

Opinion

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Join in

Help give schools a boost

A monthly peek into Bob Sklar's notebook —

IT'S NOT a pressing need. But it's sure worth exploring. What do you think of establishing an independent blue-ribbon community organization to promote enrichment projects developed outside of the regular Farmington Public Schools curriculum?

Operating much like a districtwide booster club, the blue-ribbon group would raise and administer money for culturally oriented projects mutually agreeable to group members and school officials. The rotating membership would include residents at large as well, not just parents or former district trustees.

In view of the deepening demands on taxpayers just to provide basic educational programs and services, the concept is intriguing.

CASH FROM the group's fund-raisers could, for example, be used to:

- send foreign language students to countries whose cultures they are studying;
- devise a special computer study program that enables students to stay abreast of technological changes;
- stage elaborate student concerts or plays.

The group's intent would be to establish a community-based revenue source, beyond property taxes, for supplementary educational pursuits. The group's efforts would not affect current courses or curricular planning.

Unquestionably, the Farmington area has a lot of dedicated people. And a districtwide booster club would provide a chance for that dedication to exert itself within the schools.

INNOVATION WOULD be the fund-raising byword.

Such a group's specific charge would have to be fine-tuned. And the respect such a group commanded in the community would be tied to the quality of the membership's work.

Still, the idea represents a fresh approach to maintaining super-curriculum offerings.

Beyond fund-raising, the group could do a lot of good just by serving as a liaison



Bob Sklar

between the community and the schools.

MEANWHILE, BOTH North Farmington and Farmington senior highs have wisely each developed a schoolwide booster club. The clubs act as fund-raisers and boosters for all athletic, academic and extracurricular activities.

Says Roger Lyon, president of the 270-member North Farmington High School Booster Club: "We try to build school spirit while promoting all school activities. In a way, we act like a PTA, like a parent organization. But we don't hamper individual parent groups, like the Band and Orchestra Boosters or the Football Moms. We're here to work hand-in-hand with them."

Adds Pat Brown, president of Farmington High School's 100-member Falcon Booster Club: "We're trying to be supportive of the whole school. And things are turning around. There are a lot of nice, new people joining our group. We're looking for things to be so much more positive — and I love it."

A luncheon for the school staff and an auction that raised money for school projects were the Falcon club's biggest success stories this winter. "Anything that enhances what we already have is good," Brown said.

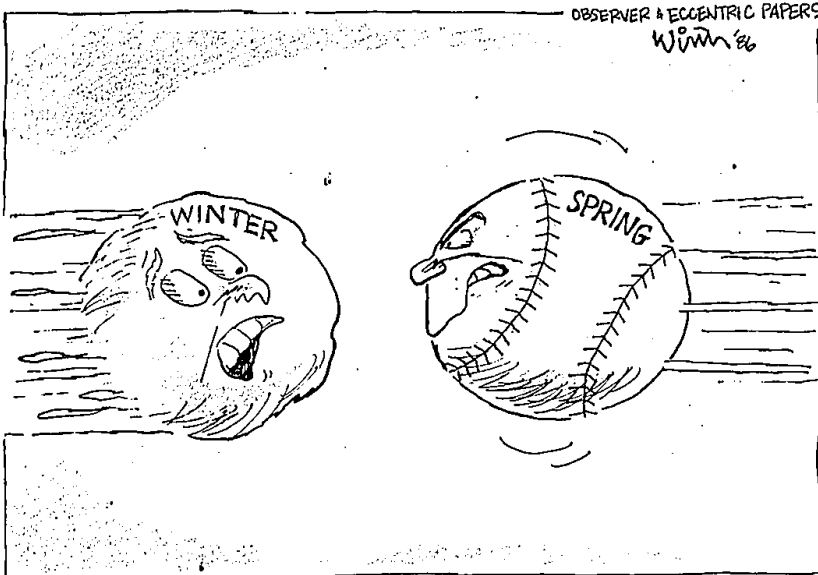
NOW, IT'S your turn, Farmington Harrison. You have active booster clubs for the band and orchestra and for the football team, but no schoolwide booster club.

Make no mistake: a districtwide booster group would supplement and assist these schoolwide groups, not replace them.

