

POINTS OF VIEW

Outlawing panhandlers must be made indelible

Hunting for the suburbs from the Freedom Festival fireworks, a man offered to wipe off our windshield for a tip.

We were standing in traffic between Fort and Lafayette, waiting for our turn to get onto the Lodge, when he and a companion approached us.

Over my husband's objections, I handed him a \$1 bill out the window and told him it wasn't necessary to wash the window.

"I want to do the work," the man protested, as the traffic opened up and we inched away. As I looked back through the rear window, I saw him pick up a bottle. I fervently hoped it was filled with water for his window washing, or with something for his thirst — something that wasn't alcoholic.

My husband reminded me of the signs we saw posted in certain areas of downtown Seattle on a recent visit requesting that people not give money to

panhandlers because it most often was used to buy alcohol and drugs.

As if they had overheard us, last week the city of Detroit began a campaign with the same theme.

The Central Business District Association, with the support of police and the mayor's office, is distributing fliers that discourage gifts to beggars.

Business owners say panhandlers create a nuisance and make their customers feel uncomfortable and/or scared.

The fliers say beggars can meet their basic needs through soup kitchens, homeless shelters and social service programs. They explain that the money most often goes to buy alcohol and illegal drugs, which in the long run hurts rather than helps them.

Those who run the shelters say that's not completely true. There are other needs — cigarettes, a can of pop, a candy bar.

But statistically, the majority of



JUDITH DONER BERNE

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panhandlers have a substance abuse problem.

This new campaign gives us written permission to say no to panhandlers. Somehow that makes us more comfortable. The panhandlers know we know the rules. So we have less guilt. That's important on several counts:

- Detroit's business community stands on the brink. A new office tower, One Detroit Center, and a new hotel, The Athenaeum, risen from a former warehouse on the edge of Greektown, are important steps toward sparking a Detroit comeback.
- So is the possibility of the pizza king, Mike Ilitch, who gives to Detroit, buying the Tigers from the pizza king, Tom Monaghan, who takes from Detroit.
- Panhandlers who use the money to feed alcohol and/or drug dependencies may slide closer to their personal bottoms without it and seek help at substance abuse treatment centers.

- As more people seek treatment, more shelter services can be freed up for those who are homeless and jobless for reasons other than their chemical dependencies.

But the written permission to say no must be more indelible than a flier.

The Central Business District should have permanent signs installed in various locations throughout the city, such as we saw in Seattle.

Although area residents — including the panhandlers — are now aware, anyone who comes to the city for business or pleasure needs to know that information.

It's important for Detroit and for our suburbs, which are dependent on Detroit's viability, that this campaign isn't fly-by-night.

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

Huck Finn, a symbol for boys, can humor adults

Sow Huckleberry Finn is black. That's what the so-called scholars say. Mark Twain met some 10-year-old black kid for about 15 minutes and modeled old Huck after him.

This isn't a joke. Honest. It was in the New York Times. And they're no folks to trifle with.

The upshot here is that Mark Twain wasn't a racist as new age fat heads had previously thought. Now that we've discovered that Huck was really black, according to his speech patterns, it's somehow OK for kids to read the book in school.

Unfortunately, the New York Times' story didn't mention Jim, a character in the book who was black. The trouble

here was that he wasn't called black or Afro-American. He was called what people in the South called black people in the 19th century. And we all know the word.

That word made "Huckleberry Finn" a racist book. But now that old Huck was black, it's all OK.

It's beyond sense. And all it really goes to show is that some English professor can prove anything for any reason given enough of a doctoral thesis with which to make an idiot of him or herself.

The point of "Huckleberry Finn" was that 10- to 15-year-old boys are funny creatures. They're full of childhood superstitions, willing to try anything and pretty much oblivious to



JEFF COUNTS

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most social conventions. They would rather fish, kill frogs or get wet in any body of water that comes their way than do any kind of work.

And that is probably at the core of any controversy over Huck Finn. The book is basically a boy's communist manifesto. It's a blueprint for avoiding social responsibility. And that bugs parents.

High MEAP scores and a trip to the Harvard School of Business envisioned by most parents is a dreaded vision for a kid infected by Huck Finn and who is dreaming of drifting down the Rouge River with some socially unacceptable companion.

And any book that preaches such nonsense is certainly subversive, and

by the way it uses "that word" for black people.

The thing here is that boys are pretty magical, no matter what race. They help us see the world fresh as a place of new wonders and adventure unencumbered by old attitudes either racial or scientific. They bring humor to our dull adult ways.

Wouldn't most of us adults like to see the world that way every day? I sure would.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspapers who as a boy spent time floating around on homemade rafts in a swamp now covered by the Jeffries Freeway.

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Saturday, July 25, 1992

5:30 p.m.—Junior 1 Mile Run
6:00 p.m.—1 Mile Walk/Run
6:30 p.m.—8 km Race

Registration and Award Ceremony at Livonia Family YMCA
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Please fill in the form below. Print clearly or type. Make checks payable to **Redford Road Runners** and mail to:

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43259 Crescent Blvd., Novi, MI 48375

For information call **Running Fit—347-4949** • Co-Race Directors: **Carol Sweeney and Larry Hull**

Please Print

LAST NAME: _____ FIRST NAME: _____
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AGE 17 and under 18-24 25-29 30-34 35-39 40-44 45-49 50-59 60+

SHIRT SIZE: S M L XL MALE FEMALE

WHEELER 1A OPEN QUAD OPEN PARA OPEN

PLEASE CHECK THIS BOX IF YOU WILL QUALIFY FOR A TRIPLE CROWN COMPLETION AWARD

WRITE IN IN CONSIDERATION OF acceptance of my entry, for myself, my executor, administrators, and assigns do hereby release and discharge Redford Roadrunners, its members, the city of Livonia, The Athletic Congress, and event operators of the Redford Classic for all claims of damages, demands, actions whatsoever in any manner arising from my participation in said event. I attest and hereby state I have full knowledge of the nature involved in this event. I am physically fit, and have my personal physician's approval. I hereby grant full permission to any and all of the foregoing to use my photograph, videotape, film, motion picture or record of my participation in this event.

Signature—Runners and Non-runners must sign _____ Parents' signature if under 18 _____

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Hosted by: The Redford Road Runners