

Opinion

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Rouge River Cleanup effort must begin with residents

LAST YEAR, A local couple went for a stroll along the Rouge River. The man accidentally fell in, swallowed some water and days later died.

What a ridiculous waste of life. But disease and death are a part of the Rouge River legacy — a legacy we can and must change.

We really don't have to put up with an open sewer filled with human waste and industrial byproducts running through our community. But for many years, residents of Wayne and Oakland counties have done just that.

The 126-mile-long river has been transformed into a sewage dump around which 1.5 million people live, work and play.

Certainly, residents must demand that government officials and business leaders work toward a solution to clean up what is a scar of environmental shame.

BUT RESIDENTS, TOO, must shoulder a large chunk of the responsibility.

And that's why you will find inserted into today's Observer & Eccentric

a special all-news section on this environmental crisis. To understand a problem, we must know the facts behind what created it. To solve the problem is to understand.

This special section will aid you in understanding the issue.

The Observer & Eccentric shares the assessment of experts who say the river can be cleaned up by the turn-of-the-century. But we must begin — now.

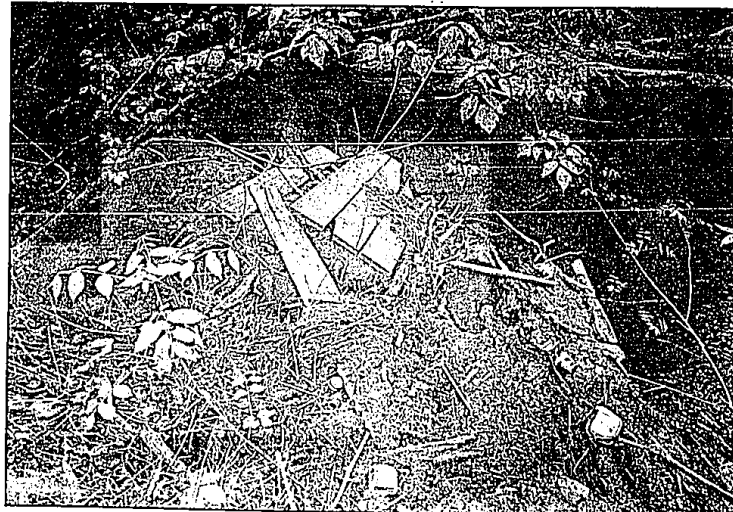
Earlier this year, we assigned a team of editors, reporters and photographers to investigate the Rouge.

After reading the facts, you may very well react as many on our news team did. It may make you angry. It may make you sick.

But it also will make you determined to join in the cause to clean up a river that could be transformed into a genuine environmental pearl of southeast Michigan.

The reasons the Rouge is unable to live up to its potential are legion. And the biggest may very well come as a surprise.

CONTRARY TO popular belief, the majority of waste is caused by you and me, the homeowners. Those



STEVE FECHT/Staff photographer

Broken picnic tables, fallen trees and assorted refuse litter the water and banks of the Rouge River in several spots.

large smokestack industries do contribute. But they are less than 10 percent of the problem.

Raw sewage has been found to be the biggest polluter of the Rouge.

You will read that 6 billion gallons of human waste is put into the river

each year because of antiquated sewer systems.

In our report one public official asks: "Why should people drive 50 miles to have the recreational uses of a river when they have one within 10 minutes?"

If we value the well-being of our children and grandchildren, we will heed the warnings and answer the call to make our River Rouge live again.

Steve Barnaby,
managing editor

All-night parties are terrific graduation gift



GRADUATION DAY. The Class of 1988 will soon be standing in their caps and gowns contemplating their futures and reflecting on their pasts. They'll feel the same range of emotions felt by graduates before them — excitement tinged with a little fear, hope weighted with a new sense of responsibility, sadness at knowing they'll never again be quite so carefree.

Whether they are going on to college, starting a job or planning a marriage, graduates can't escape the knowledge that this is truly a milestone in their lives — an ending and a beginning.

