

Worth praising

Community spirit pays off

With spirit like this, ordinary people built America. With spirit like this, maybe they could take it back someday.

There was a massive outpouring of community spirit shown recently in the construction of that state-of-the-art playground next to Gill Elementary School in Farmington Hills.

Sure, it's just a playground in the southern end of the Farmington District. It's swings and sand and pea gravel and old tires and wooden things to play on. Big deal.

You can't even see it from Gill Road. Future generations of youngsters probably will shrug and take it for granted.

But they shouldn't. There should be some kind of a plaque at the playground entrance so folks don't forget June 1992 when something special happened in South Farmington. It was something worth remembering, something worth praising.

People, hundreds of them, came together to work hard for the common good. Over five hectic days last week, the people built the playground in the old-fashioned, barn-raising style used in pioneer days.

Considering the entire organization — the planning, the fund-raising, the actual building, the day care for the youngsters, the security, the food for the workers — maybe as many as 1,000 volunteers were involved in "raising" that play-

ground.

And that's really something. To get that many suburbanites — denizens of the Me Generation, after all — to come together and cooperate and work almost non-stop for the good of the area's children... yes, that is really something.

It's not that South Farmington was in dire need of a playground. In fact, some of the expensive homes in the western end of the Gill School area are luxury playgrounds for their wealthy owners and their families.

But the people — many from those big houses and others from more modest dwellings — didn't see it that way. They saw a playground partly wiped out by a school renovation. They saw a chance to build a new playground, one worth having.

So they rolled up their sleeves and got to work, many learning to operate power equipment they'd never even seen before. They did it for their kids. They did it for their community. They did it for themselves.

Area Realtors should be picking up on their accomplishment. South Farmington, especially the Gill School area, has been shown as a great place to live.

"Yes, sir," we can just hear the house-pusher telling a prospective buyer, "this is the area where the people came together to build that wonderful playground back in '92."

Core cities reborn with models

Thanks, developers. Detroit needs that, and so do the development-weary residents of Oakland and western Wayne counties.

We're talking about Homearama Detroit, the home show that displays the fabulous (and fabulously expensive) palaces.

Homearama Detroit is taking place through June 21 in a reborn neighborhood on the lower east side of the city. More than 20 model homes, by 14 builders, are on display. Prices range from \$80,000 to \$135,000.

In our opinion, Victoria Park, the first new single-family subdivision in Detroit in 30 years and the site of a current Homearama, is one small step in the right direction — away from the undeveloped woods and meadowlands to the north and west.

Builders and developers, in a very small way, are finally doing what we've advised for years and years: Go back and rebuild the core cities before you pave over everything from Redford to Ann Arbor and from Ferndale to Flint.

Anyone who thinks that's farfetched should have listened to the radio commercials that a few years ago touted southern Genesee County county seat, Flint as a wonderful residence for people who worked in Oakland County.

It may be difficult for a dedicated suburbanite to understand, but there are plenty of urban home-owners who want to live in the city. The sales success (the first phase is a near sellout) of Homearama Detroit proves that.

Over the past quarter century, many thousands of people have left an ailing Detroit for the suburbs. Not all have wanted to go, many preferring the urban lifestyle with its racial and

ethnic diversity.

If builders provide suitable housing in an acceptable setting, many refugees from the blight will return. Hopefully, as the people return, so will the retail businesses that serve them. This is how Detroit will be brought back to social and economic health.

Now, we've heard some developers, suburban planners and others say it just won't work. Development, they'll tell us, will continue to spread to the north and west, and Detroit will continue to deteriorate. To them, it's some sort of manifest destiny.

We'd have to disagree with those sentiments. To be sure, it took a hefty Detroit subsidy to ensure the success of Victoria Park. The city sold the lots to the builders for \$1 each and paid for things like the house foundations, security fencing and sewer and water line work. The city has invested almost \$20 million in the project.

Such commitment by the city — and by lending institutions like Standard Federal, which is heavily involved — should be praised, not ridiculed. Finally, in a small way, development is being put where it's needed.

Ah, but the next Homearama will be held in Sterling Heights. It's back to the suburbs, at least for now.



LETTERS

Wiser chides paper

As the only elected incumbent in the recent Oakland Community College election, I won re-election as a trustee despite your editorial saying that I had "not learned to work as a member of the board" and that my "attitude and comments can create tension."

