

LETTERS

Horn edit unfair

On the Nov. 18 Opinion page, the editorial referring to Rande Horn, Harrison High School's new principal, seemed a bit exaggerated and heavy-handed.

Although we agree that the fire department should have been called, we feel that your treatment of this issue and of Horn has the ring of being a personal assault of his character.

We are parents of a student at Harrison and feel that this attack by your paper may have a much more serious effect on his carrying out his responsibilities as principal.

Let the man do his job and reserve your judgment after he at least completes his first year or so.

Is it possible that the fire chief or the reporter said or did something to precipitate his reaction? We hope cooler heads will prevail in the future.

Strat and Leah Calagias, Farmington Hills

Here's to Horn

Your editorial lambasting Harrison High Principal Rande Horn was mean-spirited and degrading.

Having worked with Horn since September, I'd like to present a portrait of the man far different from the ludicrous comparison you make between Horn and "The Simpsons" Principal Skinner.

The Rande Horn I see every day is a dynamic educator who is committed to the students of Harrison High School. He's truly an instructional leader who has high expectations for both staff and students.

He believes in school reform, and has the skills necessary to shape Harrison into an even better school.

An innovator, he's working to improve communication between staff

and students and is encouraging new strategies, like our Student Forum.

He's not afraid to make tough decisions and to enforce school rules, but he's also sensitive to staff and student views.

Expert in current educational thinking, in little over two months he's already energized the school. Undeniably, he's a positive force at Harrison.

While it's possible that Horn may have made an error of judgment, one wonders why your editorial staff didn't save just a smidgen of its indignation for the individuals who started these fires.

The outrage which should be directed at those who have committed an actual crime is strangely missing from your newspaper.

This entire incident has been unfortunate, but has provided a learning experience for Horn and the entire community.

It's time now to move past it, to let a good principal get on with the tough job of administering a large high school in turbulent times.

From what I've seen, Farmington Public Schools made a wise choice in hiring Rande Horn.

The next time you folks at the Observer want to pillory a principal, look at the whole picture.

Mary E. Brown, teacher Harrison High School

Work together

We were very disappointed with the Observer's editorial on Nov. 18 and earlier coverage on Nov. 15, by your reporter, Bill Coutant, regarding principal Rande Horn and his response to the recent fire incident at Harrison High School.

Horn has acknowledged his mistake in handling the situation; however, it is hard for us to understand why the Observer was so intent on keeping the

embers burning in this particular situation.

These past few months at Harrison, we have found Horn to be a caring, insightful and visionary administrator, who has gained the respect of many students, faculty and parents. In the short time that Horn has been at Harrison, we are excited and grateful for the perceptive and impressive recommendations and changes he has brought to the school.

We appreciate the Observer and look forward to it working with Horn, Harrison High School and the Farmington Public Schools.

To meet the challenges of education in the future, the entire community will need to pull together as an effective team; addressing concerns with reasoned, candid discussion, while readily acknowledging positive accomplishments.

Nikke Westberg, Gail Haynes, Bev Bahr, co-chairman of Harrison Parent Forum

Biased reporting

In regard to your editorial concerning Harrison High School Principal Rande Horn, it seems that you forgot to do your homework — H-o-m-e-w-o-r-k. That's the way that honest journalism evolves.

If you had done your homework, then you would have learned that Horn graciously answered when your reporter asked the same question the first three times. Having done your homework, you could have presented a balanced picture of Horn. Let me help you.

He's the man who visited my ninth grade English class to applaud their collaborative writing efforts, who enthusiastically was interviewed by my public speaking students, who urges students on to their classes everyday, who initiated a student forum, who

welcomes staff and student opinions, who supports innovative programs and who enforces school rules.

Further, Horn sends the right message to kids every school day. The message is that he demonstrates concern for their welfare and safety, cares about their self-esteem, and wants them to value learning.

Remember, h-o-m-e-w-o-r-k. It will eliminate biased reporting. Gayann Brook, teacher, Harrison High School

Poor coverage

I am writing to express my frustration at the way your "community" newspaper chose to cover the recent incident at Harrison High School.

Let's review the facts of the situation, facts which never appeared in your newspaper. The fire was discovered because of an overflow of the automatic sprinkling system. It was doused. It was out. I am not conversant with procedures on the reporting of fires in public buildings, but I do think a person of Rande Horn's intelligence can see if a fire is out and assess whether his students and staff are safe.

Another fact your ace reporter forgot to mention was that the incident with the ticket booth took place in the middle of the night. Was Horn somehow remiss in dealing with this issue? Your editorial implied that he was.

I don't believe student safety was the motivating agenda behind either your article or your mean-spirited editorial.

I think the real issue was that the ego of the fire chief was affronted and that Horn was going to have to pay and pay publicly for not messaging the chief's ego.

One of the big lessons Horn must have learned is that a large part of being a principal is playing the public relations game.

If Horn had groveled, beat his breast and promised to be more careful the

next time, there probably wouldn't have been an article.

The fact that it was the end of an exhausting day and that he had perhaps 20 other critical issues on his mind would probably not ice with either you or the chief.

