

Opinion

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Changes We're making many, and know you'll like them

AMERICA'S STORY has been chronicled on the printing press. And every community within this nation has its own story. You know it. I know it.

Some have told the story boldly; others with less candor. Some with great insight; others with little understanding of what makes a community live.

But some would have us believe that American communities are generally the same — that the people eat, think, work, mourn and celebrate all in the same fashion.

That's a lie and a dangerous one at that. They tote the derisive notion that suburbanites, no matter the community, suffer from an unquenchable dullness and lack a certain sophistication that is possessed only by a nebulous elite.

Hogwash, pure hogwash. It is that very same group which lacks the sophistication to analyze and perceive the subtleties that exist from community to community.

WE KNOW THEM by their patronizing attitude about our concerns and needs. We know them by the publications they attempt to foist off on the marketplace.

We also know they fail. They refuse to change.

We're changing at this publication because the communities whose history we are helping to write are changing.

We know that these differences range from block to block, subdivision to subdivision and from city to township.

Around the nation old-fashioned daily newspapers are being replaced by suburban publications.

In one major city, a longtime daily publication has been pushed into third place, replaced by a firmly entrenched weekly that is now aiming for the number-one spot.



Many of our newspapers have new editors. They're all veterans of community journalism — trained to meet your needs. I know you'll enjoy meeting them either in person or through their columns and editorials.

THIS NEW TEAM is building a publication for a new generation of readers and a new generation of consumers.

We will have better written and researched editorials. Our editorial pages will be a place where you feel welcome in submitting your opinion.

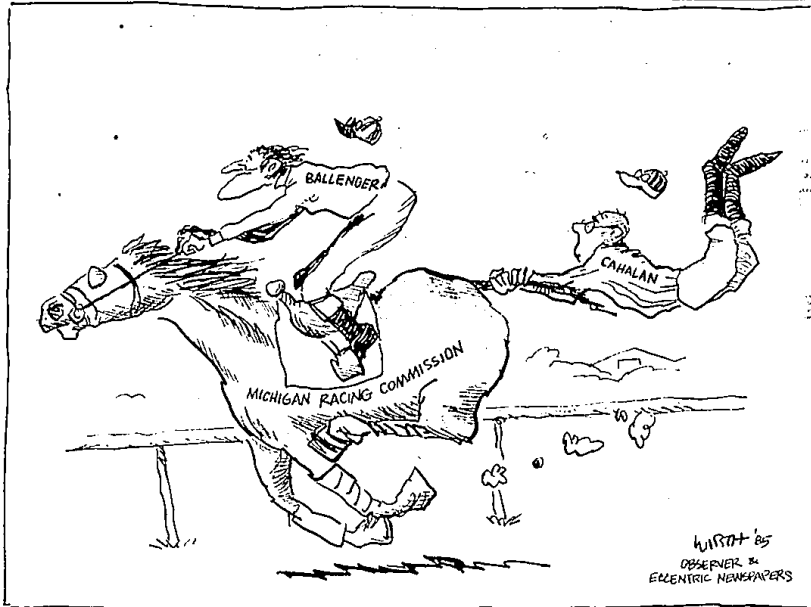
Our business pages will report all facets of the suburban business community. Our entertainment section will be more entertaining and our sports pages more all-inclusive in their coverage of your community.

And you're going to read about the social scene in your community — not the social scene as determined by the elite in control of a faraway publication.

You're going to be reading more in-depth news about how the politicians you elect are spending your money.

We're going to have sections to tell you how to do those things you love to do in your spare time and what to do when you're looking for something new.

And we're going to beat the pants off the folks who pretend they know how to put out a community section and never have really gotten it down right.



A visionary racing chief

LATE LAST year, the Hon. Frank J. Kelley, attorney general in and for the state of Michigan, tore himself away from utility bashing long enough to declare that William S. Ballenger's term as state racing commissioner ended Dec. 31, 1984.

Ballenger demurred, declaring that he was appointed by Republican Gov. William Milliken for a full four-year term that isn't due to expire until some time in 1986.

A colorful and ebullient fellow, Ballenger announced "the walls will be shaking" before he will yield his racing commissioner office to William L. Cahalan, the man Democratic Gov. James Blanchard designated to take over the reins.

