

A bad sign Main corner or Camp Swampy

What is it about the Masonic Temple corner in downtown Farmington? Even though it's not broken, folks still try to fix it.

Last year officials wanted to stick a clock tower on the northwest corner of Farmington Road and Grand River. The ordinary citizens shouted them down. Now fancy landscaping and a big green sign with frogs and butterflies on it clutter that corner.

We guess the boys and girls from the city and the Downtown Development Authority didn't retain too much of what they were taught last semester. A refresher course in recent history might be in order.

Ah, the clock tower . . . can anyone forget the great clock tower flap of 1993? The clock tower was what passed for a hot issue last year in this town. There were meetings in the morning and meetings at night about that ill-fated structure.

Emotions were rubbed raw. Angry comments were launched — both at the meetings and in the letters to the editor columns of the Farmington Observer. Fingers were pointed, tables pounded and references made to "Shirley's Temple."

Most of Farmington's officialdom supported the clock. The little old ladies in tennis shoes who keep a pretty close eye on things in downtown Farmington, however, did not. They were joined by the preservationists, and together they kicked up quite a fuss.

But the issue drew to a happy conclusion (like a B movie) when the governors finally lis-

tened to the governed. Yes, Virginia, that sometimes happens.

We remember seeing the light of understanding shine in officialdom's eyes for the first time after a memorable meeting (March 15, 1993 was the date) that was a catharsis for the 50 or so who spoke out against the clock. The officials finally got it: The people didn't want the damn clock.

Are we going to have to go through that all over again with this sign and landscaping? Well, we couldn't blame people if they squawked about it. We really couldn't.

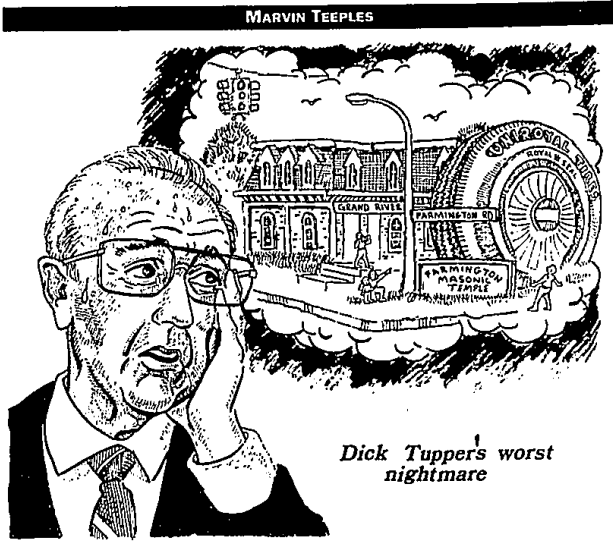
Come now! Butterflies, grasshoppers and frogs . . . in a marsh setting? What are we announcing here, a handsome and historic building on Farmington's main corner, or the entrance to Camp Swampy?

And the price . . . \$3,200 for that garish green thing? We understand that signs are expensive, but we could think of better uses for that kind of money.

We believe that the Masonic Temple needs no special sign. Sitting as it does in a park-like setting, it's certainly an asset to the city — as is. If there must be a sign to announce the Temple's pancake breakfasts and such, please keep it simple and stately — like the building itself.

Maintain the grounds, sure, and maybe a little (very little) landscaping is necessary at the corner. But let's not go ape with micro-management of a facility that isn't even open to the general public on a regular basis.

And, please, let's see if we can remember the lessons of '93.



Dick Tupper's worst nightmare

LETTERS

He's not happy

Byond the confusion of the campaign and the complexity of the new Michigan tax plan to finance schools lie two facts important to me:

1. The gulf between the economically well off and less well off will widen, increasing the problems that trouble the country;
2. The Democratic Party, long the champion of the less fortunate, was either impotent or unfaithful to its traditional calling.

It was Sen. Debbie Stabenow, the Democratic leader, who first proposed scuttling the property tax base for the schools in July, without a backup plan in place. With puny opposition, other legislators from both parties climbed aboard the bandwagon, only to find Gov. John Engler in the driver's seat.

Since then, Democrats jumped off, usually at night, but hid in the bushes to hear the shouting demands for property relief, however, the shortfall would be made up, by whoever would pay up.

The legislative alternative to Proposal A, which never did get a name, lacked strong party support. Only in passing was its unequal impact on the citizenry even mentioned. Sospy Williams would be ashamed.

But according to the media, politicians, and some friends, I should be delighted with the results. My taxes are coming down, property significantly and income a little. The sales tax, up from 4 to 6 percent, won't hurt much, especially for older people whose consumer spending is on the wane. But how about the rest of the family?

It will be painful. If you work hard to earn \$20,000 or less, or much less, that 50 percent additional tax on nonfood items you buy is a transaction you feel. It is not an idea about which you have the luxury of abstract discussion.

Add on the punitive tax of 50 cents for a pack of cigarettes, which you enjoy, and know that Big Brother has singled you out as the only sinner he is trying to help at this time. Is that an "attitude" you're showing?

No matter, for those with all that property and all that satisfaction with the new tax base, let the good times roll. They don't have to reduce the rent or increase security or improve maintenance.

