

Opinion

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O.R. Thursday, January 25, 1990

Liquor laws

Stronger sanctions are must

TOUGHER SANCTIONS will give Farmington Hills' crackdown on liquor law enforcement more clout. Make no mistake about that.

So we support the central theme of a plan outlined by the city's special counsel to curtail the sale of alcohol to minors.

The plan calls for the city:

- To aggressively prosecute anyone who sells alcohol to minors.

- To hold a show-cause hearing for licensees with repeated violations.

- To revoke or recommend suspension of licenses in flagrant cases.

- To require licensees to have employees who sell alcohol to go through mandatory training provided by the police.

- To develop an ordinance that deals specifically with the handling of licensees who sell alcohol to minors.

We suggest that the show-cause hearings be held each year before May 1, when the city's liquor licenses come up for renewal. Renewal must no longer be considered automatic — by the city, licensees or the state.

WE ECHO councilman Terry Sever's belief that the Michigan Liquor Control Commission "has been consistently soft" on offenders through its reluctance to suspend licensees — perhaps the most effective penalty of all.

Why not couple a steep fine, \$750 to \$1,000, with a stiff suspension, 15-30 days, for licensees whose businesses repeatedly violate the law? It's worth underscoring that selling alcohol is a privilege — not a right.

Meanwhile, employees who show callous disregard for the law should be aggressively prosecuted in 47th District Court, where they face a maximum penalty of \$500 and 90 days in jail. A hefty fine and even jail time should be handed down for repeat offenders.

Minors who possess alcohol — and ultimately their parents — also should face strong punishment. State Senate Bill 629 calls for minors in

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possession to pay a fine of \$100-\$500, up substantially from the current \$25.

TOKEN PENALTIES aren't enough. Heck, we're not talking about relatively insignificant offenses.

Would you like to be driving along a winding, two-lane road toward an oncoming car driven by a teen enjoying the high from an illegally purchased six-pack of beer or carafe of wine?

No licensee can argue Farmington Hills is suddenly coming down hard after years of laxly enforcing liquor laws. Police have conducted six well-publicized, undercover stings since late 1986 — an average of two a year.

Last amid the controversy surrounding use of police cadets as decoys in the stings is a key point: the city isn't arbitrarily trying to put bars, restaurants or party stores out of business or deprive owners of their livelihood.

It's simply trying to prevent the sale of alcohol to minors — something 70 percent of the licensees tend to do on a regular basis.

Remember, the burden is on licensees to card every young adult, no matter how old they look. Patron attitudes, meanwhile, must change to accept carding as a routine part of dining out.

Restaurant owners argue that teens in search of alcohol are more apt to test a party store. But they're overlooking that Farmington Hills is home to teens with plenty of cash to spend in fine restaurants. No licensees can ever let down their guard.

Stiffer fines, longer license suspensions, license revocations, jail time — tougher sanctions all — must be invoked when warranted. If strong liquor law enforcement is to truly work.

Police layoffs

City's actions affect suburbs

WHAT COLEMAN Young does regarding threatened police layoffs in Detroit is of great concern to our communities because when the nation focuses on Michigan, its eyes are on Detroit.

The rest of the country doesn't know much about Birmingham or Livonia. When it hears about this region of southeastern Michigan, at least lately, it hears about laying off police.

Don't lay off the police. A strong police force in Detroit benefits more than just that city.

Redford and Southfield, two communities in two counties that share borders with Detroit, need cooperation to continue fighting crime and drug battles. If all interested parties do their part, at least there's hope. Otherwise, a weak link in the chain could set everyone back.

Even some of our communities that don't share borders with Detroit, such as Troy or Plymouth, still have officers that need good lines of communication with Detroit police to solve area crimes. Fewer officers means the remaining members of the force will be forced to either put work aside or target almost all entirely.

That's just on the law enforcement end.

SOMEONE, SOMEWHERE, probably during the sensitive '70s, penned the phrase, "perception is reality."

Much as we may want to believe Young when he says the city is safe, come on in and enjoy it, news reports highlight other realities and give us a different perception. That of a city weighed down with violent crime, frequent shootings, muggings and pervasive drug traffic.

Politics aside, it's hard to accept an invitation to go to dinner or a play in a city that has more than its share of problems now, not to speak of how those problems could escalate with a diminished force.

