

Opinion

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Put 'community' back into center

THEY CAME to talk about a community treasure. But is it a treasure worth preserving?

That's at the heart of the revelation about the financial vice gripping the Farmington Community Center. The operating deficit is \$19,000. Repair needs weigh in at \$55,000.

Cash flow woes at the non-profit, 19-year-old center aren't new. They started to unfurl in 1986, a year after contributions — a quarter of the revenue — peaked.

It shouldn't have taken snooping by the Observer to publicize the Farmington Community Center's financial downturn. Earlier acknowledgment might have helped stave off a drop in contributions amid ever-rising costs.

Despite this questionable way of operating, the center's board of directors hasn't asked Farmington or Farmington Hills for money. That's significant. A community center that isn't self-supporting says a lot about its community support — most of it bad.

SHOULD IT close, the center would revert to the Farmington Community Library or Farmington Hills, both of which have more pressing financial concerns.

Given this backdrop, the Farmington and Farmington Hills city councils took a responsible step in pledging to appoint a task force to help identify innovative ways to secure the center's future.

A \$300,000 a year operation, the center offers an array of classes that draw 4,000 participants annually. Classes produce 35 percent of the center's revenue but are major money drainers.

In its early years, the center held a virtual monopoly on community programming. Today, it competes with the better-financed Farmington YMCA, Farmington Community Library and Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation.

Cutting this overlap is only one of the challenges facing the task force. It can't be afraid to strip away the kid gloves and ask pithy questions. Nothing should be left to the imagination. That's the



Bob Sklar

only way to carve a new niche for the drifting center.

MEANWHILE, IT'S time to play up the center's picturesque setting and address its catering shortcomings to further encourage rentals for receptions, dinners and parties.

Center staffing has been kept down to curtail costs. But burnout is an ever-present danger. Just ask executive director Betty Paine, leaving June 1. She grew weary after eight years of trying to juggle fund-raising, volunteers and programming.

Scrimping on staffing cheats everyone — from workers to visitors.

It's also time to push for more in-kind contributions — of labor, equipment, supplies, even services. Not everyone looks for tax deductibility when a community void needs to be filled.

At the same time, the center's board of directors owes it to the community to unrestrict \$165,000 held in trust for capital improvements.

Tapping the trust — but not depleting it — to hire an executive director, more staff and a consulting firm would be a prudent beginning point.

DOES THE community truly want the center?

Let's stop kidding ourselves if it doesn't. The Farmington Hills City Council, which would likely end up with it, shouldn't be left dangling.

But if community brainstorming generates a practical, new direction for the center, let's kick fund-raising into high gear.

Saying the community values this living museum is one thing. But having businesses and families — bombarded with charitable requests — put hard-earned dollars behind it consistently is something entirely different.

Adoption can solve surrogate dilemma

CASUALLY I'VE sounded out several women on the surrogate parenting question and have been surprised at the vehemence of their feelings.

They see it as baby selling.

Political liberals concentrate their fire on what they see as "exploitation of poor women," paying them \$10,000 to be artificially impregnated and have a baby for a couple who can't (won't) have a baby of their own.

Political conservatives cite the position of women, but go a lot farther by also seeing bad effects on children who fear they will be sold if they're not good. They see problems where a sperm-donating father wants to back out of the deal.

Both groups see Dearborn attorney Noel Keane as a slime bucket for arranging such deals.

MEN TEND to have fewer qualms. They tend to favor regulation of surrogate contracts — making them enforceable in a court of law.

There are lots of questions to be decided.

Should fees to surrogate mothers be limited, thus discouraging the practice? Should the state require mental and physical tests of the parties?

Should surrogate contracts be permitted where an abortion is required, say, when the father decides to back out because he's going through a divorce, or there's evidence the fetus will be deformed or retarded?

I've seen Noel Keane only once and dissent from the "slime bucket" verdict.

THE SURROGATE controversy exists because there is a shortage of adoptable babies. Childless couples thus become willing to put up \$25,000 for a baby, including \$10,000 to the surrogate mom.

There's no shortage of babies. Among whites, one child in 10 is born out of wedlock. A generation ago, the majority of those babies, particularly those born



Tim Richard

to teens, would have been put up for adoption. Today less than 5 percent are put up for adoption.

Why? First, government today subsidizes single mothers through welfare and a host of "social services." Second, social workers appear not to be counseling teen mothers about the adoption option.

THE WAY OUT of this surrogate mess, in the long run is neither prohibiting nor regulating surrogate contracts.

Dr. Edward V. Mech of the University of Illinois, writing in "Child Welfare Journal," reported that "usually no options other than keeping (the baby) are considered" by teen mothers. Counselors simply never brought up the subject.

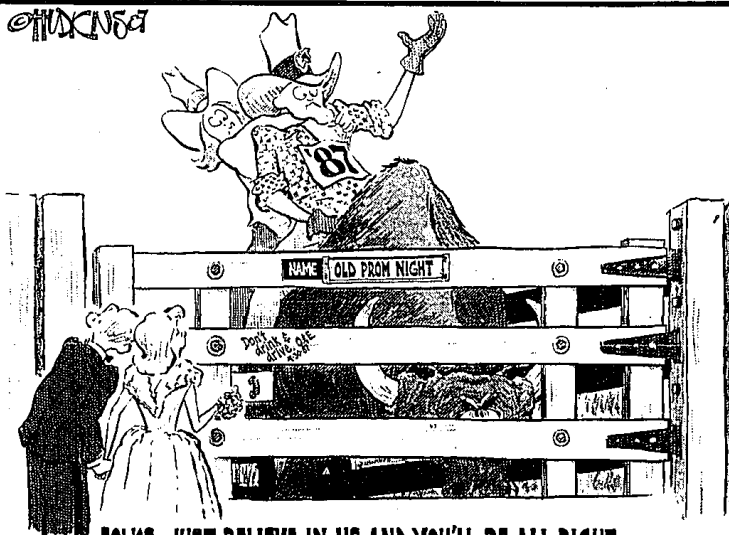
He adds, "A sizeable proportion of pregnant adolescents — about one in three — expressed moderate or high interest in adoption, with a possibility that some . . . would be serious candidates for in-depth exploration of adoption as an option."

