

points of view

# Progressive action not unique to Ann Arbor

TUESDAY MORNING I wished that I still lived in Ann Arbor.

Then I might have been a part of that community's thoughtful discussions on what I see as the three burning issues of our day — abortion, drugs and the environment.

Ann Arbor voted to:

- Create an "zone of reproductive freedom" in case federal or state laws ever ban abortion.
- Increase the fine for marijuana use from \$5 to \$25, recognizing that pot smoking is not as frivolous as it once was for a number of reasons, including higher potency.
- Spend money to expand the

city's landfill and create more recycling programs.

Now, that's an enlightened community!

BUT ANN ARBOR doesn't have a license on enlightenment. Communities covered by the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers also are taking progressive action.

Southfield is leading the way in plans for curbside recycling. Starting in July 1, three trucks will come down that city's streets, one for garbage, another for recyclables and another for grass clippings and leaves for composting. Redford



Judith Doner Berne

Township is not far behind, holding a public hearing later this month on curbside trash separation. Southfield also is stepping up to growing segregation in its schools. Following a series of community dialogues, a consultant has been hired

to come up with a plan to achieve racial balance throughout the district. That school board is not ignoring the fact that one of its high schools has a 70-30 black-to-white student ratio while the other's is just the reverse. Or that one elementary school has 86 percent black students while another has just 9.5 percent.

And speaking of segregation, a number of Oakland County communities have banded together to support the new Center for Open Housing, which hopes to promote suburban integration. These include Beverly Hills, Birmingham, Farmington

Hills, Lathrup Village and Southfield.

MEANWHILE FARMINGTON'S new superintendent — who does not have an academic background by the way — is not content with merely creating business/school partnerships. He is pushing for businesspeople to mentor individual students.

And, a new model high school will open in Bloomfield Hills this fall based on new roles for teachers and students. That school system has just received a \$750,000 RJR Nabisco Foundation grant to help fund it. About 84 students have been ac-

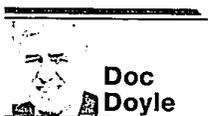
cepted into the program, which approaches teaching with a different philosophy. Students are workers, teachers are coaches and grades are de-emphasized. Courses are multidisciplinary and offered in two-hour blocks.

The students are a mixture of achievement levels, grades, schools, and cultural background. Now who was it said she wanted to live in Ann Arbor?

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

## Retirement bonuses save schools money

Q: Our school district is going to give an \$18,000 bonus to teachers who are eligible to retire this year. As a teacher, I don't begrudge those who have served children for 30 or more years this benefit. However, many of my teacher peers who have many more years to work before retirement are upset. We are a district just barely getting by and to pay a one-time bonus for up to 20 teachers just doesn't make sense. We need new textbooks and materials. We also admit some selfishness because the money the retirees get is money that won't be available for a new contract next year. I know many taxpayers that are also upset. Why do school boards and administration enter into these agreements?



Doc Doyle

In your case, the savings grow each year until the new teachers reach the maximum salary level. Look at the second year. The new teachers in your district will be paid about \$25,000. The cost of those 15 teachers will be \$375,000 in the second year.

Had the 20 teachers not retired the cost to the district would be approximately \$920,000. The district will save \$445,000 the second year.

Even assuming five of the 20 teachers who were eligible for retirement do not retire the district would still save \$315,000 in the second year alone. So, in most cases, the bonus is not a benevolent gesture by a school district but a sound business decision — one in which both the district and retiring teacher benefit.

However, I have also known some school districts drawn into retirement

plans that were fine for teachers but cost the district lots of money.

For instance, one district many years ago, gave a pay out from age 55 to 62 for about \$4,000 a year. Declining enrollment set in and no new teachers were hired. Lay offs went back to 10 years of seniority. Now you have a situation where money was going out to the retirees yet no money was saved because no new teachers were needed. And when teachers were called back they were at the top of the salary schedule.

In this case a teacher making \$45,000 in his/her retirement year would receive a bonus of \$8,000 only to be replaced by a recalled teacher who will earn \$45,000.

Business wise, the plan only works if a district is losing their highest paid teachers and must hire new teachers at the lowest end of the pay scale.

Dr. James Doyle is a former assistant superintendent in the Troy School District. Questions for this column should be sent to Doc Doyle, c/o Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

## A quick incident tells a society's sad story

THE WORLD is getting uncomfortably small.

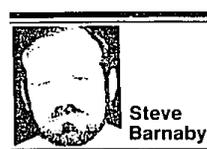
This week fresh back from a stay at my favorite hideaway on Florida's Sanibel Island, I was shocked back to reality.

As a colleague and I pulled into the parking lot of a local hotel we heard the shouts, "You're under arrest, this is a drug raid, get down on the ground!"

Looking up we saw four men, armed with M-16s and other assorted weapons running in our direction. It only took a few seconds to realize that an individual a few vehicles down the row was the target of their displeasure.

My colleague and I stood frozen, the safety of the hotel lobby seeming far, far away and our vehicles feebly substituting as armor from the potential of ricocheting bullets from the high-powered assault weapons. A distant yet familiar feeling, not experienced since my combat days in Vietnam, swept over me.

"THIS COULD be trouble," I joked with myself. For me relieving the tension of combat was always through humor. It was nothing intentional, purely instinctive. I remember how shocked I was after the first time it happened more than 20 years ago. After all, nobody in the movies



Steve Barnaby

ever joked during combat.

It was only after the combat situation was completed that the more "normal" emotions came back, the ones you and I as regular folks imagine we would feel under the circumstances — fright, anger, regret and resentment.

After the federal drug enforcement officials had apprehended their man, I nervously laughed (another strange habit). The agents glared our way, not appreciating the humor. "Guess this isn't the place to be," I said to my colleague with a smile. They glared again. ("C'mon Barnaby, shut up," I told myself, "let's get out of here.")

WE DID get out, to the hotel. I looked back, through the window, once again feeling all the emotions we imagine we should feel under those circumstances.

Anger, more than anything else, predominated. I felt assaulted. Once again, some slime bag drug dealer, interested in only making a lot of money had invaded my space, my society, violated my heritage of what the world should be like.

I wanted to go back out in the parking lot and punch the big creep in the chops. Naturally, I didn't.

The entire incident reminded me once again how much the greed involved in drug peddling has screwed up our society.

I watched the agents doing their job, catching this one drug pusher who today is probably back out on the street destroying lives, including his own. And I realized that while they were arresting this one guy, dozens of other pushers were plying their trade within miles, unnoticed and unapprehended.

My humor was gone. The anger flagged.

Resentment set in as I remembered that 11.1 miles away the President of the United States was in town, blindly campaigning for his party, unaware of the invasion that had just happened in my community.

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

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