

points of view

What the computer age means

IT ISN'T exactly defense department data, but information in student files at Farmington Public Schools could be considered just as "top secret" or "classified" as any Pentagon folder.

As young hackers break into government and business computer files on a regular basis and are caught, we see the need to look carefully at what the computer age really means.

Convenience, ease of workload, better communications and good recordkeeping and reporting are all part of the game, but a new set of problems comes with these goodies.

Security concerns are being addressed up front, as Farmington school officials move ahead to computerize individual buildings and allow the entire school system to integrate technologically through an upgraded mainframe system.

There will be computer terminals in each building, allowing counselors to access student records, administrators to look at attendance information, and even, eventually, allowing teachers to do their instructional recordkeeping.



Casey Hans

Principals will be able to keep track of their individual budgets, and send purchase requisitions to central office via the computer.

It sounds wonderful, and it's bound to aid administrators greatly.

BUT, LOOK around your own office. How many times do people forget to log off a computer system, leaving their access code open to anyone who comes along? Are access codes written down, even stuck in a top drawer? They shouldn't be.

But it's human nature to do things the easy way.

That's what trustees like Susan Rennels and Helen Prutow and residents like Richard DeVries voiced concern about this week. Even with all the precautions, how easy will it

be to control a large number of computer users in separate buildings?

There could someday be 450 or more terminals in the Farmington district — one of the area's largest businesses — that will need to be controlled.

Employees who tape an access password to the front of their terminal for all to see should be "severely disciplined," says Rennels.

I agree. With a districtwide system that encompasses everything from purchasing to student records, nobody can take their access for granted.

Implementing the expanded system will take more than changing passwords regularly and monitoring logs, as data supervisor Kathy Jones well knows. It will take extensive training, so that people learn to use the system properly.

If that is done, and retraining offered for people new to the system, I can buy acting superintendent Mike Flanagan's statement that "we're more secure in this type of a system than in the (paper) files."

Casey Hans is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

ABORTION, THE issue of the '90s, won't be the focal point of the 1990 race shaping up in one of Michigan's most affluent, powerful senatorial districts. Neither will who wears socks.

Both state Sen. Richard Fessler and state Rep. David Honigman are anti-abortion. And both, although Honigman more recently, wear socks.

They are expected to be the contenders in the Republican primary for the prestigious 17th Senate district, which includes Bloomfield Hills and Bloomfield and West Bloomfield townships.

Fessler has held the seat for two terms, but hasn't officially announced his candidacy. Honigman has announced. He was outspoken about gunning for the seat — long before Fessler's troubles on the legal and domestic fronts.

NOW FESSLER's actions in light of these incidents should overshadow all other issues in voters' minds.

No one, politico or not, gets by without their share of problems in life. But Richard Fessler's problems have been magnified, not by the usual villain — the press, but by his own actions.

Once Marilyn and Rick Fessler must have loved each other.

Marilyn was by his side as he was first elected to the state House of Representatives in 1974, and later as he climbed higher on the political ladder to a state Senate seat.

And Rick isn't the only politician in the family. In 1978, Marilyn ran for and was elected West Bloomfield Township treasurer. At the time, she was criticized for not having the ex-



Judith Doner Berne

perience for the job, for trading on her husband's name.

DURING HER term in office, Rick became somewhat of a fixture around West Bloomfield Town Hall. She was chastised for taking four weeks paid vacation that first year and not working well with her fellow elected officials.

In 1980, voters defeated Marilyn Fessler's bid for re-election. In the same election, Rick went on to his fourth term in the House and has now won two successive terms in the Michigan Senate.

But his fortunes changed too.

He and Marilyn separated. In 1987, he spent a night in jail after an Oakland County judge found him in contempt of court for not paying the mortgage on the West Bloomfield home where she and two of his children were living.

In 1988, he was convicted of impaired driving — and resisting arrest. The attorney-legislator also defied state law by refusing to take a Breathalyzer test to determine the amount of alcohol in his system.

BUT RICK apparently still doesn't accept the consequences of his actions.

After his night in jail, he emerged calling the contempt charge "an unnecessary, purposeful and very mali-

cious act. After all, three children are involved. They deserved better than they are getting. . ." (Dare he apply that statement to his own most recent actions?)

Directly following his conviction, Fessler insisted that it won't hamper his effectiveness in Lansing. "It has not affected my abilities to enact legislation in Lansing. I don't see the impact."

And only weeks later, after filing an appeal, he had the audacity to throw his hat into the ring for prosecuting attorney of Oakland County. Predictably, he finished last of four Republican primary contenders.

Now, he and his ex-wife are willing to subject their children to public scrutiny in their bitter custody battle, holding press conferences to aim their weapons.

