

Opinion

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City agenda

Downtown concerns near top

WHY DID THE shopper cross the road? To get to the other side and hopefully spend some money of course.

And let's just say that road is Grand River Avenue in downtown Farmington. Are there enough reasons for the shopper to cross to the north side of Grand River?

Officials, both in the city and the Downtown Development Authority, have to keep on providing reasons for folks to cross Farmington's busy main street from the solid businesses in the shopping center to the south to the relative obscurity to the north.

Downtown redevelopment should remain an important item on the 1991 agenda of the city of Farmington, 64-years-old and struggling to retain its small-town character while sandwiched between fast-growing Farmington Hills and Livonia.

Actually, the Farmington DDA has done wonders under director Wendy Strip Sittsamer, and we expect even better things for the old business district.

The DDA, now past the half-way point in its "streetscape" changes, must look at ways to market and promote downtown. Hiring that part-time promotions director would seem to be a smart move at this time.

LET'S HOPE that person can pull the merchants together in the marketing effort, no small task considering their independent natures.

Officials also should continue to monitor private building projects both downtown and elsewhere in the city to make sure they blend in with the plan.

Downtown is an important aspect of tiny Farmington, and officials are right to pay attention to it. But there other items for the city's '91 agenda. In our opinion, some of them are:

- Historic preservation — Farmington's history — and there's a lot of it left, happily — must

never be compromised for development's sake. The historic district is as much a part of the community as the business district. Officials must do whatever is necessary to protect property values in Old Village, a historic gem with few equals in Oakland County.

- Solid waste — It's good that Farmington is a member of the Resource Recovery and Recycling Authority of Southwest Oakland County, which takes an active role in reducing the cost of trash removal. It also strikes us that City Manager Robert Deadman, the group's chairman, seems to have a good handle on costs and options. Remember, Farmington, like neighboring Farmington Hills, starts curbside trash recycling this summer. It's every residents' responsibility to see that the program is carried out.

- TRAFFIC congestion — Widening of Orchard Lake Road has started. A smoother, wider Orchard lake will help traffic by providing a good north-south route for traffic not headed downtown. Members of the Old Village Association have gotten involved in traffic concerns last year. Good for them. Let's have more citizen involvement in city problems.

- Industrial block — Farmington has two of them. The one along Eight Mile Road seems to have come upon hard times. The closing of Chesley Industries is a major blow, and there are several empty buildings. The city must work with the chamber of commerce and the business to do something to boost tenancy. That something, however, should not include tax abatements.

- Sewers — A \$12 million sewer improvement program — the largest public works project in the city's history — is at the midway point. Farmington officials were smart to get a jump on the project before being mandated to do so by the state or federal government.

There are a lot of big jobs to do in Farmington, but if we all pull together, they're manageable.

FBI probe

Guard your civil liberties

THE START SEEMS reasonable enough: the FBI nosing around for some tips on potential Arab terrorism in our suburban neighborhoods where large populations congregate. But it's the end that has Arab-Americans, and all others who value their civil rights, scared.

Those with a memory of history — World War II history — are scared most. Some are still left with scars from the experience.

"We don't want to have happen to us what happened to Japanese-Americans," said Westland businessman Sid Shaleen.

He was referring to the progressive denial of civil rights to Japanese-Americans, many of them born in the U.S., following the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Soon Japanese-Americans were denied access to certain areas along the west coast and eventually herded into barbed wire enclosed detention camps.

IT IS IMPORTANT that individuals and community groups continue to speak on the record for protection of civil liberties. Our liberty is diminished each time our brothers and sisters are mistreated.

While we fully support the need to maintain domestic security, we are concerned that an open-ended plan to interview leaders may have a

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negative impact on the greater community's perception of Arab-Americans," said Paul D. Borman, president of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Detroit.

Also commenting was the American Arabic and Jewish Friends organization, which drew attention to a concern that the probe would bring more anti-Arab feeling.