That doesn't mean the suburbs don't have crime problems. Property crimes are alive and well in Oakland County; grisly murders or car bombings are not unheard of in western Wayne County.

We also have our share of extremely violent crimes and criminals, such as Steve Szeman, who is accused of a string of sexual assaults in Oakland County and is expected to plead guilty soon. He already has been sentenced for a similar crime in another state.

ALL THIS MEANS one thing: crime is everywhere. Detroit can't let its guard down.

A few years ago during cutbacks, Michigan State Police were brought in to patrol the freeways in Detroit because there weren't enough officers to handle the job.

All communities benefit from state police patrols; they augment services that would be severely missed in some communities. One might

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question the balance of rerouting patrols into Detroit instead of along I-696 in Farmington Hills.

Farmington Hills is just as deserving as Detroit, and vice versa, of those enhanced patrols.

DEVELOPMENT AND BUILDING up Detroit are two more good reasons to keep the force intact.

It's no secret that a lot of suburban developers have built, or are approached about building, businesses and living quarters in Detroit.

Safety is a major concern when the issue on the table is whether or not to invest millions in Detroit. Mike Birch of Bloomfield Hills did just that, reconfiguring the Fox Theatre and moving Little Caesars out of Farmington Hills, and into the adjacent office building. But others might not be so optimistic or confident without a feeling of safety.

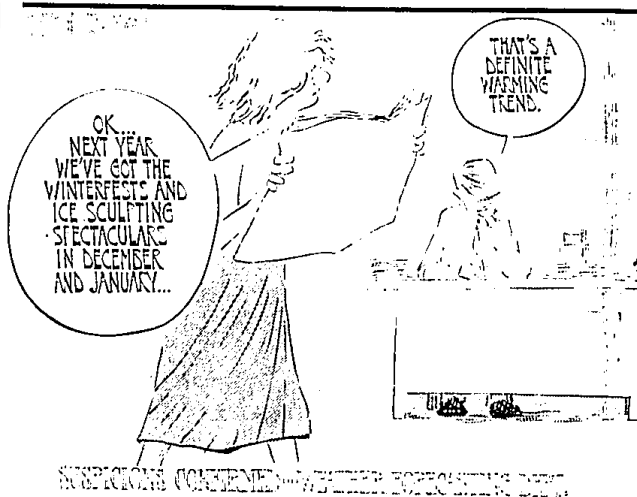
That might be one small example in itself to consider. To keep the Fox safe during budget cutbacks on the force, officers will have to be redirected from other areas. That will strain already thin system of coverage, and leave another area of the city more vulnerable than it might need to be.

BUT THERE'S ONE more reason that should be mentioned. Thinning out the ranks may put more officers at risk of personal injury. It's something we never want to see happen, but the chance is there.

Fewer officers could mean less staffing in critical areas, high tempers, tension and then unfortunate results.

There isn't much that can match the sadness of watching police officers from Detroit, the suburbs we serve, and outstate areas lining up for the funeral of an officer slain in the line of duty. Maybe there isn't a direct correlation between fewer police and increased incidents of personal injury, but it certainly increases the chances.

No one wants to see that happen. For the sake of Detroit, the communities that want to enjoy and lend support to the city, and the police themselves, we'd like to see the mayor find a way to balance his budget without laying off police officers.



Must be a better way to reward our young

IMAGINE GETTING up one morning, looking in the mirror and, instead of seeing that usual happy mug, you see the face that you wore around two decades ago.

That's what happened to me last Sunday as I sat in Risen Christ Lutheran Church down on Ann Arbor Road in Plymouth Township. Oh no, it wasn't any kind of out-of-body or supernatural experience. Nothing like that.

It was much simpler. Much more real.

It made me realize how much too willing this country is to sacrifice its young in war.

As services ended I stood up, turned around and was faced with a young man in military uniform. U.S. Army. To be exact. Nothing unusual about that. Lots of kids in the service. But it was the badge he wore that made a difference.

Few in the Army wear it. None of the other branches give it. So it stands out. And it was the badge that made me see myself 21 years ago.

SOMEWHERE TUCKED away in a drawer is that same badge. It's tarnished and its blue paint is chipped around the edges. Occasionally I run across it, gaze at it for a few seconds and put it back, to be found yet another day.