Granted, a districtwide group would have to overcome stiff odds in trying to attract members in a community where time already is at a premium.

What's more, such a group might lack the insight, camaraderie and ties that exist in individual schools.

Nonetheless, the idea has enough merit to explore. What do you think?



Dull guys need respect, too

I'M EMBARRASSED at the way my own industry lambastes candidates for being "dull," as if that were a sin like giving contracts to pals or using the public treasury to promote one's image.

"Dull Dan" Murphy is only the latest case in point.

That's what other political columnists call him. And last week one reporter even asked the Republican gubernatorial hopeful how he liked being known as "Dull Dan."

Taken aback, Murphy could only reply, "I don't think I'm dull."

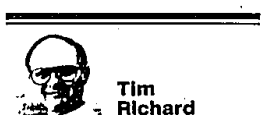
Well, here are some thoughts for Murphy or any other sober, studious person seeking high public office.

"YOU GUYS would consider George Washington dull," Murphy should reply.

And it's true. The Father of Our Country rarely cracked a smile. He never was known as a scintillating conversationalist. His writing plods. His only speeches with pizzazz were ghosted by his aide-camp, later Treasury secretary, Alexander Hamilton.

But George had other qualities that the Franklins and Jeffersons of the era respected. He made mistakes in battle but learned from them. He had courage. He could delegate.

When it came time to write the U.S. Constitution, dull George was elected pres-



Tim Richard

siding officer and kept those diverse minds on target. I kind of like our Constitution.

He patiently welded the first presidential administration, formed a government and launched economic policies that were in place for a century.

JEAN BAPTISTE Bernadotte was so dull that they made a movie about his wife, Desiree. The Swedes elected Bernadotte, a one-time henchman of Napoleon, their king, and he played a role in bringing down the emperor of the French. That's my kind of dull.

John Maynard Keynes wrote impossibly dull stuff, as any economics student knows, but he revolutionized "the dismal science."

Roger Smith could be called dull. But I would guess his General Motors stockholders are happier with last week's sales increases than Lee Iacocca's Chrysler stockholders were with their sales decline.

Another ploy Murphy could use:

"Yeah, you guys may yawn during my speeches, but there are 75,000 people with new jobs in Oakland County who don't yawn when they cash their paychecks each week."

IT'S COMMON for my brethren covering political conventions to complain — in print, and in news stories yet — that the convention is dull.

There's nothing in the Ten Commandments, the U.N. Charter, the Constitution or the statutes that says politicians owe us entertainment.

We're talking about a state with an \$11 billion budget, 55,000 employees, 15 colleges and universities, a cantankerous and divided Legislature. What's charisma got to do with handling that job?

The question to Murphy about being "Dull Dan" came at the end of his presentation of his platform for bringing more industrial, financial and service jobs into the state.

He had fairly specific ideas on workers comp, unemployment comp, credit card rules, taxes and research tax credits. Whether or not you agree with Murphy's positions, there was a lot of meat to chew on.

Instead they asked him about being "Dull Dan."

My own industry embarrasses me some days.

New law to assist in helping fight drunks

CRACKING DOWN on drinking and driving has become almost the fashion-able thing to do. The tenor of parties is changing and there's a growing social pressure against combining drinking and driving.

But the problem is far from solved. The state highway administration estimates that 20 percent of accidents are caused by under-age drivers who had been drinking (with that age group making up just 10 percent of the driver force).

Some cities have been trying to crack down on illegal sales to minors — but all they really can do is slap the hand of the party store owner.

The power currently is held by the state Liquor Control Commission. Only the LCC can revoke a liquor or beer and wine license — and it rarely does.

But not for long. Local units of government soon will be carrying some weight — considerable weight. A store that receives three violations in one 12-month period may find itself in deep trouble.

STARTING IN February, city councils and township boards will now be able to tell the LCC to revoke that store's license after the third offense with few exceptions.

The law, which was signed two weeks ago by the work of state Rep. Greg Gruse, R-Edison Heights. After hearing of the frustrations of local governments, Gruse introduced a bill to bring power over beer and wine, and packaged liquor licenses closer to home.

It received almost unanimous support in the state House and Senate — and considerable support from party store owners themselves. In fact, the only opposition came from the LCC, which wanted to re-

tain control.