The FBI itself is responsible largely for the specter of repression. According to a recent professional journalism magazine, the FBI has one of the worst reputations in federal government for freedom of information requests. They are denied, or simply ignored. Indeed our questions to the bureau last week went unanswered. We have little confidence in an agency which is stingy with public information.

Unlike the shimmering line of a boundary in Saudi Arabia, there is a finer line which we're dealing with in our suburban communities. We all must guard against crossing it.

Enact handgun training

THE MICHIGAN Legislature in 1990 currently passed a uniform law regulating handguns.

But in ending the patchwork of local handgun ordinances, the state eliminated those requiring training for new handgun buyers. Lawmakers should remedy the flaw this year by requiring appropriate training.

Michigan already requires training in the use of potentially dangerous equipment.

- People born after Jan. 1, 1966 must have a hunter education certificate to buy their first hunting licenses. Some 1,700 volunteer instructors teach the eight-lesson course (The law was amended in 1988 gradually to require safety instruction for all first-time hunters.)

- People aged 12 to 16 must take state prescribed courses to operate pleasure boats with more than six-horsepower engines, snowmobiles, and off-road vehicles.

Sheriff's departments, Coast Guard auxiliaries and other agencies teach the course in many locations. Thousands of volunteers help.

Michigan, a state that relishes outdoor recreation and tourism, has put a premium on training for safety. No one need have qualms about requiring training for handling a pistol safely.

The uniform pistol law was the good idea of the National Rifle Association. But NRA was off base in opposing mandatory training.

NRA argues that private gun ownership is constitutionally protected. "A well regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free state, the right of the people to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." NRA sees mandatory training as a bogeyman, infringing on that right.

Not so. The right to vote is constitutionally protected. Although no one has to take a literacy test before registering to vote, Michigan requires school attendance to age 16, which is much the same thing.

State-mandated pistol training should be readily available. Frequently offered and cheap, Detroit's training ordinance was flawed because classes were allegedly infrequent and expensive.

Michigan has a good record in providing hunter, boater and snowmobile safety training. We trust it could do the same for pistol training.

Our precious constitutional right to bear arms will get a bad name if untrained people keep hurting themselves and others. State-mandated training for new pistol owners will help us preserve the right.



American dream slips due to professionals

MOST PEOPLE in Michigan are entering the '90s worse off than they were 20 years ago. Excepting the top 20 percent (whose income is up significantly), the last time most Michigan families could show real improvements in family income was the early '70s.

Since then, for Michiganders the American Dream has turned into a nightmare. This is another in a series of examinations of how and why.

The American Dream is made up not only of rising incomes. It promises a rising level of living in solid middle-class style.

Central to this style are three things: college, health care and keeping out of legal and financial trouble — for which prices have gone out of sight in the past 20 years. A falling pressure on falling incomes to keep up.

COLLEGE TUITIONS have gone through the roof in the past 10 years.

At the University of Michigan, in-state tuition has gone from \$1,475 per year to \$3,592 for the 1990 year. Other Michigan colleges have followed suit. If the budget cuts now being talked about by Gov. John Engler come to pass, we may be sure the universities will pass on most of their shortfall in income to their students — and parents.

At elite private colleges like Harvard, tuition from 1977 to 1989 has more than tripled while the consumer price index has doubled.

As any family with kids in college knows all too well, dollars to pay tuition, room, board, books, clothes and fun are after-tax dollars. A family making \$60,000 a year sounds well off, but after taxes that works out to around \$36,000. And if you take \$3,000 a year for two children in college, that's a big, big bite out of a family budget.

Why pay for a 5th year?

QUESTION: At a social gathering, I heard parents talking about how it took their children five years to get through supposedly four-year college programs. We have a son going to college next fall and have budgeted for a four-year degree program. What can we do to avoid getting stuck with paying for a fifth year?

ANSWER: I know one family which put three of its children through a major state university and all three had to go a fifth year to get a four-year degree. None of the three changed a major or took a second major, which should be the only legitimate reason for a fifth year.

We're not talking about the ramp-up social butterfly who is not ready to face the real world. We're talking about a system that seems to be structuring itself to hold students for five years.

