

POINTS OF VIEW

Let's recognize and support all school achievers

I would like to congratulate the Farmington Observer for the great coverage given to the Farmington Harrison High School state champion football team.

As a spectator at the championship game on Nov. 26, I found the game to be very exciting, and I fully support and appreciate all of the hard work each team member has put into this season.

They deserve to be recognized. But at the same time, I begin to wonder why the Observer only chose to give such immediate, front-page coverage to a state champion football team?

Why is it that when the Harrison High School marching band won the state championship at the Pontiac Silverdome on Saturday, Nov. 6, for the third year in a row, the story didn't appear in the Observer until two weeks later on page 3?

Don't these dedicated, hard-working kids deserve the same kind of recogni-

tion for the same kind of title? I guess I wasn't really surprised when I called the editor to ask this very question and was told that at least it was covered, the Detroit News or Free Press didn't cover the band at all because they only cover sports, and that's just the way it is.

How true. Well, maybe it's time to change that. Maybe it's time for our parents, our schools, our community and our media to have a change in attitude. I think an obvious place to start is with the local newspaper, in an effort to initiate acceptance.

The community paper has the power, the influence, and I believe, the responsibility to encourage and promote those young people who have talents and abilities outside of the athletic arena.

So what's the big deal about marching band? Most people are at least familiar with the intense training that



TINA MARINUCCI

takes place during a football season. But I'm sure very few people are aware (except band parents, of course), of what marching band entails. The members of the HHS marching band begin their season with an intense week at band camp every August.

Upon their return from camp, they practice six days per week, a minimum of two-and-a-half hours each day, for the rest of the season.

Besides playing at the football games, the band participates in several competitions, traveling to such places as Flint, Durand, and Toledo.

Not only do they have to memorize and play the music, but also have to learn and synchronize the marching drill. I can only compare this to putting your head and rubbing your stomach at the same time. It's not easy.

The color guard then has to be choreographed in such a way as to enhance the performance. There are more than 100 kids on the field performing at the same time. Changes are constantly being made to try to improve the overall performance.

I could go on, but I think the point is obvious. A lot of hard work and long, grueling hours go into becoming a first-rate, competitive marching band.

Not everyone's cup of tea? Maybe not, but neither are athletic competitions. I guess that's the beauty of it—allowing all of our students the chance to excel at what they enjoy doing, then recognizing that excellence equally, whenever the opportunity arises. Our high schools have a lot of talented, dedicated kids with a variety of interests and accomplishments.

Let's recognize and support them all, rather than just a select few. After all, these kids are our future.

So, HHS State Champs football team—Congratulations and keep up the good work. To the HHS State Champ marching band—Congratulations, and to quote my 6-year-old, "You're the best marching band in the whole world."

Tina Marinucci, a Farmington Hills homeowner and time registered nurse, is the mother of a Harrison High band member.

Access is crucial to state prisoners, taxpayers

Like many Michiganians, Dale Snyder thinks he was given improper medical treatment and plans to sue for malpractice. That is hardly newsworthy.

Snyder needs copies of his medical records. At this point, he becomes different. As an inmate of the Charles Egler Street, a state prison on Cooper Street in Jackson, the former Kalamazoo County resident must request his records under the state Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

Senate Bill 639 would prohibit prison inmates of any right to use FOIA. It is sponsored by Sen. Philip Hoffman, R-Jackson, and supported by Gov. John Engler.

The argument is that inmates bombard the prisons with absurd FOIA requests. Let's check the math: 54,000 requests from 40,000 prisoners, or 1.3 per person per year. Big deal.

Well, why do prisoners make FOIA requests? James Hayton, who was sentenced for murder from Livingston County,

soon will be FOIAing Michigan State Police at Brighton for fingerprints found at the scene of the crime—Hamburg Pharmacy—on the cash register and counter top. At the time of his conviction 26 years ago, the fingerprints were unidentified.

"It meant the person wasn't in the system," he said. Hayton has a hunch that the person who left the fingerprints "may be on file now if he's been busted for something else."

You might respond, "Oh, they all say they're innocent." Actually, Hayton was the only Egler inmate of eight I interviewed who made such a claim. But contrary to the Engler and Hoffman line, Hayton has a reasonable FOIA request.

David Hoffman, a Monroe resident until 17 years ago, said, "To prepare myself for my appearance to the Parole Board, I requested copies of my institutional file, medical records and PSI (presentence investigation)."

Almost all the interviewees had made FOIA requests for their institu-



TIM RICHARD

tional files, which contain records of their (mis)conduct within prison walls.

Alfredo Robinson, once of Wayne County, had a different reason for FOIAing his file. Other inmates sometimes file papers called SPONS—in for special prisoner offender notices—in order to mess up someone's chances of being transferred to another facility. Robinson said SPONS reports in his file were submitted by someone he didn't even know. "All of 'em were

false. They create imaginary enemies," he said.

Larry Verse, who has done 18 years for armed robbery, FOIAed his central office file from Lansing and found it differed from his institutional file. The former contained information on charges of which he had been cleared. Verse, eligible for parole in 1996, said, "At my request, they did remove (the inaccurate charges)."

Whether those reports were true or false is not for the press or readers to judge. Hearing officers, parole boards and judges do that job. But unless an inmate can FOIA his records, how can officials get to the truth?

Many request their medical records. Saunders May, formerly of Wayne County, wanted to see if he was getting the wrong medication. Alfredo Robinson contends that medical officials "pad their costs" by listing medications that weren't actually administered. There's only one way to check it out—FOIA. Considering how many

health practitioners Blue Cross has put out of business for phony reports, the inmates' suspicion has more logic than paranoia.

