

Right thing to do

Recycling a source of community pride

This is the final article in a series looking at Oakland County's program for managing solid waste, a three-part plan for which officials are prepared to spend up to \$470 million. Related stories on page 13A and 15A.

By Pat Murphy
staff writer

It took a couple of weeks, but Troy residents seem to be adjusting to an ordinance requiring that grass clippings, leaves and organic yard debris be separated from household trash as a condition for curbside pickup.

"There were some initial problems," said assistant city manager A. John Szerlag, including the relatively short notice to residents before the program was implemented.

"But people seem to realize separating compost material is environmentally the right thing to do," Szerlag said Tuesday, the first day

the ordinance was to be rigidly enforced.

In what is a solid indication of things to come, at least six other cities in Oakland County have implemented, or plan to implement, similar leaf-grass separation programs.

It's the wave of the future as communities come to grip with the solid waste problem.

BY THE END of the decade, voluntary recycling done on a small scale now in cities like Birmingham, Southfield and Farmington Hills will be expanded and put in place on a mandatory basis, predicts Roger J. Smith, deputy director of the solid waste unit of the Oakland County Department of Public Works.

He's also one of the chief architects of the county's three-part, \$470 million program to deal with solid waste.

The plan calls for recycling, incineration and the limited use of landfills.

taking on TRASH

But as expensive and ambitious as the plan is, it simply won't work unless all three components are carried out — with enthusiastic support from residents.

Just as the key to accomplishing Troy's yard debris program this week was the realization by citizens that separating was the environmentally right thing to do, the county's trash program is dependent on residents — and businesses — coming to a similar conclusion.

"WE SEE IT (recycling) as a gift to the next generation," said Linda Brick, a Troy resident who is part of that city's branch of the American

Association of University Women (AAUW). "What better gift can we give than a clean environment?"

The AAUW and the League of Women Voters are negotiating with Troy administrators for a glass recycling facility — similar to those in Birmingham, Southfield and elsewhere — where residents voluntarily separate and drop off glass containers.

The Troy glass recycling program begins Nov. 18 at the Public Works Facility, 4693 Rochester Road.

Brick is convinced most residents will cooperate with recycling efforts once they realize it is easy and beneficial.

"My family made a choice to recycle," she said. "Some people might think it's a lot of work, but it isn't. It's not hard at all and it makes a difference."

Residents in other communities voice similar sentiments. Nancy

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'There are more drugs in the joint than out on the street. We have to provide more treatment — that is the incredible crime that the government commits.'

— U.S. Rep. John Conyers
D-Detroit

'Even if marginal use and addiction increased, it might be worth it if it reduced crime. We're not going to arrest, prosecute and imprison our way out of this. It is a war that should be fought by the surgeon general, not the attorney general.'

— Howard Simon
Michigan ACLU director

Simon condones, Conyers opposes legalized drugs

By Judith Doner Berne
staff writer

The idea of legalizing drugs came out of the closet and into the open for maybe the first time in Michigan as friends John Conyers and Howard Simon squared off before a full house at Birmingham Temple Monday night.

"This is the first dialogue on the subject in the state of Michigan that I am aware of," Michigan American Civil Liberties Union director Simon told the largely pro-legalization audience at the Farmington Hills temple. "It often falls to the ACLU to raise what is often thought of as the unthinkable."

Conyers, the longtime U.S. Democratic representative from Detroit, said this was "not just a debate, but a question of the most fundamental social problem facing us and the world. This is the beginning of a series of discussions on this subject. But we haven't had one discussion on what is right short of legalization."

Both agree that the Bush administration's approach to stemming the tide of drugs can't work — that there is no way to make a significant dent in the illegal drugs coming into the country — and those produced here.

But to Conyers, legalization is a morality issue. He said that he can't tell young people "Don't do drugs" and then go ahead and make them legal.

HE ALSO BELIEVES legalizing drugs would be ineffective because "wherever the line is between legality and illegality, the dealers will meet you there." If the drugs are cheap, for example, he suggested, then they'll charge you for mixing them.

Simon said he isn't actually calling for all-out legalization. But he doesn't want it dismissed out of hand. "I'm not advocating we should do it, but we need research and experimentation. Would it in-

crease use? Would it increase addiction?"

"Even if marginal use and addiction increased, it might be worth it if it reduced crime. We're not going to arrest, prosecute and imprison our way out of this."

"It is a war that should be fought by the surgeon general, not the attorney general. Smoking used to be sexy. We've made drinking and driving a more serious matter." Public attitudes can be affected toward drugs.

Simon and Conyers agreed that education, better schools, giving everyone a stake in society, more treatment centers and effective law enforcement are the way to go. And that more and more prisons are not.

It's ridiculous to send addicts to prison, Conyers said. "There are more drugs in the joint than out on the street. We have to provide more treatment — that is the incredible crime that the government commits."

WHETHER ANY MINDS were changed by the debate was unclear. But at least two in the audience found some argumentative holes.

Birmingham Temple rabbi, Sherwin Wine, thought Simon got the best of the debate, but said he continues to oppose legalization.

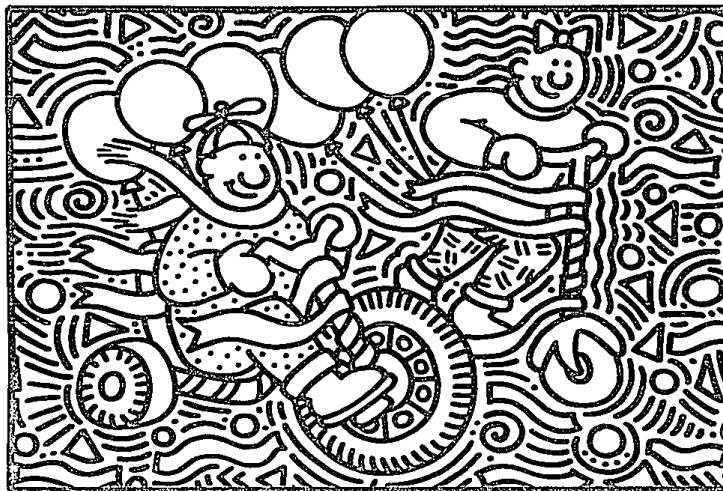
Simon's point that tobacco and alcohol are unregulated isn't relevant, Wine said. "Drugs aren't the same as other addictive substances — they're totally disorienting."

West Bloomfield High School senior Matt Berman also picked up on that. "I came in favor of Congressman Conyers. Drugs are addicting. That's the one thing they seemed to be missing."

"My mind is open to an alternative along the lines of decriminalization," said Shirley Sklar of Southfield at the evening's end.

"I don't know," said Gisele Feldman of Farmington Hills. "I believe in the family and more education and more jobs."

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Dr. Julius Harwood of West Bloomfield makes a point during the discussion following the debate.