The walls have started shaking. A state Court of Appeals panel this week ruled that the governor has the authority to replace Ballenger.

IT'S A SHAME, however, for Michigan to lose the services of Ballenger as racing commissioner. He is a man who grasps that horse racing is an industry that can generate far more jobs, entertainment, profits and state taxes than it is providing.

He calls the industry "unimaginative and stodgy" in promoting itself. He sees the state as off-base in promoting the lottery, which is straight gambling with no entertainment value and which pays off only 45 cents on a \$1 bet compared to horse racing's 80 cents.



Tim Richard

Ballenger had a program to change things.

● He wanted to stimulate attendance by realizing state and industry improvements.

● He would have cut the state's drain on the industry by reducing the 6.23 percent tax on wagering to the 3.7 percent average of other states. He would offer better purses to horse owners to attract better horses.

The industry, since Ballenger has been around, ended a 20-year decline. Harness racing wagering at Northville and Hazel Park started upward. Attendance at those tracks and the DRG in Livonia reversed its long downward slide.

CAHALAN, HIS apparent successor, was prosecutor of Wayne County for 16 years.

In keeping with the bad old tradition of Wayne County politics, Cahalan quit in the middle of his final term, allowing for his successor to be appointed by fellow politicians, not elected by the people.

Whereas Oakland Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson developed a record, for better or worse, of advocacy for executing murderers, cracking down on welfare cheats and toughening up on prison sentences, we almost never heard the somber Cahalan voice an opinion — pro or con — on these points.

Personally, I had just one dealing with Cahalan's office — an open-and-shut case against the Schoolcraft College board for violation of the Open Meetings Act. Cahalan's troops dawdled with it, and dawdled with it, until finally I said the heck with it because it was too late to do anything about the matter.

THERE ARE political considerations.

Sure, Ballenger is a Republican. But it's hard to see where he was any political threat to Blanchard. Since when is the post of state racing commissioner a passport to higher office?

Then there is Jimmy Karoub, the former Democratic legislator and now lobbyist for many interests, including the owners of Hazel Park. Ballenger had forced those owners to sell DRG, and the story goes that they and Karoub are out to get the racing commissioner. Maybe yes, maybe no.

Ballenger was not only a tough regulator but an economic visionary, a man as fertile with ideas as Cahalan is devoid of them.

No joke Drunk driving: under attack

AT A TIME when young people are under unrelenting pressure to excel, there's a group of students trying its damndest to make sure the pursuit of excellence doesn't turn deadly.

Bluntly put, members of Students Against Driving Drunk (SADD) don't want fellow students to kill themselves and maim others because a leisure-time dare made the lure of alcohol too strong to resist.

With Farmington Public Schools back in session, it's a good time to revisit the SADD philosophy.

SADD LEADERS hope that by spotlighting the pain and suffering that driving drunk invariably produces, they can help overcome student apathy and prick community interest.

Wisely, local chapters hope to take dead aim on middle-school students, who are at a highly impressionable age.

Says Farmington Harrison High School faculty adviser Maria Schneider, "We feel it's important for kids to learn to say, 'No, I don't want to ride with you because you were drinking.'"

"Even though ninth graders don't drive, they'll find occasions in which they'll have to make a choice. So it's important they recognize they have a choice."

Although SADD is less than a year old in Farmington Public Schools, each of the three senior-high chapters ably spread the SADD message during the 1984-85 school year. For example, an informational night at Farmington High drew 200 parents and students. Farmington Harrison hosted an orientation forum for 16 area senior highs.

NORTH FARMINGTON held a school assembly, with Larry Rotta, a Michigan-based SADD spokesman, the guest speaker. "And I was almost in tears," said chapter president Francine Greene, a senior. "I was just so happy the whole school was there, listening. I felt I had won my battle to win over the students. I've now got big plans for gaining wider awareness among parents."

Local SADD chapters also developed graduation-related projects designed to gently remind seniors about the responsibility a diploma carries.

Even though one teen-ager is killed in a

drunk-driving accident every hour, SADD founder/executive director Robert Anastas is quick to tell student assemblies: "You kids just don't care. Perhaps that's because that one kid is not real to you. It's not someone you know, it's not one of your friends who lives just down the street — but it could be."