As to messages being sent to youth, how about this one? Not one word in your paper was addressed to the fact that some young person or persons is wantonly out there starting fires. It was much more fun to beat up on the principal. Your priorities seem a bit confused to me.

Although I have taught in Farmington for over 25 years, I have only known Horn for a few months, but I have no hesitation in saying that I believe him to be a careful, competent, intelligent leader of our school community.

He is substance over form. He won't glad-hand you, or slap you on the back, but I believe he will quietly deliver a quality product.

I can assure you and the Farmington community that he is not the person you portrayed in your newspaper.

But then again, it was not your intention to fairly portray him, but to sensationalize what has really turned out to be a non-issue.

It saddens me to think how he has been misrepresented to our community through your thoughtless use of journalistic power.

Only you can answer as to whether a casual comment made at the end of a tiring day deserves to be the focus of the front page of your newspaper, which was to be followed up by a scathing and unproductive editorial.

I suggest that the writer of your editorial on Mr. Horn return to watching "The Simpsons" and perhaps "Current Affairs" or "Geraldo" to gather some more incisive metaphors for your next penetrating editorial.

Carla Barrett, co-chairwoman, North Central School Improvement Committee, Harrison High School

Their report cards coming from those who count most

Some of our school districts refused to participate in Gov. John Engler's first report card on schools — Southfield and Bloomfield Hills, Livonia and Plymouth-Canton, for example.

These districts fault the Michigan School Report because of some inconsistencies in the data provided and the use of test scores to compare schools without any way to explain the populations they serve.

Some administrators see it as purely political — saying that the information requested is already available within each district.

Probably some refinements need to be made. But taxpayers are entitled to some way to measure the schools they pay for. And this report is a start.

Friday, as the governor was releasing these cold, hard facts in Lansing, a far warmer method of educational accountability was going on closer to home.

More than 100 people gathered over lunch at the Chrysler Technology Center in Auburn Hills to honor 13 area teachers. Each was a winner in Southfield-based metroParent Magazine's 4th Outstanding Teacher Awards.

It's a competition that has grown from 25 or so nominations and three winners the first year to the 280 nominations from parents, students and/or principals that came in this time around. It is co-sponsored by Chrysler Corporation and Health Alliance Plan.

And so nicely done. Each teacher and his or her (mostly her) principal was invited to the podium and an excerpt or more from their nominations was read by Alyssa Martina, publisher of metroParent.

Some examples:

Holly Tescher, a student in Carol Barratt's fourth grade class at Commerce Elementary School, said: "Mrs. Barratt is a unique teacher . . . She taught me a lot and made learning fun for me. She is one wonderful teacher I won't forget."

A Warren schools parent and student, Tara and Nichole Young, wrote of Washington Elementary teacher Bette Dezenski: "Over the 15 weeks of Nicole's illness Mrs. Dezenski was there, with calls, cards and loving arms and taking on the responsibility of home tutor . . . Not only did she make a difference in Nichole's education, but she made a difference in my family's life."

Susan Williams, a parent at The Roeper School in Bloomfield Hills, said of music teacher Jennifer Evenson: "I wish I knew how she gets so much out of her students. . . Perhaps inspire would be a more accurate description of what she does."

Catherine McKeon, a student at Birmingham's Covington Middle School, had this to say about her sixth grade teacher Maria Ponczochka:



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"Every day I look forward to math class because of Mrs. Ponczochka. She really makes learning fun. She is an outstanding teacher and an outstanding person."

"Reaching for stars is what Diane Dillard is all about and getting others, teachers as well as students, to do likewise," was Troy principal Kenneth Lahti's description of this Bemis Elementary teacher.

Joan Green's third grade class at Birmingham's Beverly Elementary wrote: "This year, all of us have experienced what it feels like to be a person who is respected and cared for by their teacher and fellow students."

And a first grader at Kensington Academy in Bloomfield Hills wrote of Dianne Hoely-Clauss: "She is my favorite teacher because she is kind and she is the best teacher and she takes us to field trips, and she loves us, and she takes us to outdoor recess and she helps the earth."

Now these are only the tip of the iceberg of a lengthy application and judging process. Besides the required nominations and back-up data, each nominee had to complete an in-depth questionnaire probing educational philosophy. Six judges concerned with children's issues made the decisions.

Other winners were: Barbara Jean Manning, special education at Ford Elementary, Detroit; Joseph Mucaria (Chef Joe), food management, Goleightly Career and Technical Center, Detroit; Kim O'Keefe, DeKeyser Elementary, Sterling Heights; Lila Fisher, Mason Elementary, Grosse Pointe; C. Deana Georgopoulos, University Liggett, Grosse Pointe Woods; and Margaret Hankins, The Cathedral School, Detroit.

None of these teachers' names will appear on the Michigan School Report. But Lt. Gov. Connie Binsfeld, who attended and spoke of her own teaching experiences, knows of them. And now, so do you.

When you are reading the tangible report on your school district — keep in mind the intangibles it doesn't reflect. Like the outstanding teacher in the classroom.

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