"Prisoners with diabetes will test positive for alcohol. Some hearing officers will realize that and allow prisoners to present their evidence," said Sandra Girard as we left together through Egler's three gates.

Girard, an attorney, runs Prison Legal Services. She won a big, big FOIA case in the Michigan Supreme Court last summer. SB 639 would undo several years of her work.

If inmates couldn't file FOIA requests, Girard went on, they would have to file lawsuits and use the "discovery" process. "That would mean more litigation and higher costs," she said.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events. His office number is (313) 349-1700.

Quality suffers in debate in Legislature on schools

Last July the Michigan Legislature abruptly scrapped property taxes as the basis for school funding. Then Gov. John Engler imposed a Dec. 31 deadline to come up with a new system for school finance and quality.

Because Michigan had dithered without result for 20 years about the best way to finance kindergarten through 12th grade public schools, the idea was to construct a crisis to force the governor, the Legislature and the various interest groups into definitive action.

I was worried back then that the tactical device of framing the matter as a tax issue would skew the substance of the debate toward finance and away from educational quality.

Now it's only three weeks until the deadline, and I'm not worried; I'm scared. Scared that the best opportunity in a generation to fix our schools will be lost.

It turns out I'm not alone. A report prepared for Gov. Engler by the respected Education Commission of the States concludes state leaders entered the debate on schools with "major, glaring gaps" in strategy and were confused about even basic education issues.

"There is not a lot of consistency or coherence across the various recommendations for change," the report concludes, criticizing lack of broad agreement about what our education system is supposed to achieve and absence of a political strategy for reform.

William Sederberg, a former GOP state senator now with Public Sector Consultants in Lansing, echoes the thought: "Everybody has their proposals out there, but there's no coherent underlying agreement on where to go as a state."

Kim Brennen Root, spokeswoman for the Michigan Education Association, agrees: "What's been missing is a fundamental look at what we want our schools to be like."

The report makes depressing reading. "There is support for high standards . . . but there appears to be no agreement on what the standards should be and who should be responsible for developing them."



PHILIP POWER

the MEA wants to set standards but has no idea what to do with schools that fail to reach them.

And "no one seems to make the connection between instructional improvement and organizational changes like decentralization, new kinds of contracts, site-based decision-making, etc."

In other words, our leaders started a landmark debate on a very difficult topic—reforming a school system out of step with today's economic realities—without doing their basic homework in figuring out what they wanted to achieve.

So what now? The governor and the Legislature should do two main things:

First, get the financing argument settled once and for all. If that requires a public vote on taxes, fine. But at least our schools won't go out of business for lack of money.

Second, recognize that we're nowhere on quality and reform and that getting somewhere will take some time and work. So bend a strategic retreat and follow the Education Commission's advice to create a "curriculum congress" where the governor, legislators, educators and employers work together to set broad educational goals and develop strategies to implement them.

Such commissions now exist in Missouri and Kentucky. A Michigan version might eventually get done what our leaders have so far failed to do.

Phil Power is chairman of the company that owns this newspaper. His telephone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047 mailbox 1880.

We Want To Turn Your Dog Into A Ham

WITH THE FREE 35 MM CAMERA FROM PRO PLAN

Your dog will ham it up when you bring home Pro Plan pet food and your free 35 mm camera.

He'll gladly show off the beautiful developments that come from Pro Plan's unsurpassed nutrition. His lustrous coat and bright eyes help to show that he's the picture of health.

So pick up a 40 lb. bag of Pro Plan dog food or a 20 lb. bag of Pro Plan cat food and you'll not only get a free 35 mm camera, you'll likely get a ham.

Ask a participating Pro Plan retailer for details. And hurry! This offer is good only while supplies last.

- Available At These Participating Pro Plan Retailers
- | | | | | |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| BIG ACRE STORE 8220 W. Grand Pkwy Livonia | FEED RITE 2979 Ford Street Livonia | NEW HAVEN FARMER'S ELEVATOR 21071 Division Street New Haven | PET PROVISIONS 5757 Whitmore Lane Bingham | ROCHESTER ELEVATOR, INC. 203 E. University Dr. Rochester |
| CHAP'S FEED STORE 29216 Five Mile Livonia | FEED RITE 11780 Bellevue Road Belleville | NOW FEED & SUPPLY INC. 43943 Grand River Ave Novi | PET PROVISIONS 3619 East Grand River Novi | VAL-4-PET 2511 Schooner Road Dearborn |
| CLASSIC PET SUPPLY 13740 East Twelve Mile 1 Warren | GOODIES PET 24331 E. Michigan Ave Warren | PAW & CLAWS PET SUPPLIES 18100 Ten Mile Road East Farmington | PET SUPPLY WAREHOUSE INC. 22411 Michigan Ave Dearborn | VAL'S PET SUPPLIES 4 South Rochester Dr. Dearborn |
| COUNTRY WATER TREATMENT 13531 Ten Mile South Lyon | R-S SPECIALTIES 31936 Mound Road Warren | PET SUPERMARKET 30943 Five Mile Road Livonia | PET SUPPLY WAREHOUSE INC. 13621 Eureka Southgate | WYCOM COUNTY CORNER 4350 Farmco Trail Warren |
| FEED RITE 42432 Ford Road Canton | MY PET SUPPLY 2767 Fourteen Mile Sterling Heights | PET SUPERMARKET 466 N. Telegraph Farmington | PREMIER PET 31215 Southland Road Livonia | |

WHILE SUPPLIES LAST

©1993, Pro-Plan, Pet Specialty Enterprises, A Division of Ralston Purina Company