

points of view

Excitement on the field, not in bottle this season

OUR SUBURES will be pretty empty Saturday.

A good percentage of local residents will be biggaling it for East Lansing or Ann Arbor, as Michigan State and the University of Michigan launch their football seasons.

And this year, the excitement at the games (at least by the second half) will be generated from what's going on in the field and not from what's coming out of a bottle.

The University of Michigan, exhibiting one more facet of the leadership that should come from a world-class university, last month banned bringing containers into the stadium — anything that could hold food or drink.

Last week, MSU followed suit.

As U-M season ticket holders, who like many fans have been relegated to the same seats in the same row and section for the past five years, we've become accustomed to the people and tone of our section. It doesn't matter that from row 16, section 20, we can't see the far side of the field at all — we've got a great view when it's on our goal line.

SINCE RUMOR has it you have to be willing tickets or pay the hefty price to join The Victors Club to change season ticket seats, we ex-



Judith Doner Berne

pect to be seeing these same folks for quite a while.

But I wonder what the funny guy in front of us will be like — without a drink in his hand. He usually starts out quietly, but by the half he's getting into it — no matter what's happening on the field — and his high fives are extended to a broader and broader audience as the game goes on.

And, as a member of one of the few sections with our own cheerleader, I wonder if he will still have the courage to stand up on the divider between the field and the seats and lead us in the M-I-C-H-I-G-A-N chant after a score — then gesture pointedly to the end-zone section reserved for fans of the opposing team.

I sure hope so. He is an institution.

It would be a shame if it turned out that without spirits he is spiritless.

ON A LIGHTER note, lost in all the press given the crackdown on alcohol consumption is U-M's crack-

down on umbrellas.

That's really sticking it to us. We'll certainly be able to tell who's a fair-weather fan now.

Half the fun is waking up to that gray Saturday morning, contemplating whether it will or it won't, then tossing that blue and yellow umbrella into the car and hoping that the old adage holds — if you're prepared for rain, it won't.

And what's going to happen to all those blue and yellow umbrellas? They'll have to be left at the tailgate, taken to the golf course or — in the worst possible scenario — donated to your neighbor and season ticket holder for Michigan State, where they stopped short of the umbrella ban.

"If you can cram anything into it, go ahead and try," laughed an MSU spokeswoman.

You could say that MSU fans are more fragile, less staunch. Officials are afraid that, threatened with wet weather, they won't show up if they can't be protected by an umbrella.

You could. But I won't. Happy football season.

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

Are school chief salaries going up unreasonably?



Casey Hans

WHILE TEACHERS in several Michigan school districts walked the picket lines this month, officials in other districts — like Farmington — were wiping their brows with relief due to last-minute contract settlements.

Most of those union disputes were about money.

What's got to be troubling teachers, secretaries, bus drivers and other support employees in Michigan is not just what they earn, but what their district's top administrators are earning. Each year it goes up and up.

While they're offered a one-digit salary increase — which under normal circumstances would be considered reasonable — many superintendents are earning double-digit increases.

It's disgraceful.

A top job in public education administration in this state is becoming a prime position, passing even top jobs in private industry for salary, perks and benefits. As management in private industry complains about the upward climb of union salaries and benefits, so goes the salaries of upper level school administrators.

THIS MONTH, it was revealed that Bloomfield Hills Superintendent of Schools Robert Docking would receive some \$135,000 by the end of his contract in July 1992. When he started as school chief in 1985, he earned a little more than \$94,000. He now earns \$101,198.

That's a 43 percent increase in seven years, with 34 percent of that occurring between this year and 1992.

In Farmington, money will no doubt be an issue as the school board searches for a new school chief. The board started its former superintendent at \$73,000 in 1986, then jumped his salary 34 percent to just under \$100,000 "to get in line with other districts in the area."

The thought is: to have the best, you must keep up with the Joneses.

But where will it stop? Will Farmington now have to up the ante — again — to get a decent person to run the district because of what has been done in Bloomfield Hills?