Taking the offensive, he later said: "Kids, once you're dead at 17, you're dead — there's no coming back."

So, he said, "Watch others and care enough to make sure that your friends get home safely — and don't pressure others to drink."

SADD HAS built a solid framework for keeping drunks off the streets. But it skirts the larger problem of alcoholism.

That's where parents, police and judges must step forward. They not only must publicize the tougher drunk-driving laws, but also enforce them to the fullest where discretion dictates.

Convincing a teen-ager not to drive while drunk is certainly commendable. But spreading the word about the evils of alcoholism is equally, if not more, important.

In May, the Farmington Hills City Council — at the urging of Families in Action's local chapter — showed the way in adopting Oakland County's first "host liability" ordinance.

While suppliers can be prosecuted under other statutes, the new law metes out stiff penalties for adults 17 or older who knowingly allow minors to consume alcoholic beverages or illegal drugs at house parties under their control — and who fail to take preventive steps.

MEANWHILE, the preliminary breath-testing device, now part of most every patrol car, helps Farmington-area police identify borderline drinking drivers. And local judges are beginning to crack down, even on first-time offenders.

This team approach is just dandy. A snapped neck and instant death when a car going 75 mph slams into a tree make an ugly scene, but a poignant reason why SADD's efforts merit — no, demand — a potent community assault on alcoholism's potentially lethal effects.

— Bob Sklar

Lucas express loses steam

THERE SHOULD be a course called Assessing Political Fallout. There isn't, of course, but just think how handy it would be in trying to figure out whether Wayne County Executive Bill Lucas knew or didn't know and when did he find out that his top assistant stood to make a good deal of money from a contract that Lucas was pushing.

If we had taken such a course, there would be guidelines. Will Lucas' express-train rush for the Republican nomination be in trying to figure out whether Wayne County Executive Bill Lucas knew or didn't know and when did he find out that his top assistant stood to make a good deal of money from a contract that Lucas was pushing.

Since we have no sure-fire analytical method of assessing political fallout, aside from costly and time-consuming polls, we turn to those who have become experts by being caught right smack in the middle of political disasters themselves.

THE EXPERTS read all the stories, listen to the statements, talk to the cronies, sniff the wind and, mindful that the great unwashed deals not necessarily with all the facts but with perceptions of the facts, make their pronouncements.

The experts now say: Awful, but no disaster, and no permanent damage. It will blow over.

Ah, but why are the folks who surround



Bob Wisler

Oakland County Executive Daniel Murphy jabbing each other in the ribs while laughing and chortling? Why has fence-sitter L.

Brooks Patterson seemingly sailed his size 11½ white Stetson into the ring of "probable" candidates for the Republican nomination for governor? They smell the blood of a wounded animal.

It may well be that this particular story about one of the errors of the impetuous, able Lucas' ways eventually will die down, even though political opponents will make every effort to keep it resuscitated. But there is something disquieting about the whole affair.

NO MATTER what the details, there is a smell to it. It really doesn't give off the stench of scandal, or of payoff, or even the aroma of quid pro quo, or mutual backscratching. But there is something that seems to be wafting through the air — a kind of oily perspiration exuded from the strain of men turning desperate, struggling and wrestling to try to maintain power and advantage, or pushing to

get in on the windfall ahead.

It is as if Lucas' group of government reformers have confirmed our worst opinions about politicians. They all say they want to provide honest, efficient, clean government, all the while sliding unobserved into a favorable spot at the trough to take advantage of the myriad opportunities that government leaders have to turn inside information into cold cash.

We are reminded that the incomparable Harry S. Truman was seemingly the last politician who ended his political career without amassing a personal fortune while in office.

AND THE REFORM group of County Executive William Lucas, divided and seething with anger over denied opportunities and losses in power and prestige, gives ample indication that the well-oiled machine of the county executive is not as powerful, awesome or efficient as we have been led to believe.

Chances are that Lucas will get over this hurdle, but he will be jabbed at again and again by Republican opponents — with a probable loss to GOP chances of unseating Gov. Blanchard — and his straight, hard-and-true ride to the Republican nomination has become somewhat bumpy and uncertain.

The engineer is still at the throttle, but there are indeed drops of blood on his immaculate white shirt front.