

Rochester Eccentric OPINION

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1814 S. ROCHESTER ROAD, ROCHESTER HILLS, MICHIGAN 48307

THURSDAY, MARCH 13, 1997

Yes on bond issue Area needs what money will provide

We're convinced. The Rochester school establishment (and some of its powerful friends) has won us over.

We're saying: Vote YES on the Rochester Community Schools' \$112.5-million bond issue on Tuesday, March 18.

Yes, it's a costly proposal. We gulp and swallow hard when we hear how much education costs these days. And this new bond issue is being presented just 14 months after district voters said no to a \$110 million proposal.

When the new amount was announced, we said to ourselves, "Well, voters said no to \$110 million, what makes these schoolies think voters will approve \$112.5?"

But after listening to all the arguments for and against, it seems to us that this \$112.5 million will buy a whole lot more than the \$110 million would have.

And we see a real need for what the additional funds will supply: Badly-needed renovations to existing buildings, including the two high schools; addition of a third high school; technology improvements; and a new service center.

Hey, let's be honest about it. This is Rochester, the most populous district in Oakland County, or close to it. There are something like 13,000 youngsters to educate.

The kids are here now. Many more are on the way.

The Rochester area is, we think, the quintessential bedroom community. Things may have changed in other towns (and perhaps they're changing here, too), but the nuclear family reigns supreme in Rochester.

There will be a need for a third high school as northern Rochester Hills and southern Oakland Township are seeded with subdivisions. We hope there will be funds to operate

it. There are strong arguments for renovating the existing two high schools. Although improved 11 years ago, Rochester High School is an overcrowded mess right now.

And Rochester Adams High School has some shocking deficiencies. When Adams students stage a play, the boards they tread usually are at Rochester High. There's no suitable auditorium at Adams. How could this go on for 25 years?

Early on, the Eccentric urged the school establishment to get involved in selling the bond issue to the public, and quit preaching to the choir.

We asked that officials themselves reach out to the community, show the need, answer honestly all questions.

Well, after this short, hectic campaign, we have to say that we're impressed with the school establishment efforts.

We would have liked to see more "reaching out" by school officials to the legion of no voters. That didn't happen. Maybe it was just too much to ask.

However, officials did enlist the help of some well-known members of the business community (some of their names go back many decades in this community), and those people may just turn the trick this time.

People with names like Pixley and Crissman can dissolve a lot of the distrust so many voters have when it comes to the public schools.

It has been pointed out in one recent Eccentric opinion column that this bond issue would cost the owner of a \$200,000 house an additional \$240 more a year in taxes, or 66 cents a day.

That just doesn't seem like a lot for what the community is getting.

We cover the preps, not the pros

Now that we publish on Sunday, we should add Detroit's professional sports to what we cover, said a caller, who acknowledged we do a fine job covering high school sports in Oakland County.

Since the metro dailies serve up their biggest sports section of the week on Sunday, I felt that suggestion deserved a reply insofar as why we stick to local prep and campus athletics as well as local recreation and fitness features.

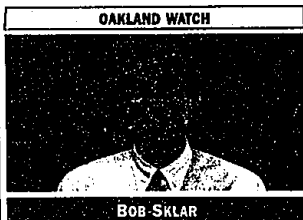
Sportswise, our mission is to be community based. It's not our intent to duplicate what the dailies do — extensively cover the Lions, Tigers, Red Wings and Pistons. There's no way we could match that level of coverage publishing only twice a week. Miss a Friday-night basketball score and we hear about it. No reader has ever complained about the lack of a Pistons score in our paper.

Nor do we think our readers expect us to cover the pros at the expense of local varsity athletics in the Clarkston, Orion, Oxford, Rochester, Avondale, Troy, Birmingham, Bloomfield Hills, Southfield, West Bloomfield, Farmington and Walled Lake school districts or at the private and parochial high schools in our coverage area. Birmingham Groves competing against Bloomfield Hills Lahser in swimming, Rochester playing Troy Athens in volleyball or Clarkston playing Southfield-Lathrup in basketball grab O&E headlines, not the Tigers playing the Red Sox.

