

points of view

Ribbons remind us we need to save ourselves

AT FIRST they kind of annoyed me. I don't know why. They just did.

I'm talking about the red ribbons you may have seen tied to door handles and car antennas.

Frivolous, I thought.

But I was wrong. People need symbols. They help make sense out of this slightly mad world.

The ribbons you've seen this holiday season were the idea of Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD), the group representing families who have had children killed in alcohol-related accidents.

Those with ribbons committed themselves to not drink and drive during the holiday season.

LOTS OF folks are killed every year because of alcohol abuse — as one person said the other day, enough to make up several passenger-loads of 747s.

For years now, America has been committing this act of terrorism against itself. And very honestly, before MADD came along, not many said anything about it.

The general attitude was flip-pant, even among those in authority who could do something about it — judges and police officials.

Drunk drivers involved in fatal accidents were given light sentences, if sentenced at all.

And every year 50,000 people would be killed for no other reason than abuse and neglect.

The names from alcohol-related deaths in the last 20 years would fill 20 Vietnam Memorial walls.

It boggles the mind.

The good-old-boy attitude scoffed at MADD initially. "After all," the thinking went, "the boy was just out having some fun."



Steve Barnaby

BUT MADD just wouldn't let up. Members monitored trials and judges' sentencing practices. They lobbied legislatures to see that stricter laws were put on the books.

Now MADD is a group for more than just families who have been victimized by alcohol-related deaths. Many people across the country support its goals.

Finally, we have become aware of this tragedy that has lingered in the shadows of this country's psyche for so many years.

Certainly, more, too many more, people will be victimized by drunk drivers.

But finally, at least, there is widespread recognition that alcohol abuse isn't a joke. It's a crime.

The ribbons on the sides of those cars, they got me to thinking about all this. Hopefully, they've made you stop and think before climbing behind the wheel after socking down too many drinks.

It could save you a lot of misery and somebody else's life.

Have a happy, safe and sober New Year.

Steve Barnaby is managing editor of the 12 Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Germs are winter protocol

IT WAS one in 91 million. Talk about feeling like a statistic.

The case of stomach virus I developed one hour before leaving to go out-on-the-town for New Year's Eve is one of the 91 million cases of flu and other viruses reported in the U.S. each year, according to a recent study.

How reassuring.

The study tells us Midwesterners are less prone due to colds and flu, and less likely to lose work time because of illness. The bulk of the 91 million cases are somewhere else, probably in the West if we can believe the stats.

Well, here sits this Michiganian at work. The flu's gone, but now I'm sneezing and coughing. And I'm not alone. The past few weeks have begat the most sickly holiday season ever — and it seems everybody is still hard at work.

Our public safety director in Farmington described Christmas



Casey Hans

morning at his house as a not-so-merry event because of sick kids. Another regular visitor to our office talked about a recent trip to the hospital where he was labeled "dehydrated," placed on an IV and pumped full of antibiotics. Our editor has returned from vacation this week with remnants of a sore throat and a recurrent cough.

With all these hard luck stories, it's hard to believe the Midwest is a good place to avoid colds and the flu.

LINDA WASHINGTON, public affairs specialist for the National Cen-

ter for Health Statistics, reports Americans also suffer 61.9 million colds each year, in addition to the influenza cases.

The research shows Midwesterners reporting 21 colds per 100 people surveyed. Northerners reporting 27 colds, Southerners 24 colds and Westerners 33 colds per 100 people.

And I always thought of sunny California and the rugged Northwest coast as such happy, healthy places.

"Not so," says Washington: • Thirty-one percent of Westerners had their colds attended to by doctors, compared with 40 percent of Midwesterners.

• Westerners lost more than twice as many days from work due to colds — 33 days per 100 employed adults in the West compared with 15 days per 100 working adults in the Midwest.

• Westerners reportedly took more work time off due to respira-

tory illnesses, infectious viruses, digestive disorders and injuries.

MORE THAN 100,000 people were contacted for the study and asked what conditions they experienced in the three months before.

Doctors contacted about the statistics would provide no hypotheses on why Midwesterners appeared tougher — or luckier — than people in other regions.

Maybe in Michigan, we just expect the cold to arrive in January and leave sometime in the spring — about when the tulips peek through the frosted ground. Passing the germs here is just some sort of sick winter protocol.

Sounds like we all need to book a flight to sunny California where we can call in sick and take time to get better.

Casey Hans is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

Cut inheritance tax, says Engler



Tim Richard

JIM BLANCHARD is missing something when he dismisses the state Legislature's flap over the inheritance tax as "game playing." The governor used that term on the Senate's effort to tie a general tax bill to another bill repealing the state inheritance tax.

John Engler, the Senate Republican chief and Blanchard's probable 1990 rival, is a mile ahead of Blanchard in recognizing the need to reduce the inheritance tax. For that matter, a number of Democrats in the "graying suburbs" also grasp the issue.

The issue is more than merely reducing state taxes by \$60 million and finding replacement revenue. It's part of the long-term planning for Michigan's reindustrialization and preserving our natural and human resources.

Between 1980 and 2000, the number of Michigan residents over the age of 65 will increase by 23 percent, the institute found. In a chapter on Traverse City, it notes:

"Many of these older residents will pick Michigan's lakefront areas as the place for their retirement. They may be joined by large numbers of somewhat younger Michigan residents who will choose — or be forced — to retire in their mid or late 50s."

The retirees' Social Security, pen-

sion and dividend checks help fuel Traverse City's boom in service, retailing and construction industries. That has already happened in Florida and Arizona.

TO KEEP retirees and attract tourists, Michigan should "bend all its policies to the task," the institute report said.

There are blistering comments on the high percentage of state income Michigan devotes to welfare. The institute says Michigan should promote its lake country areas with spending on highways, airports, parks, recreation and tourism advertising. In this key sentence, it suggests:

"Taxes that discourage visitors (e.g., levies on hotel rooms), or that make it expensive to die in Michigan (inheritance taxes), could be reduced."

Essentially the plan is to cut the Michigan inheritance tax to Florida's level — virtually nothing.

Now we have the inheritance tax question in context. Engler grows that context. Blanchard doesn't — yet.

LOTS OF people go to Florida for their health or other reasons and

stay there. Nothing but a hurricane could induce two retirees near and dear to me to travel north of Sarasota voluntarily.

Others I know maintain two residences. They can choose between Michigan and Florida as their "tax home."

The issue is complicated by Michigan's lack of a gift tax and other details, state treasurer Bob Bowman tells me.

But as the 1989 Legislature again takes up the inheritance tax question, Blanchard needs to understand that it's more than "game playing."

Saving money is important to people who lived through the Great Depression and worked darn hard for their wages. They prefer to leave that money to their kids, even if the kids are rotten. Instead of the state treasury, even if Bowman is a lovable and clean cut guy.

The inheritance tax cut bill deserves a better hearing than it got in 1987-88.

Tim Richard, political writer and columnist, is the Oakland County editor of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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