

points of view

Jaded materialism doesn't permeate suburbs

GIVEN OUR level of prosperity and the quality of life in southeastern Michigan, one would think this is the top of the heap.

Yet two educational leaders — R. Stephen Nicholson and C. Nelson Grote — have chosen to move on. And it appears they haven't changed their goals about educating the communities they serve.

Nicholson, 64, could have retired as Oakland Community College's chief executive in a short spell. He chose instead to head for the United Arab Emirates, a hot but wealthy little nation whose inland border with Saudi Arabia is so sandy that it's not even defined on any globe.

"IT'S NOT an underdeveloped country. It's highly developed," Nicholson said at his going-away party last week. "They say they have 400,000 residents and 500,000 expatriates who do the work. They told me they'd have trouble fixing an elevator without outside help. They want to learn to operate their own country."

As of this week, Nicholson is vice chancellor in charge of the colleges of technology. He reports to a chancellor instead of a seven-member elected board.

In his earlier years, Nicholson was a missionary, and a strong streak of the Christian humanitarianism shows through. I observed it last November



Tim Richard

on a trip with him and other community college leaders to that wretched stretch of the earth known as the Gaza Strip.

But Nicholson isn't going to the United Arab Emirates with missionary work in mind. He candidly admitted they got him by "flattery." They said they had the money to hire the best, and he was the best.

Nicholson is a sociologist and cultural anthropologist. In his new job on the Persian Gulf, just a short jaunt from Iran, he will help guide a Middle Eastern oil nation into the 21st century. Much as he loved Oakland County, it was an offer he couldn't refuse.

I only hope he doesn't melt in the 110-degree heat.

GROTE WAS president of Schoolcraft College in northwestern Wayne County for the better part of a decade, bringing on a lot of technology programs and surviving two recessions.

He left for what looked like an ideal two-campus job in Spokane, Wash., but about three years ago he went back to a four-year college to

which he had strong ties.

It's Morehead State University, and it's in the Appalachian foothills of eastern Kentucky. Grote sent me a local newspaper supplement shortly after his arrival. One had to read between the lines, but it looked as if he had walked into a hornet's nest.

"It was a hornet's nest all right," Grote agreed at a recent social gathering of the Schoolcraft Old Guard. "They had lost students. They came within an inch — within an inch — of being closed and converted to a prison."

What a sad social commentary that would have been!

To make several years of work into a short story, Grote has led a turnaround. The student body has grown from 5,000 to some 8,500.

Most of the students come from nearby counties. It's not the kind of comfortable, middle-class existence of Livonia, Garden City and Plymouth-Canton. But Grote has a sense of accomplishment.

"At commencement, Nelson asks the graduates who are the first in their families to attend college to stand," said Wilma Grote, his excited wife of 41 years. A lot of them stand. A lot.

Idealism. Devotion to teaching. Who said the suburbs are loaded with jaded materialism?

Tim Richard is director of the Suburban Communications News Service. SCN is the parent company of the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers.

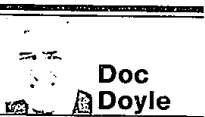
Teachers sometimes couch their viewpoint

Q: My fifth grade son's report card had a written comment. It said, "He needs help in learning to express himself at the appropriate time." I have received similar comments on report cards about my three children over the years, and sometimes I am not sure what the comments truly mean. Can you help?

A: Elementary teachers often use euphemisms to keep from putting kids down and not offend parents in the hope the child will grow out of any inappropriate behavior.

Since you and I are friends and have discussed the teacher's comment, you know I am responding to the typical teacher type euphemism with tongue in cheek.

"He needs to express himself at appropriate times" probably means he blurts out in class and interrupts other students and the teacher and should keep his mouth shut when others are speaking.



Doc Doyle

Let's think of some others and what the teacher really means:

"Will accomplish a task when interested and frequently stimulated." This means he/she won't work until the teacher is pushing her every minute of the day.

"Is a nice boy but sometimes resorts to physical means to win his point with smaller children." He is probably a bully who will eventually get his "clock cleaned" when he pushes the wrong kid.

"Needs to develop a sense of independence, he only seems secure in group situations." He can't make a

decision — a born follower.

"Needs some direction in improving table manners in the cafeteria." This could mean he/she has disgusting eating habits and everyone knows it.

"Sometimes shows a lack of maturity in relationships with others." Acts like a baby and should grow up.

"Needs guidance in developing good hygiene habits." Needs to take a bath.

Teachers care about their children and therefore use euphemisms so as not to destroy their relationship. However, I often wonder if parents were fully aware of the messages being given in softer language.

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, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia 48150.

Public deserves say in development wars

THE OLD MAN smiled gently when I told him I had worked in Farmington for 10 years.

We were standing on the shores of Burt Lake, taking in the first glints of summer sun. The Saginaw area was his home now, had been for many years. But in 1935 he had worked in Farmington.

"I get back to that area once in a while to visit a friend. Sure has changed," he remarked, looking out over the sandy beach.

His eyes glistened, as he recalled the old golf course which once graced the west side of town just off Grand River and all the old farms north of 10 Mile.

Then he hesitated, looked around and said:

"You know, those malls out there in Novi are really something. I've just never really seen anything like that." There was a bit of gleeful mischief in his voice, referring to the mega-development around Novi Road and I-96.

After a moment, he became more somber.

"I guess I understand the big malls. It's just too bad that all the open land down there is disappearing," he said, shaking his head. "Nobody minds development, but



Steve Barnaby

it looks like somebody down there wants to make sure that there isn't one piece of empty space left."

THIS CONVERSATION came back to me the other day when reading about the legislation our lawmakers are contemplating. It's a package that certainly deserves support from anyone who really cares about a more orderly development of this region.

For a decade now some developers have been using a field day seeing to it that wherever there was an empty space, a strip mall, bank, office building or house was covering it. Local officials, for the most part, either went along with this laissez-faire development orgy or just threw their hands up in frustration. The results were predictable — uncon-

trolled growth with little thought given to the impact on the community.

But State Rep. David Holtzman, R-West Bloomfield, is sponsoring a package of legislation that he hopes will bring back some sanity to the development process. In part the package would give some clout to municipalities that wish to be something other than a series of strip malls.

Nothing particularly radical about these bills. Basically the proposed laws expand the definition of "park" to include open space, natural areas, wildlife areas and bird sanctuaries. If passed the legislation would allow communities to make special assessments to preserve open space and natural areas.

Not surprisingly, the Southeastern Michigan Builders Association and the Apartment Association of Michigan are opposed to enactment. They fear the use of eminent domain to stop development.

Nothing to fear. It will be a relief to have control of development back in the hands of the public rather than the private sector, which has demonstrated that its greed in too many cases overcomes any sense of civic responsibility.

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