But wait. Graduation isn't just a heavy intellectual experience. One doesn't have to dwell on the emotional tug-of-war — there's some partying to be done here. There may be a family party ahead, but the highlight of graduation night these days is an all-night fling held at the school for the entire class.

THE ALL-NIGHT parties have caught fire in our towns in the last few years. While some schools like North Farmington and Rochester Adams have parties dating back 10 years, many schools are initiating parties this year



Kathleen
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or putting on their second such event.

The evenings begin about the time any real party gets going — 10 p.m. or so — and break up at the crack of dawn (another trait of a memorable night out). The difference between these and other all-nighters is that the school graduation parties are supervised and are organized to offer more than any one parent or peer could manage.

Featured attractions range from Las Vegas-style games to dancing, swimming, volleyball and feasting on a great array of food. Of course, it's not so structured that students can't just sit around and talk and reminisce — and make more than one resolve to stay in touch.

THE BEAUTY of the evenings is that they provide an opportunity for the whole graduating class to spend a fun

evening together. It will be the last such opportunity until they, like most of us, start chalking off five-, 10-, 30-year reunions and beyond.

It takes a dedicated, caring group of parents to make these parties a success. Although they are held in the high schools, they aren't organized by teachers and administrators. It's the parents who start planning months before and who seek out donations of prizes from local businesses.

An underlying reason for the parties is to keep students from drinking and driving. Cops will say that graduation and prom nights rank up there with the nights they fear the most — the nights when they are most apt to answer a call to find the bodies of teen-agers in the twisted wreckage of a car.

Graduation parties cut to almost nil the chance that one of the happiest days in a person's life will turn to tragedy.

And since parents are the moving forces behind these events, we encourage parents to get involved in planning them for the Class of 1987. Graduation Day should be filled with memories — and the all-night school parties are almost a guarantee that it will be.

Nurturing young journalists

TRADITION HAS a lot to do with what you read in a newspaper.

Every year I try to pass a little of this tradition on by participating as a judge in the high school journalism contest sponsored by Schoolcraft College.

Developed over the past dozen years, it's a fine program with a noble purpose — to help interested young persons to become responsible journalists.

You see, this tradition, this right to free speech, can only be preserved if it is used. And it only can be used if we are continually bringing along trained practitioners with fresh new insights.

THIS YEAR'S entries were most impressive. Some were humorous, others serious, none were sophomoric. All contained a sense of maturity. All contained fresh insights.

Now I'm not trying to foist on you the all-American teen routine. Forget that. These young journalists came to the awards ceremony in assorted styles and temperaments. And that's good. That's journalism — a



crackerbarrel
debate

Steve
Barnaby

reflection of the very diverse American personality.

Journalists, despite all their diversity, are nearly unified in efforts to pass on this tradition. Some call it freedom of the press. But it's more than that — much more.

Actually, this freedom is for all of us — the reader and the journalist alike. Journalists possess no special privilege. We all have a right to free speech and inquiry. Journalists just get paid to be where you don't have time to be, to find out what you need to know.

One of our revolutionary patriots told us the essence of freedom was to "dare to read, think, speak and write." And in this country we do it

through our newspapers.

NO OTHER country — not England, not France, not even our neighbor, Canada, — has the same express right, or responsibility.

Only in America.

The truly professional journalist is the one who takes the time to seek out the knowledge, digest it, become fluent enough to talk about it and then put it on paper.

Being a journalist is more than recording words of others — that's what happens in totalitarian states. Neither are they to be promoters of the status quo.

A journalist's job is to think, to decide what is important in maintaining our freedoms and to promote debate in our society.

Robert Ingersoll liked to tell us that, "We need free bodies and free minds — free labor and free thought, chainless hands and fetterless brains. Free labor will give us wealth. Free thought will give us truth."

Schoolcraft College and the high schools that participate deserve credit for fostering this very important tradition.



STEVE FECHT/Staff photographer

Brother Rice High School in Birmingham took top honors in this year's Schoolcraft College Journalism Contest. Here, Joe Hart, editor of The Chieftain, the Brother Rice newspaper, accepts the Best Newspaper Award from Pat Newman, student activities director at Schoolcraft College.