Perhaps my "attitude" was exactly the reason that others supported me. The Oakland Press said: "Wiser challenges assumptions and policies; an extremely valuable role."

The Spinal Column endorsed me for "across-the-board OCC experience." Voters seemed to understand this — I received the highest vote in several of the communities where your newspaper is distributed.

I do not expect newspapers to agree any more than voters do. Nevertheless, in this period when entrenched government is under great suspicion, I might have expected a newspaper to recognize the value of elected officials who don't simply "go along to get along."

I have an excellent working relationship with the current board and with Dr. Patsy Fulton's administration. But I still ask questions and vote my conscience — as I assume you would

want every elected official to do. Sometimes "tension" is needed to get answers.

Judith Wiser, OCC Trustee

Follow Commandments

I learned the Ten Commandments as a child. Two of them are: Thou shalt not kill and Thou shalt not commit adultery.

Women do not have the right to do either of these. If women go by these rules of life, there should be no need for abortion. If they do not commit adultery, they will not conceive. Then they will not need to kill their fetus because they are unable to care for it.

I always thought this was too obvious to have to write it down.

Cecilia Brzys, Livonia

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Farmington Observer, 21898 Farmington Road, Farmington 48336.

Cost, results kill choice plans

The issue on last week's ballot was enough to make political sloganeers drool: Schools of choice.

The phrase conjures up the currently popular notion that all it takes to fix the workings of government is one easy-to-enact "fundamental" policy change: the silver bullet — a miracle cure — simple, popular, low in cost, quick to work.

The idea behind choice is simple: Public schools are incompetent because they are monopolies, curable by the rigors of competition when parents are allowed to choose which school their kids attend.

The Legislature duly enacted schools of choice as state policy. It also required, however, that school districts provide free transportation to kids who want to switch schools.

Figuring that the Legislature never would pay for the busing it required, a number of school districts got an item on the ballot requesting voter approval to ignore the state rule.

Results were unanimous and overwhelming. District after district — Livonia, Rochester, Howell, Brighton, Plymouth-Canton — voted against being forced to pay to bus kids to schools of choice. Results were overwhelmingly against "Why?"

• Cost. Howell figured it would cost \$80,000 a year to pay for extra busing. Plymouth-Canton estimated a new bus fleet would be required at a \$700,000 cost. In that budget-squeezed district where 58 teaching jobs have been eliminated, "If you have excess funds, it might be fun to try as an experiment," said spokesman Richard Egli.

• Redundancy. Plymouth-Canton, for example, already allows kids to change schools, but only for educational reasons. Parents must provide the transit, though, and that may put off some use. The district estimates fewer than 20 of its 15,000 students actually go to schools of choice.

• Uncertain results. In Brighton, which has had schools of choice for nearly 20 years, district spokeswoman Marilyn Goodson said,



"They were changing because the baby-sitter lived nearby. For the most part, people are very loyal to their home schools."

That last part about home schools is important.

Originally, American schools grew up serving kids in the neighborhood. Kids could walk to school and back home. The school served as a kind of community center for the neighborhood, triggering all kind of services and activities which went well beyond education.

The neighborhood schools is much more than a historic myth. It is a functioning, practical reality to countless kids, a building block to communities, a part of local reality. As last week's vote indicated, sacrificing the neighborhood school on the altar of school reform ideology is something most people don't want to do.

What they do want is schools that work better, that prepare kids for the world of work and a life of responsibility, where kids perform at the level of our international competitors.

By breaking monopolies, the schools of choice theory may be a good one. But the way it was actually presented to folks in Michigan — a weak, unfunded pretense at reform — was little more than another attempt by politicians to find the silver bullet.

Philip Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION: What are you doing for Father's Day?

We asked this question at Heritage Park in Farmington Hills

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| I'm a single parent and I get presents on both Mother's Day and Father's Day. | Most likely we'll just go out to eat, take the kids, relax. | I'm going to my sister-in-law's for a barbecue. The kids make gifts for their dad. | Beats me. I'll probably buy him a card. |
| Laura Gragory and daughter Kato | Mira Bernal and daughter Mahak | Michele Borovoy and children Brandon and Danielle | Joey Sachs |

The Farmington Observer

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