Now Gruse is thinking about sponsoring a bill to impose stiff fines for the first and second offenses — and may also try to give local units more control over Class C liquor-by-the-glass licenses. A city can now demand that a bar or restaurant license be revoked — but the LCC doesn't always listen.

LIQUOR LICENSE holders have double reason to worry in Troy. There, police have set up a sting operation to nab businesses that sell to minors. Some — including Gruse — think that's a little too heavy-handed. "I don't think they should be able to break the law and cause entrapment, in a sense," he said.

We aren't wild about sting operations either, but we think the harsh methods are justified in trying to stem the flow of alcohol to teens. Alcohol abuse is a serious social problem among teens — and they risk their own and other's lives when they drink and then get behind the wheel.

We commend Gruse on leading the fight for tougher enforcement of liquor laws. This was the first piece of legislation sponsored by the freshman legislator — and he garnered support and praise from all corners.

And we urge all local units of government to get serious in the fight against liquor law violations — particularly on sales to minors. Communities should deal harshly with the businesses that are noted for being "easy" targets for illegal sales.

This law — in connection with a new rule, which will noticeably distinguish "under 21" on driver's licenses — will make teens work harder and hopefully think longer about breaking the law.

— Kathleen Moran

Shuttle tragedy holds a lesson

THE DECISIONS and events leading to the space shuttle disaster are now becoming public knowledge. Coming through are refrains that sound too familiar.

The decision makers sat behind closed doors and made long-distance telephone calls to each other. The only opinions that finally mattered were those of the top echelon. The warnings and protests of the lower-level engineers went unheeded. The standard bearers, the astronauts, were left out of the decision-making process.

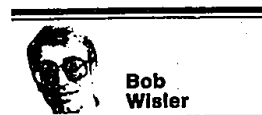
To say that the process was flawed, as did the chairman of the panel investigating the shuttle disaster, is an understatement. The disaster could have been avoided, there is no doubt of that. It might be too early to say that those in charge were negligent in their duties in putting managerial goals ahead of concerns for safety.

BUT THERE surely is the idea coming through that those in charge were overly concerned with schedules being followed, goals being met and public image of the shuttle launch being paramountly important.

The shuttle had had so many setbacks that people on the inside had begun to call it "Mission Impossible." How ironic that that is finally what it became.

If the tragedy were to be a movie it would have to be "The Strangers," a screenplay written by Terry Southern and directed by Stanley Kubrick.

It is almost a parody of some Peter Principle about organizational inefficien-



Bob Wisler

cy. Yet, we see similar examples going on for years in our industries and governments.

THE AUTO industry even now is trying to catch up to the Japanese in management systems that place premiums ultimately on quality and a feeling of participation on all employee levels in producing a quality product.

The industry is trying to involve employees in a participatory system rather than a system that operates solely by fiat and dictum.

We see too often in our organizations, particularly governments, the bad results of systems geared toward shutting off participation on lower levels and mistrust of dissenting opinions.

Even in a country dedicated to the idea that a dissenting minority does not a disservice but a real service to its majority, there is a distrust of dissent.

A GOVERNMENT spokesman belittles the minorities and the dissenters; an erudite speech writer called those who doubt the wisdom of government decisions

"nattering nabobs of negativism."

In the NASA agency there was perhaps not an active and hostile resistance to dissent, but there was certainly a system for keeping the dissent quiet and behind closed doors, so that not even the astronauts who were to be shot into space knew of the deep concerns for safety voiced by many of those most responsible for building the vehicle that was to carry them.

Such systems involve using an insistence by top management that the good of all is best served by meeting the goals of those who have decided what the goals should be.

IT IS NOT an end-justifies-the-means sort of declaration, but it is the ever-present pressure at each level of an organization to conform to what the management wants, whether all agree that it is the wisest and best way to go.

The dismaying aspect is that often, as in the case of the NASA management, the top echelon is not even aware of all the problems involved in its own system. The shutting off of dissenting opinion to the management led to the disastrous decision to launch.

What will be learned from the sad lesson surely will change the nature of NASA with every level in the future being able to provide information to NASA's highest echelon and with the astronauts themselves much more able to participate in launch decisions.

Perhaps our government and all of us can learn from the lesson.