I asked my four children and their friends, all of whom graduated from college, what percentage of college students do they estimate took five years to get a four-year degree? They estimated at least 40 percent of the students entering a four-year program needed a fifth year.

Why? One reason I believe is that some of the larger universities, either out of benevolence or their



HEALTH CARE is another necessity for middle-class living.

True, most health care costs are covered by employer-paid health insurance. But in a competitive world, the costs of health insurance translate to lower wages.

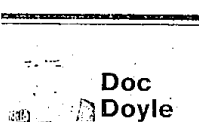
In 1960, our national health care costs were about 5 percent of total personal income. That went to 13 percent by 1989 — or more than 11 percent of our total gross national product.

The number of doctors rose from 279,000 in 1970 to 554,000 in 1988, an increase from 137 to 225 per 100,000 Americans. The incomes of those doctors rose by one-fourth during the past decade, to nearly \$150,000 a year, while other middle-class incomes were flat at best.

Judging by the usual indicators — Michigan ranks worst among the states in mortality from major disease and 10th worst in infant mortality. What we as a society put into health care is less than what we get out of it.

ANOTHER FACTOR in the slide of middle-class lifestyles is the growing infestation of our society by so-called professionals who do little to add value to our economy and who in practice have merely raised our costs and added to our aggravation.

Take lawyers. According to the *London Economist*, in 1960 America had 260,000 lawyers, by 1970, 355,000, in 1980, 541,000, and in 1990, 726,000.



heart or for money, are enrolling more students than they can handle.

OFTEN JUNIORS and seniors get locked out of courses required for graduation in their major area. Why? There are not enough course sections offered for certain required courses to handle all the students.

In some colleges the schedule is a problem. Some required courses are only offered every year. If the course is not offered in the senior year, and the student doesn't find out until the junior year, it's too late.

Sometimes summer school offers the course, sometimes it doesn't. Another major reason, I believe, is that many college departments over the years have increased the number of class requirements or the number of credit hours for a course.

At the same time many institutions have not decreased the number

The number of lawyers has nearly tripled in 30 years, the number per 100,000 Americans has gone from 145 to 301.

And we all know that much of the "demand" for services of lawyers is produced not by ordinary people trying to stay out of trouble but by other lawyers adding to their income.

Take lobbyists. In 1960 the U.S. Senate registered 3,656 paid lobbyists; as of last July, 33,704 — 337 per senator.

You tell me. What boost to the living standards of the middle class do these people produce?

HAVING ANTAGONIZED most professionals who read this column, I will end by diverting your notice to those friendly folks on Wall Street who assisted the demise of our living standards by:

- Destroying the stock market by repeated and brazen insider trading;
- Destroying the bond market by creating junk bonds which polluted solid corporate debt instruments.

- Milked outrageous fees from corporate raiders and beleaguered managements alike while using junk bonds as weapons in the corporate takeover game, thereby ruining scores of magnificent American corporations.

For these people, nothing is too awful. I delight in the recession now ravaging Wall Street.

Wall Streeters, lawyers, doctors and college administrators all have had a hand in the decline of the American Dream. They ran up their prices and took our money without much of it going to boost our living standards by:

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His anti-inflation column will appear periodically.

of equate courses courses to make student a well-rounded individual.

YOU ASK, "How can parents avoid getting stuck with paying for a fifth year?" Your son or you and your son should meet with his college advisor and find out exactly when all courses on his four year plan are being offered.

You must also inform your son that it is his responsibility to make an appointment each spring with his advisor to insure he is on track. Thousands of students go through the larger universities and never see an advisor. Your son is a big boy and on his schedule of classes, there is a number or name that identifies his advisor. Don't wait for the advisor to call, it's your responsibility.

Every spring find out if any changes are going to take place in next year's schedule. Always pre-register. Don't wait until the last day and stand in line.

Frankly I find it appalling the numbers of families getting stuck with paying tuition, activities fees, food and lodging for a fifth year.

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