lotto winner twice a week and seeing the obligatory television and news stories about "instant millionaires" twice a week instead of once.

The move to twice-weekly drawings seems to be little more than an attempt to capitalize on the interest state residents have displayed in Lotto, which has set national sales records since it started one year ago.

The move also plunges the state deeper into operating on one hand like a huckster

promoting pipe dreams while on the other hand preaching prudent spending and fiscal responsibility.

THE STATE, like a carny barker trying to entice the suckers in for some more penny-ante game, emphasizes the payoffs. Lottery officials talk little about the actual odds or how less than half the bets actually go into the winnings pool. In fact, the odds of winning the big fat payoff are astronomical. Betting money on such a payoff — no matter how small the wager — isn't betting, Chickie Sherman would say, it's giving your money away.

Still the myth goes on, with the media aiding and abetting it.

THE DANGER is that as the state learns to rely on gambling as a source of income, it will turn increasingly to gambling, rather than prudent management, to bail itself out of trouble.

Even now gambling promoters are circling around Detroit waiting for the election to get over so that they can push for establishment of gambling casinos on Belle Isle.

To turn a beautiful park into a mecca for those who deal in blood promises and broken dreams is an affront to the idea of recreation and a natural setting as a civilizing and restful influence on the populace.

Meijer: fine eye for detail



Tim Richard

TO EVERY rule there's an exception. "Thrifty Years" by Hendrik G. Meijer is an exception to two rules: 1) Be wary of an "authorized" biography, and 2) a book about one ethnic group — in this case, the Dutch — won't be interesting to other groups.

Hendrik G. Meijer is better known around these parts as Hank Meijer. His subject is his grandfather, Hendrik Meijer (1883-1964), founder of the string of supermarkets and discount stores that spread from western Michigan to Canton and now Northville Township.

Hank was an excellent and promising reporter for the old Observer Newspapers in the early 1970s when, regrettably, he joined a nondescript counter-culture paper for a spell. Last time I chatted with him, he was working on an advanced degree in history.

His book combines historical scholarship and the illuminating anecdotes of the newsmen.

THE FIRST Hendrik Meijer was born in the Netherlands, worked in a cotton mill, served his time as a draftee in the Dutch army, got set for the United States at the age of 23, and bounced around the country in odd jobs.

Before you conjure up the image of a western Michigan Dutchman — puritanical Calvinist, arch-conservative Republi-

can — be apprised that old Hendrik was a socialist, anarchist and general non-believer. Why, he even spoke glowingly of Franklin Delano Roosevelt and encouraged folks on welfare to trade in his store.

Hendrik was 50 and a barber in Little Greenville during the Depression when he decided to get into the grocery business. His business biography is one element of "Thrifty Years."

Tales of the Old World are another. You don't have to be Dutch, as I said, to savor Hendrik's conflicts with the ways of a European monarchy. I once heard the late Harry Golden say that his Carolina Israelite essays were appreciated by Swedes and Frenchmen because they practiced the same customs.

Those of us who knew immigrants can kick ourselves for never taping their recollections before they died. We will envy the way Hank recorded the impressions of Hendrik's widow along with the old-time merchants, customers and Rotarians around Greenville.

MANY SOURCES are woven together in "Thrifty Years" — personal interviews, diaries, letters between his grandfather and grandmother, business history, weird history, newspaper accounts and Meijer store ads — to make a story about the man, the store, the people and the times.

Hendrik studied the methods of the A&P supermarkets and attempted to improve on them. One day a Meijer customer in Greenville attempted to return a 30-cent box of cereal that turned out to be A&P's private brand.

Hendrik's son Fred, staffing the cash register, started to explain that it couldn't have come from the Meijer store, but old Hendrik took Fred aside and ordered him to make the refund because:

"We can eat it ourselves; don't send him back to A&P for a dime."

THE IMMIGRANT who started a food store that grew to become one of the nation's 100 largest retailing firms never lost sight of the goal of satisfying the common customer, Hank writes:

"Even in his 70s . . . he sat in on meetings and looked for ways to challenge complacency."

Young Hank the author could be a worthy heir of old Hendrik the retailer; a great sense of the big picture, a fine-eye for details.