HONIGMAN'S CANDIDACY by itself would have made Fessler's bid for a third Senate term a major battle. The representative from West Bloomfield has the record, background and financing to make the state Senate seat one more step toward higher political office.

The thing to do, of course, would be to step down gracefully. But that's not Rick Fessler's style. Once again, he will probably let it all hang out, refusing to accept that he is not an appropriate public representative.

And Honigman should knock his socks off.

Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

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Dems lose very faithful servant

WHEN DOUG ROSS packs his bags and heads for Washington, Michigan will lose the man who should have been governor.

Not everybody feels that way. Many, many folks can't stand the state commerce director. He's a maverick. And in Michigan's political climate that can spell professional destruction.

But, the 47-year-old Southfield resident has done much to combat the economic malaise since taking off the commerce position in 1984.

Even many of his critics, who complain about his flashy image, admit that without Ross at the commerce helm, the state is going to have a more difficult time selling itself to the business community.

Because of its business tax and workers' compensation systems, the Wolverine state never has been an easy sell. But Ross overcame a lot of those negative feelings by the force of his personality and his incredible energy.

He is a non-stop, driven public official out to accomplish whatever the goal at hand happens to be.

Unfortunately, throughout his career, Ross has been denied by his own party. And despite those denials,



Steve Barnaby

he has stayed true to it and the state he has served so well.

HE CAME to public notice back in the early '70s as the director of the Michigan chapter of Common Cause and as a co-director of Michigan Citizens Lobby. The business community, which now is one of his biggest supporters, couldn't stand him.

To break the monotony of early-morning chamber of commerce breakfast meetings, they would invite him to stir up members against this liberal activist. But Ross would persevere. He reminded the hard-working entrepreneurs to seek their own paths to success, rather than attempting to ape the multinational corporations whose interests were often counter to those of small business.

Time and again he would win over what had been a skeptical group of hardcore business types.

After serving in the state senate, Ross sought a congressional seat. He was thwarted by machine labor interests upset with a few votes he cast in the state's upper chamber.

THAT HAD to be Ross' darkest moment. But once again, he remained true to the party and took on a special project for newly elected Gov. James Blanchard. It was a political crumb that Ross, in typical style, transformed into the political jewel of the early Blanchard administration.

Soon after he became commerce director.

And all during his tenure in the Blanchard administration, Ross carefully made sure that he gave the governor all the credit.

Many of us know better. Many of us thought that it was Doug Ross who should have been Michigan's governor. But it was not to be. Not this day, anyway.

That certainly is our loss. Good luck, Doug, we'll miss you.

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

The writer, Jean M. Fox, is a Farmington Hills city councilwoman.

THE CIVIL WAR Encampment that launched the Founders Festival on Saturday was an inspiration to all fortunate enough to be able to attend.

Once away from the modern charlats in the parking lot, the re-creation of the Civil War era took over in costume, action and even speech, as participants conversed within the confines of the 1860s.

The haunting melodies of the Fifth Michigan Band, playing on instruments of the era, floated through the grove of trees at Heritage Park . . . even more moving if one recalled the words of "Tenting Tonight" and "Just Before the Battle, Mother."

guest column

The skirmish on Saturday was intriguing (even if the South did win) and the staging of the camps, the campfires and soldiers' tents, the company doctor with his herbs and New Testament lent authenticity.

Heritage Park, because of its terrain and natural areas of trees and rolling ground, lends itself well to such a re-enactment. It was on land much like this that much of the Civil War was fought.

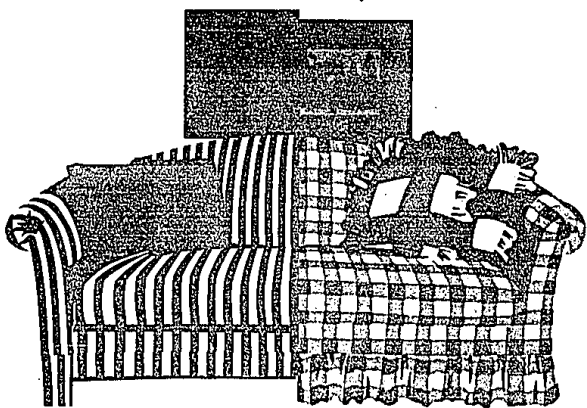
Where were all the children? Every single school child in Farmington should have been privileged to witness such "living history," which no teacher, no matter how proficient, can convey from a textbook or video. Are Farmington parents, the school board and administration unaware of chamber of commerce activities planned months ahead? Do we work together, or only in classrooms financed by tax dollars?

The Chamber of Commerce is to be commended for bringing this fine Civil War Encampment to Farmington, for it is of such memories that our heritage and history becomes more widely appreciated.

This is what the Founders Festival should be all about, and it is wonderful that this opportunity was given to our community.

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