

points of view

Studies must include service

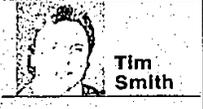
OUR SON CHOSE to pick up aluminum cans, mostly from construction sites, and take them to a Pontiac recycling center in the days before glass and aluminum beverage containers were redeemable. Our oldest daughter chose to be a late afternoon aide for kindergartners at our neighborhood elementary school. Our youngest was the manager of the girl's high school tennis team, which basically meant she lugged the bolts and picked up the trash left around the courts by the players. All three projects met the community service requirement which was part of the curriculum in their required ninth grade health class, and all three projects, the first two more so and the last somewhat, were among the more constructive things our children accomplished during that fragile freshman year in high school. So I was very glad to hear that a federal district court in Pennsylvania had dictated I wouldn't be eligible to sue the West Bloomfield School District for "involuntary servitude."



INCREDIBLY, SEVERAL PARENTS in the Bethlehem Area School District in eastern Pennsylvania claimed that district's community service requirement violated students' rights under the 13th Amendment of the Constitution, which prohibits slavery and involuntary servitude. But the judge in his wisdom dismissed the suit, explaining the obvious — community service is an educational activity. Probably the West Bloomfield School District wasn't in any real danger. The health class requirement of community service was only part of the health curriculum. Conceivably you could flunk community service, but if you did well in the rest of the course you might pass it. Not so in Bethlehem and not so in the more tangible Bloomfield Hills Schools and many area private schools where community service is a graduation requirement. Deputy superintendent Gary Doyle, who helped launch the Bloomfield Hills program, was involved in the case as one of a group of educators who submitted affidavits in support of students performing community service. EACH SEMESTER between 75 and 150 Bloomfield Hills students are involved in community projects from helping in nursing homes to working at the district's summer camp for impaired youngsters to taking part in home building projects for the needy. The teenage years are a naturally selfish age, a time when young people are caught up almost totally in themselves. An opportunity for them to give of themselves may turn out to offer them another perspective, at the least, and may build self-confidence and lead to changes in philosophy or even career choices, at the most. Rather than a court suit against such experiences, parents should urge their school districts to adopt such a requirement. Here's hoping the federal court's all-clear sign will act as a catalyst for school systems to mandate community service as a nearly cost-free addition to a well-rounded education. Judith Doner Berne is assistant managing editor for the Oakland County editions of the Observer & Eccentric.

Survival bottom line for workers

THEY'RE AT IT again, those companies that used to compete just fine in the marketplace while at the same time enabling good people to make a decent living and raise their families. Of course, in today's world, companies say both things can no longer happen at the same time. That includes companies like Kroger. Undoubtedly, that food chain's various headhunters and bean-counters are justifying what is a hideous contract offer to its clerks and cashiers by saying it's all within the rules as to how the 1990s business game is played. It's called watching the bottom line. Staying lean and mean. Maintaining that razor-sharp competitive edge. Hogwash. It's also called, "thanks for your many years of hard work and loyalty, but we can get somebody to do this a heckuva lot cheaper for us. . . . So long, and don't let the shopping cart hit you in the rear end on the way out."



YOU CAN count one fellow who I worked with at the Livonia store, and still play recreational hockey with today, among the latter. He still believed in Kroger as a place to make a living, even at the hockey rink on the recent Sunday night before the strike began. Although cognizant of the fact he was still making the \$10.37 hourly wage he was back when I worked with him in 1984, this single man didn't really want to strike. But he accepted the tougher stance of his colleagues, many with spouses and families, and is walking the picket line right along with them. So, too, must be many others here and I worked with a decade ago who, thanks to Kroger, were able to buy a car, send their children to college, enjoy a vacation every now and then, enjoy life. People like Larry, Maureen, Doris, Rudy. None of these people planned on writing for a newspaper someday. For them, Kroger was their career. They intended on stocking shelves, counting change and sweeping floors until they reached retirement age. AND WHAT'S wrong with that? My father was a truck driver who was able to do pretty well for himself without a college degree. I know many others who — blue collars and all — managed to make a living despite having little more going for them than the inclination to get their hands dirty. They're all good people, who, in the days when employers took care of their own, didn't have to resort to working two minimum-wage jobs merely to pay for groceries and utility bills. That's the real bottom line. Tim Smith is a staff writer for the West Bloomfield/Lakes Eccentric.

He stands tall among his peers

I HAVE LONG known that Gary Faber was the best principal in the state. Now the state knows it, too. The Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals has just said so. MASSP will recognize him as its High School Principal of the Year at its annual banquet in Traverse City on Dec. 2. Piloting West Bloomfield High to national recognition as one of America's 10 top high schools is just one of Faber's many stellar accomplishments. Earlier this month, I was privileged to visit Troy High School on the occasion of its being evaluated by a team of educators representing the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This is a process all high schools are required to undergo every seven years. The team was composed of outside specialists in the academic, administrative and budgetary techniques, school plant structure and essential programs such as athletics, the performing arts, media technology and multi-culturalism. Troy principal Larry Boehms and his multi-cultural committee are doing a good job of addressing the latter issue with staff awareness sessions and student interaction forums. Troy High's five-year outcomes accreditation plan is an ambitious piece of work, and the school has committed itself to be monitored by the NNAAC team for that period of time. I have no doubt that Troy will ultimately pass the NCA test with flying colors. NOR WILL this be a small accomplishment. Troy is being subjected to the scrutiny of a star-studded team whose members number among the very best in their fields. I found during my visit that I knew several of these stars, all of whom donate their time to this vital process. I've worked with some of them on NCA teams myself, or even more closely as their colleague in one school district or another during my multiple professional wanderings.



Beverly Stone, formerly one of my two top lieutenants in Rochester and my successor as assistant superintendent there, was on the team. So were my ex-boss Michael Homes, assistant superintendent in Plymouth/Canton; James Clatworthy, my colleague at Oakland University; Elana Irtzall, my former colleague in Rochester and now director of West Bloomfield's learning laboratory; Michael Yocum of the Oakland Intermediate District; and Jack MacDonald, retired executive director from Livonia. And who was the captain of this champion team? None other than the best high-school principal in Michigan. While I make my contribution to the profession every time I head up an NCA team, said Faber, "I also bring fresh ideas back to West Bloomfield. So even though the process is time-consuming, it benefits not only the evaluated school but the evaluator's school, too." This is from the man who, when I promoted him to Plymouth Canton's Lowell Middle School principalship in 1981, a board member protested that he was "too short."

Actually, Gary Faber stands taller than any principal around. It takes the best to lead the best. No wonder West Bloomfield has one of America's 10 top high schools — it has him. John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester School District. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth Canton District. @ Twice a week is better!

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