The Lions dominated the news last fall with "speculation about Wayne Fontes' impending dismissal but we stayed home to cover Walled Lake Western winning the state high school football title in Class AA. The Pistons are making a run at the playoffs this year but we're set to follow Beverly Hills Detroit Country Day's run in Class B high school basketball's March Madness.

Whether it's Bloomfield Hills Andover's 1997 state title in boys swimming, Bloomfield Hills Cranbrook-Kingwood's 1997 state title in boys ice hockey, Birmingham Marian's 1995 state girls basketball championship, Birmingham Brother Rice's state titles in swimming the last four years, Rochester High's state titles in competitive cheerleading the last three years, Birmingham Seaholm's 1995 state titles in girls soccer and swimming, Troy High's 1994 state football championship, or Rochester Adams' 1995 and 1996 runner-up finishes in the state boys baseball tournament, our readers can bank on reading all about it in their hometown Eccentric.

As we see it, readers expect to read about coaching legends like Farmington Harrison's John Harrington or Birmingham Brother Rice's Al Francesca in football, Marian's Mary Lillie Ciccone in basketball, Lahser's Jan Espar in



tennis, Andover's Mike Lane in swimming and Athens' Tim Storch in soccer. They're not looking to us for the latest on the Red Wings' Scotty Bowman or the Pistons' Doug Collins.

The Lions and Pistons are based in Oakland County and many of the top coaches on our pro teams live here. So we may do stories about the implications of professional sports on the local entertainment dollar or personality profiles of the coaches or players. But you won't find box scores of Tiger games or game state for Pistons star Grant Hill.

Beyond the pros, we report on campus sports at Oakland University in Rochester Hills, St. Mary's College in Orchard Lake, Oakland Community College's various campuses and Michigan Christian College in Rochester Hills.

We also eagerly seek out scores, stats, announcements and features from local adult and community recreation leagues, whatever the sport. And we're always interested in the latest exploits of weekend warriors and fitness buffs who have excelled in anonymity.

In short, our sports sections are meant to exude personalities of their own about your friends or neighbors, not mirror what the dailies do.

If you have a comment, complaint or question about our sports or rec pages, please send me a note by fax (810-844-1314) or mail (Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009). Please specify which O&E edition you typically read. Our goal is to fulfill your expectations, too — not just ours.

Bob Sklar is managing editor of our Oakland County editions. He started out at the O&E nearly 26 years ago covering, what else, but high school sports.

MEMORY LANE

This week in history, as reported in past editions of the Rochester Eccentric:

15 YEARS AGO — 1982

The Food Tray owner Ray Brinker sued the Rochester government for \$1 million in circuit court, charging the city with false arrest, harassment and denying his right to a speedy trial in connection with a signage

dispute. The dispute was later resolved.

10 YEARS AGO — 1987

A 30-year-old Rochester man was charged with attempted murder in the shooting of his roommate after an argument about housecleaning. Police arrested the man after a neighbor living in the same duplex reported a gunshot at 2 a.m.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

Who's going to win the NCAA men's basketball tourney?

We asked this question at the Northfield Commons shopping center at Crooks and South Boulevard in Troy.



'Kentucky, no doubt about it.'
Don Ward
Rochester Hills



'Cincinnati, I guess.'
Tammy Outland
Troy



'Kentucky. They're a good team with coaching and tradition.'
Bill Worthen
Rochester Hills



'Minnesota. It's cold up there and they have nothing better to do.'
Lori Pahl
Troy

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

'The right choice'

I am one of the middle-of-the-road voters you said you wanted to hear from about the bond issue. Since I am the mother of two children in Rochester public schools, I have spent some time learning about and deciding how to vote in this election.