Isn't it about time there are some changes around here? Regressive or progressive taxes? What are they? Who cares?

Lawrence Niblett, Farmington Hills

Parents send their children to school to learn reading, writing, spelling, computation, history, geography, and science. These are observable, achievable, and assessable outcomes.

There is no proof that OBE works. Does anyone know what it costs? How can the eight Outcomes be ensured? What objective test could be used to measure these goals?

How can you measure that a third-grader is a lifelong learner? How does the prolonged use of inventive spelling evidence a quality producer?

Arn't responsible citizens and healthy individuals the result of what is learned in the home and genetics? Does a collaborative team member have to subvert logic and facts in order to build consensus? Can a thoughtful problem solver decide that for some questions there are no answers?

Knowledgeable thinkers and effective communicators rely on skills. The underlying parts of these two outcomes can be taught and objectively tested for.

Two other issues in Richard's columns need to be addressed.

Self-esteem is not "naughty." Self-esteem must be earned. It can not be given. As reported in the January 1994 issue of Education Digest, self-esteem programs do not work.

Elementary school children rely on actual academic achievement for their self-esteem. With no reward or recognition of effort (grades, honors, privileges) children learn that there is no reason to try and excel.

Everyone gets the goodies whether they have done the work or not. No one is punished for failure, so success must not be important.

There have been many independent university studies comparing phonics reading programs to context reading programs (Look/Say, Whole Language).

From the first study done in 1968 to the one published by Bowman Gray in 1993, phonics was shown to be vastly superior in reading comprehension and word attack skills.

There are no published studies validating the use of the whole language approach.

Give me the research, proof, texts, and actual classroom studies on the effectiveness of OBE. Sell me on this program, don't shove it down my throat.

The last time I checked, society still valued competition, individual achievement, and uniqueness. Where are those outcomes listed?

Patricia A. Alspach, Farmington Hills

Mall smoking ban on target

Ano smoking restriction in shopping malls would be a step forward in the steady climb towards fresher air.

House Bill 5212 that would restrict smoking in commons areas of malls has passed the House and is ready to be discussed by a Senate committee.

If adopted as it currently reads, the law would apply to corridors, lounge sections and restaurants. Restaurants are covered by a separate law. Individual stores are not affected.

Although malls are private property, we agree with the reasons state Rep. John Jamian, the Republican from Bloomfield Township, gives for sponsoring the bill.

"Malls are like town squares. They're public places," says Jamian, co-chairman of the House Public Health Committee.

Calls supporting the ban were overwhelming, he reports. "Most support came from people who walk the malls and mothers with children," Jamian says.

That washes with our research, too. "I really wish the malls were smoke free," Linda Weinstein of West Bloomfield told us last August, as she took her morning walk at Laurel Park Place in Livonia.

"I'm here walking for fitness, but I wonder if the air I'm huffing and puffing is clean and healthy enough?"

In fact, passing such a law would just step up a process that is already headed in that direction.

By law, smoking is banned in government buildings, hospitals, nursing homes and schools. Restaurants must allocate smoke-free sections. (And, in fact, some restaurants such as the Old Woodward Grill in downtown Birmingham have elected to become completely non-smoking.)

By choice, several area malls have smoke-free

■ Despite the direction of the bill, smokers' rights have not gone the way of a puff of smoke. Jamian accepted an amendment allowing malls to establish separate smoking rooms with separate ventilation systems so that smoke will not be recycled into the mall.

zones. At Oakland Mall in Troy, Summit Place Mall in Waterford and Fairlane Town Center in Dearborn, benched areas have been designated as "Smoke free."

At Twelve Oaks in Novi, The Gathering Space and center court are no smoking zones, with smoking allowed in other commons areas.

And Westland Mall will go to three designated smoking areas April 1.

Although Jamian's bill does not encompass individual stores, Hudson's has for some time banned smoking in all its stores, except for smoking sections in its restaurants.

Despite the direction of the bill, smokers' rights have not gone the way of a puff of smoke. Jamian accepted an amendment allowing malls to establish separate smoking rooms with separate ventilation systems so that smoke will not be recycled into the mall.

That should at least mitigate the anger of Molly Giles of Birmingham, who once told us that if she couldn't have a cigarette between stores at the malls, she'd take her business to the mainstreets.

The Michigan Senate should follow the House lead and ban smoking in our shopping malls. House Bill 5212 protects the air for the majority of us who are non-smokers, while still allowing a place for those who choose to smoke.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What are you looking forward to doing when spring finally comes?



"Getting my boat in the water. It's an inboard outdrive. I cruise the St. Clair River."
Rudolph Frank
Farmington Hills



"Home improvements . . . roof and a new deck. We're looking forward to warmer weather."
Denise Hooker
Farmington Hills



"Playing on the monkey bars."
Kaitlin Hooker
Farmington Hills



"I have a place in East Tawas. I go north."
Joe LaPlante
Farmington Hills

Oh, that OBE!

Yes, it's mo again. I could not let Tim Richard's March 24 column ridiculing people against Outcomes Based Education go unchallenged.

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.

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