My casual survey found unanimity among liberals, conservatives, men and women that adoption counseling is a great idea.

How do we accomplish it? Darned if I know. My contacts in the Michigan Legislature also are unsure.

We need to find out who in the Department of Social Services can get a handle on the rules in order to encourage adoption counseling — not high-pressure tactics on teen mothers, just honest counseling.

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FOLKS, JUST BELIEVE IN US AND YOU'LL BE ALL RIGHT.

Learning to compete

HANGING IN my office is a picture some say represents a dying tradition. I just wonder.

This painting is of a kid standing on a corner hawking newspapers. That's right, "hawking."

You remember. Newspaper carriers would yell out the headlines from the latest edition. That's when newspapers would print multiple editions to keep readers abreast of the news throughout the day.

With the advent of television and spot news, hawking did fade away. Its last remnant was the "bulldog," an evening edition tailored to catch the commuter coming home from work. I'm not sure bulldogging ever worked. The attempt to get to weary travelers before they got to a television set was undermined by drive time radio news.

BUT IT WAS fun — and profitable while it lasted. It also was educational. To hawk effectively, a carrier had to read the newspaper. Often competing hawkers would stand on opposite corners. Sales would depend on who could scream out the most exciting headline.

And those who did buy were often generous, thrusting out a dollar bill, grabbing a paper and rushing off to home in time to catch the Cunningham News Ace zooming into their home.

If you're from Detroit and remember hawking, you know that the Cunningham News Ace was Dick Femmel, who



hosted one of the first local television news programs on Channel 7. Femmel, by the way, now does business at Blue Cross/Blue Shield these days.

You'll also remember that a dollar for anything was big bucks.

TODAY, NEWSPAPER executives scratch their heads in bewilderment. Trade publications are full of articles dissecting what is commonly referred to as the "carrier problem."

In the last 20 years, newspapers have turned into technological wonders, with computers beeping, blinking and honking out the news. But in the end, it all depends on that kid with the bag.



crackerbarrel debate

Steve Barnaby

Frankly, kids are being drawn away, lured by a variety of competing interests. And more and more newspapers are turning to adult carriers.

WHAT a shame.

Working on a paper route really is different from any other job a kid could have. But a carrier is a one-person business. To succeed, a carrier has to think about new and better ways to attract and keep customers, to become more efficient, to make the bottom line balance. Some carriers are more successful than others. But they do it on their own.

Folks attend MBA schools to learn those skills today.

Working at a fast food restaurant teaches little, if anything, about entrepreneurial initiative. Robots could do the job.

Competing in the world market, this country needs people who can think for themselves. Think about that the next time you talk with your child about working.

A killing causes outrage

THE KILLING OF Chester Jackson, shot to death at his Detroit high school, has mobilized leaders from Lansing to Detroit and all points between to "do something" about the slaughter of Detroit youths.

About time.

If there is a way to measure these atrocities, then Chester's death was particularly senseless. He was a good kid with a lot of friends and a lot of respect in his school. A silly confrontation with a troubled 14-year-old ended all that.

Check that. It was not a silly confrontation. It was a confrontation in which one youngster had a gun.

SO NOW the action begins: weapons sweeps, curfew crackdowns and promises that any students — all students — caught with a gun in school will be kicked out. Forever.

Everyone seems to agree that Chester's death was the catalyst for all this. But why the wait? Before Chester was killed, 10 Detroit youths 16 or younger died violently this year. Another 99 were injured.

These figures are startling but not unusual. They are in line with the pace of 1986. If some of these high profile

folks had been as forceful a year ago — when there was plenty of carnage to wring their hands about — then maybe there wouldn't be the need to grieve for Chester Jackson.

That's only a maybe, of course. But until Chester died there was more noise than action from the same people dominating the headlines today with their concern. Always there were excuses, always roadblocks, always so-called legitimate reasons why all that could be done was done.

It is naive to believe that cures for such a complicated problem come about just because important people talk tough. A key part of the solution starts at home. But those parents who do teach discipline and responsibility must depend on elected and appointed officials to protect their children from gun-toting students.

Such protection is not forthcoming when Detroit's mayor encourages his residents to stay armed to protect themselves from roving suburban terrorists.

I HAVE long been a fan of Coleman Young, warts and all. But I can't understand how he can move mountains to



Rich Perlberg

buy hotels and encourage development on the riverfront, but can't find a way to demolish the abandoned homes in the inner-city. And, for the life of me, I don't see how a man can advocate guns in the homes of a community whose children are being regularly shot down.

And not just children. In a short period after Young's ill-advised call to arms, two Detroit police officers were killed by gun-toting citizens who thought the cops were crooks and a Detroit resident was shot to death in Southfield by her sister who thought she was an intruder.

Now the mayor is among those calling for a get-tough policy on weapons in schools. His support is as welcome as it is necessary. But he of all people knows how to look at the big picture. The guns that come to school came from home. And the mayor said that's where they belong.