

points of view

Fred has cost state taxpayers bundles

TURNING HIS state of the state message into a TV show, Gov. James Blanchard introduced seven families of "Michigan Superstars."

These were fine folks who had been helped by one state program or another to help themselves — "to save for college, to get better skills for better jobs, to buy a home, to build a business, or rebuild their neighborhood," said Blanchard.

The governor failed to mention "Michigan's superdrains" like Fred (not his real name), who cost us big bundles of tax money and never do anything for society in return.

THE DAY before Blanchard's speech, the state Court of Appeals ruled against Fred. He had appealed Wayne Probate Judge Frances Pitts' (real name) decision to terminate his paternal rights to the daughter he had sired.

The girl was born Dec. 29, 1988, to 13-year-old Denise (not her real name), who won the court ruling against Fred on Feb. 23, 1989.

Fred is 14 and in the eighth grade. He provided no support for Denise during her pregnancy. He provided no support for the baby. Neither did his family.

The judge said Fred has "a file and a record" and is himself a temporary ward of the court on a neglect petition. He lives with an aunt.

(I attempted to look up the original court file to flesh out Fred's biography, but a clerk in Wayne County couldn't find the case number on her computer. I went to three other offices before giving up.)

BECAUSE of his age, Fred wants the baby to be placed in custody of a second aunt, Winnie (not her real name).

The court opinion said Aunt Winnie has three sons (no husband is mentioned) and lives on general assistance, a welfare program that few states but Michigan dole out.

Fred wanted Judge Pitts to appoint a lawyer to represent him. She refused. He appealed. The Court of



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Appeals upheld the judge, citing a Supreme Court opinion that "the probate court has discretionary authority to appoint counsel to assist an indigent, non-custodial parent... but we can discern no language which requires the probate court to do so."

BLANCHARD'S "SUPERSTARS" needed only one program per family to help them. But let's count the ways Fred has cost us tax money:

- He has been neglected (not his fault), requiring the attention of a \$90,000-plus judge and her staff. The Wayne County records, if anyone

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could locate them, probably would show he's on welfare.

- He apparently has been in scrapes with the law himself, one infers from the appeals court record.

- He has had sex with a girl of 12 or 13.

- He has helped bring into the world an out-of-wedlock child who starts life with 2.9 strikes against her.

- He has never given the mother or his child a dime of support, leaving that to others.

- He took up court time (money)

fighting Denise's effort to terminate his parental rights.

- He wants custody to go to a woman on welfare who no doubt would be able to use the baby to collect more welfare.

- He failed to get a court-appointed lawyer at the probate court level but apparently succeeded in getting one to go to the Court of Appeals.

- The Court of Appeals panel consists of three learned judges who collect nearly \$100,000 annually

apiece. They have offices, law books, computers, clerks, telephones and research staff. They produce a six-page opinion, which is considerably longer and more researched than the typical 1½ pages.

(Source: Appeals Court case No. 115869, entitled *In the Matter of April Archer, Minor*, decided Jan. 9.) No, Blanchard won't talk about the Superdrains like Fred who are costing the state far more than the Superstars.

FOOTNOTE: The Court of Appeals caseload in 1989 was 28 percent higher than the year before. The Supreme Court is recommending that nine judges be added to the 24-judge Appeals Court.

That's where our tax money really is going.

Tim Richard heads the news service of Suburban Communications Corp., parent company of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

Importance of books is lost on our youth

LAST YEAR at this time, Ronald Hairston and Carlton Collins were just a couple of middle class teenagers, recently graduated from high school, never really been in any trouble of consequence, enjoying life as only teenagers can.

Today both are in jail.

A blow against knowledge is the way that Judge Alice Gilbert described the crime which destroyed the Southfield High School library. On Feb. 20, 1989, Hairston and Collins broke into their alma mater and set several fires.

The majority of \$2.5 million in damage was to the library facility.

Last week Gilbert sentenced the two to 4-10 years in jail and fined them more than \$2 million.

It's tough to figure, this one. Journalists spend a lot of time covering crimes. Murder, drugs, robbery have become all too common places. We have come to understand that often

they are linked in a vicious circle of addiction and greed. We abhor these crimes, but in some morbid way, they have an order, a reason, however sick.

BUT ATTACKING a library, burning books. To what end? Neither Hairston or Collins ever really gave much of a reason for their act. Thousands of volumes were destroyed. The building was closed down.

The community was in shock. Before being sentenced, with tears in their eyes, both of the perpetrators apologized. But it really was too late for apologies. The scar is just too deep.

Under most circumstances my political leanings recoil at harsh sentences for first offenders. Prisons, after all, rarely help anyone, rarely act as a deterrent. But somehow there is something different about this crime. And it is questionable whether



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Collins or Hairston understand the gravity of their offense. If they had, it is doubtful they would have set those fires.

It is doubtful whether either understands the importance of books to our society.

AND YOU have to ask yourself, how many other Carlton Lee Collins and Ronald Hairstons are there waiting to destroy something of which they have no respect? It's frightening to think about.

These young men weren't hoodlums. In many ways, they had a pretty good life.

This act of wanton destruction is an indication that the "normal" children in our society often aren't getting the message. But then again, maybe they aren't being sent the message, either.

While the sentence certainly seems just, Gilbert's line of more than \$2.3 million seems a waste. They obviously never will be able to pay. Perhaps a better fine would be to make them become intimately involved with the care and nurturing of books for many years to come.

And for those other regular kids out there who really don't have an appreciation of books and their relationship to a free society, it's up to us, you and I, parents and teachers, to see to it that they gain the respect that books and ideas deserve in this

society.

It's the only way we will preserve this democracy.

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

know your government

Looking for information about state government? The League of Women Voters has a toll-free telephone service (1-800-292-5823) that may be helpful.

The league's Citizen Information Center in Lansing offers to help people find out about such things as pending legislation, the state constitution, election laws, voting regulations or tax information.

The telephone is answered from 10:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. weekdays.

The telephone service is paid for by the league's education fund. The League of Women Voters is a non-profit organization that works to keep voters interested and informed about governmental issues.

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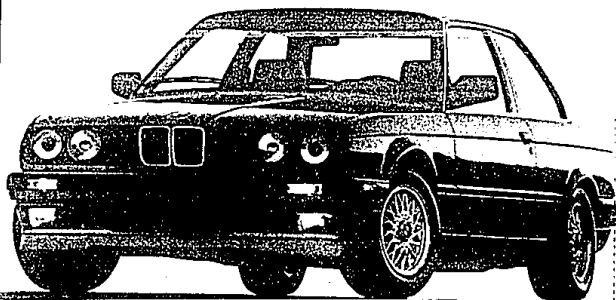
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YOU CAN TELL IT FROM AN IMITATION WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED.

THE BMW 3-SERIES

These days, you'd be hard-pressed to find an import car dealer not offering models that are "just like a BMW."

Flattering as this may be, there are quite a number of different ways to tell them apart. One of which, we think you will agree, is rather simple.

First, step inside a BMW 3-Series. Then, after you've closed the door, sit back and close your eyes.

You'll find yourself surrounded in a cockpit of sheer ergonomic perfection. Lean back and its adjustable seats grip you with support. Reach forward and you'll find its control panel is right at your fingertips. As easy to find with your eyes closed as it would be driving at highway speeds at night.

Turn the key and, as a well-known American automotive editor has stated, you'll know instantly that it's a BMW. In fact, another editor went so far as to

write, "If I could sing like the engine in the BMW 325is, I'd pack Carnegie Hall for weeks (Car and Driver)." For an eye-opening performance of your own, stop by your nearest authorized BMW dealer for a test drive.

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