You don't have to be a hero to wear this badge. No, you just have to

show up, be in the right place and stay alive. The Army calls it the Combat Infantry Badge, commonly referred to by grunts as a CIB.

If you're in combat, you get to wear a CIB.

You'll see some of them around, now. Maybe you've seen them already. Our young soldiers who participated in the Panamanian military intrusion will be wearing them. Just so you know, the CIB is blue infantry colors, rectangular with a rifle in the middle, surrounded by a wreath.

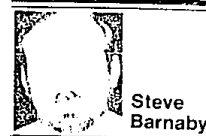
Obviously this young man standing in church was proud. And he did look good, all polished and shined. I remember being proud and polished and shined when I wore my CIB the first time home from Vietnam.

This week the Observer & Eccentric carried first hand accounts from local soldiers who recently returned from Panama. Like myself 21 years ago, they were proud and sure that what they had done was the right thing.

Livonia's Marine Lance Cpl. Richard Sudz explained his feelings.

"When we went on supply runs, wherever we went, the people were celebrating, thanking us," he said.

I remembered walking through the villages of Vietnam 21 years ago and the people thanking us. Then I remembered walking through the



Steve Barnaby

villages of Vietnam last November seeing a people in control of their own country for the first time and being proud and free from colonial rule.

It made me wonder how long it will before Central America is free from American military domination.

And then I thought of all the dead young men whose names are inscribed on the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C., and the young men who went to Panama last year and came home for Christmas in caskets.

CIBs don't mean a thing if you're dead, not even 21 years later.

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

Farmington readers' forum

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King article is uplifting

To the editor:
Cheers to the Observer for publishing such an uplifting article on the front page of the Jan. 18 paper ("Sharing A Dream" — the story of the second graders at Flanders Elementary on Martin Luther King Jr. Day).

Cheers, also, to Mike Flanagan and the Farmington school district for encouraging good use within the district to salute one of the peacekeepers of our time.

The creative use of the day in school seems to far surpass just giving the children a "day off," with only brief recognition of the reason for its importance.

Pam Wright,
Farmington

Outreach — a terrific plus

To the editor:
My mother participates in the Kan Doo Stroke Club at the Mercy Conference Center. We are deeply grateful for this outreach program.

The Tuesday morning meetings are well organized and always well attended. The success is due to the praiseworthy attitudes and efforts of the attendees and the loving support

of the volunteer staff.

In addition to informative speaking, the social activities and sharing of resources in difficult situations have provided strength to people who make the effort to be present. We especially appreciate the use of the van and the driver, the lunch and the excellent planning behind the scenes.

Elaine Roy,
Farmington Hills

Ban spurs questions

To the editor:

I live less than a mile from the private Community Center and the city's Heritage Park. I have heard one of the center's outdoor concerts from my back yard. I have also heard outdoor concerts sponsored by the city in Heritage Park.

I do not argue with the claim that a few of these concerts were "too loud," because "loudness" is relative. What is "too loud" for one may not be "too loud" for another.

Several additional facts we must remember: In 1988, the planning commission approved the center's construction of an outdoor bandshell, knowing it was to be wired for amplification. If the board of directors for the privately owned center votes to close the center, the building goes to the library — if the library doesn't want it, it goes to the city. And remember, in 1989, the library

attempted to get voter approval for more space and a larger operation — but failed.

If the sound from the center has been so bad, why haven't the four protesters been joined by any equal or greater number of other neighbors? Why hasn't the planning commission accepted a maximum decibel level (suggested by the center and the Observer) to give "loudness" a definition, rather than banning amplification?

What assurance can the commission or council give the center that their concerts will not be judged too "loud" even without amplification? Why hasn't the commission made an issue out of the amplified concerts the city has sponsored in Heritage Park?

To whom is the planning commission accountable on decisions like their "no amplification" ban? What can the council do to prevent a future planning commission decision from creating an even more dangerous dilemma for the council?

The simple facts of this issue do not explain why it has mushroomed into an impassioned — threatening the center, making the council appear impotent and consuming hours of tax-paid time.

Currently, the privately owned center does not consume (directly) our tax dollars. Its operation is financed by user fees and charitable gifts. Maybe the planning commission's torpedo is designed to change all that.

John E. Miller,
Farmington Hills

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