I like the bond issue because it would fix the overcrowding, the physical inadequacy, and the lack of equal facilities in our high schools. I know the high schools are overcrowded now. I personally have seen kids setting on steps and even on the floor to eat their lunch because there are not enough seats available.

It is almost impossible for our kids to safely walk the halls when classes change. Both schools are also old, have inefficient heating and ventilation systems, and have inadequate electrical systems. These things need to be modernized and made more efficient to reduce the costs of operating our schools.

Both high school buildings also need to be brought into compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act and with Michigan requirements for safe swimming pool depth. And I believe each high school should have equal facilities. The students at Adams High School deserve their own auditorium.

I also like the plan to put better technology in all the schools and to have equal technology in every school. I think all children need to be exposed to and learn how to use the most modern technology available so they'll be able to function effectively in a rapidly changing world. I also think connecting the buildings in a wide area network will save the district money because because now they bus kids from one school to another for some classes.

My two biggest reservations about voting for the bond issue are whether there really is going to be enough growth to justify building a third high school and about the cost of operating a third high school. Some people say the district has overestimated the growth of the school age population.

The bond committees say their projections are good.

I don't know which group is right. I know our two high schools are already overcrowded now, so I have decided arguments about future growth are irrelevant. Also, I don't think the fact that our high schools were just as overcrowded 10 years ago as they are now is a valid reason for not fixing the overcrowding problem now.

The cost of operating a third high school is a bigger obstacle for me. The school district's own estimate of the cost of running a third high school is about \$1.7 million, and that has to come out of the operating budget.

In the last school bond election, the school board and bond proponents said those costs were too high and the district couldn't afford

it. Now they are saying they will come up with the money by savings generated by more modern efficient systems in the updated schools and by making budget cuts in other areas.

Again, I don't know which position is right. But I have decided that forcing the administration to become more efficient and really look at cutting the budget is probably a good thing. I really don't care if Rochester has two high schools or three, but since the voters turned down expanding the two we have now in the last election, I'll go along with building a third one to fix the overcrowding, inefficiency and parity problems.

Personally, I wish I didn't have to cast a vote to raise my taxes, but I will vote for this bond issue. I think it is the right choice to get the best educational facilities possible for my sons and for all the children in our schools.

Diane Stricker,
Rochester Hills

A no voter

Asking for a larger bond amount this year after it was rejected just a year ago is nonsense. Does it take a new bus garage, a new high school building, and renovation of two existing high school buildings to better equip our young people for their futures?

As a Rochester parent, with seniority in regards to Rochester School Bond issues, I can assure you that the bond money being asked for will be just the beginning of more funding that will be asked of us to support the new bus garage and upkeep of the existing high school buildings.

With the student population holding steady, these buildings will be wasted as the city population matures and the student population decreases. It seems like the school board thinks that the citizens of Rochester have an endless income.

Most of us are middle class, and want the best for our children. However, the best does not have to be new. The committee behind the bond issue already has ample funding to advertise (signs) all over town about the bond. This money seems to be ill spent, as it could be used for the very purpose it is being wasted on.

I encourage all Rochester voters to vote no. Perhaps the board might then know that the Rochester voters would rather use the 66 cents per day being asked of them for their children's future. It could be saved for college tuition.

The renovation of education (books, teacher training, learning equipment, etc.) is more important to the minds of our young ones and the future of our city than the building of new schools and renovation of existing ones.

Susan Cee,
Rochester Hills

Rochester Eccentric

TOM BAER, COMMUNITY EDITOR, 810-651-7575
TOM BYRD, PUBLISHER, 810-901-2537
BOB SKLAR, MANAGING EDITOR, 810-901-2563
PHILIP SHERMAN, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 810-901-2575
MARY SCOTT, MANAGER OF CIRCULATION, 810-901-2548
STEVEN K. POPE, GENERAL MANAGER, 810-901-2595

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— Philip Power