THESE CASH salary figures don't even include perks like district-owned cars, insurance annuities, retirement program payments and other behind-the-scenes things sometimes negotiated into a contract.

With the hiring of PNR Associates, an Illinois-based consulting firm, Tuesday, the school board starts its search for a new superintendent. Hopefully, the issue of money and accountability to taxpayers will remain foremost in the minds of trustees.

Only the elected officials who run our school districts can keep these costs in line, and prepare for the budget-cutting likely to come with school finance reform. A school chief deserves a fair salary, but not one that escalates out of line with private industry and its own employees.

It's a matter of control. We must all learn to live within our means — not spend away our future.

Casey Hans is a staff writer for the Farmington Observer.

Teacher holds key to making 'split' class work

Q: I just found out my fourth-grade daughter is going to be mixed in a class with fifth-grade students. I think fourth-grade students should be in a class with other fourth graders and fifth-grade students with other fifth graders. Is this going to be a problem for my daughter? What is the real reason for mixing fourth and fifth graders?

A: What you are referring to is called a "split" class. Although not always popular, "splits" are not unusual, especially in communities such as yours, which is experiencing a surge of student growth.

We need to understand there is no

such thing as a fourth-grade student. For instance, a reading level for a fourth- or fifth-grade student can range from the third to the ninth grade. Furthermore, students for a "split" are selected based on their academic and intellectual ability and may indeed be closer in their range of skills than students in a regular, fourth- or fifth-grade classroom.

Students selected for "splits" usually have comparable test scores, similar reading abilities, interests and work habits.

Indeed, a greater "split" can occur in a 12th-grade government class (a



Doc Doyle

required course for graduation) in which students can range in reading skills from a second-year college level to a ninth-grade high school level.

If we grouped only by chronological age for all education experiences, your school band and football team may have to disband. Musicians and athletes range in ability. A freshman may blow the trumpet while a sophomore may be the best halfback.

All this withstanding, the "split" issue always raises its head at the start of the school year.

You asked for the real reasons for "splits." There are many, but the most common is the sudden increase in enrollment at a specific grade level.

Let us assume there are two fourth-grade and two fifth-grade classes, both filled with students according to the teacher contract or by district philosophy.

Assume that in August, nine fourth

graders and seven fifth graders move into an elementary attendance area. There is only one classroom available. Two classrooms simply don't exist to have separate fourth and fifth graders.

If two classrooms are available, the school board must hire two teachers to avoid a "split." If there are 10 potential "splits" in a school district (with moderate funds) and the administration decides not to use "split" sections, the cost is 10 extra teachers or \$350,000 (with benefits). The question then becomes, "Is the district being fiscally responsible?"

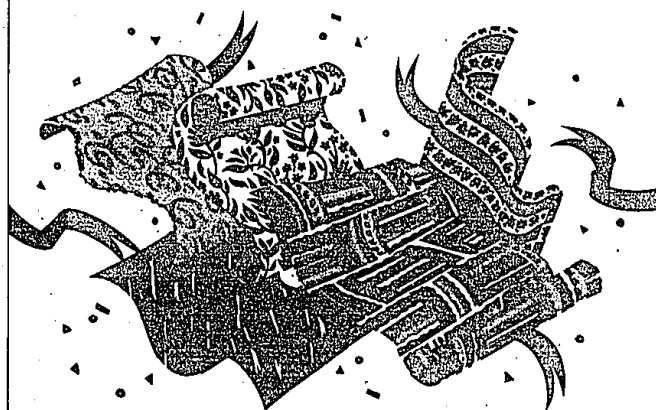
Principals generally place one of their most experienced and compe-

tent teachers in a "split" to grant a quality experience for children and to reduce parental anxiety.

Therefore, the most critical variable for a positive experience is the teacher who you have indicated — in your case — is a well-respected, quality educator.

Dr. James Doyle is an assistant superintendent in the Troy School District. The answers provided here are the opinions of Doyle and not the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle c/o the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

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