

POINTS OF VIEW

Make a difference with resolutions

Come the New Year, most of us make personal resolutions.

You know the usual — eat less, exercise more, stop smoking, start a new hobby, organize the family photographs, re-organize that basement.

But some of our neighbors have a more universal resolution in mind. Members of Metro-Detroit WAND seek to empower women to act politically to reduce militarism and violence, and redirect military resources toward human and environmental needs.

WAND, a national organization which stands for Women's Action for New Directions, was once Women's Action for Nuclear Disarmament. When the nuclear threat subsided, it lost members to other causes, despite shifting its attention to further decreasing defense spending. It makes a lot of sense, WAND members say, because the less spent on defense, the more that can go to directly benefit society.

Like our personal resolutions, there are not easily accomplished. At a two-day planning retreat in early January, a number of local WAND

activists spoke frankly of the difficulty in getting people to hear their concerns.

"We were at Borders wrapping (as a holiday fund-raiser)," reported Lorraine Lerner of Southfield. "It gave me an opportunity to talk with a lot of people — who mostly weren't interested. 'We made \$52. The Girl Scouts made \$300. It's a real hard sell. It's hard to get across your passion.'"

"When I talk to people, they say nothing matters," says Bunny Cooper of West Bloomfield. "They feel disenfranchised."

"As a futurist, I see we are not teaching people to envision a better society," said Debbie Rowe of Farmington Hills. "We need to come up with specific examples where people made a difference."

All are accomplished women. Many are active or recently-retired teachers. Others are psychologists, writers, artists, CPAs. A 20-member board of directors heads a local organization that varies from 300-400 members.

Marilyn Schechter is an artist, and not a joiner. "I hate belonging to things," she acknowledged to WAND members sitting about her West



JUDITH DONER BERNE

Bloomfield living room, site of the retreat. "I tried a lot of things and left them. It's been 5-6 years and I'm still here."

Before making future plans, they discussed what they had accomplished locally this year. "Our goal this year was to get people with our goals elected to office," reviewed Lerner.

They credit hard work, including their "Got Out The Vote '96" poster which Harriet Alper of Bloomfield Hills got displayed all over town. It depicted a gagged Statue of Liberty and read: "Women have no voice if we don't vote. Our vote is our voice. Use It. Vote Nov. 5th."

WAND supported the successful

elections of Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick and Debbie Stabenow and reelection of Lynn Rivers to Congress; reelection of Sen. Carl Levin; election of Marilyn Kelly to the Supreme Court, giving that court its first female majority; replacement of a 6-2 Republican majority with a 4-4 GOP-Democratic split on the Michigan Board of Education; and re-achievement of a Democratic House in Lansing.

But that was then, this is now, Fern Katz of Southfield was quick to remind them. "Things are going well, but we can't afford to sit back and rest on our laurels."

Major goals for 1997 include: celebrating and publicizing the 10th anniversary of WAND's annual Mother's Peace Day Brunch; sending a delegation to Washington D.C. to lobby the March Chemical Weapons Convention; holding a September WAND/WILL (Women Legislator's Lobby) Conference in Washington D.C.; taking action against military spending via calls, e-mail, letters to Congress and letters to the editor; inaugurating a "Pie Day" picnic in July, with slices cut according to dis-

cretionary budget pie as an opportunity to highlight the size of the military budget.

As important, the ways to achieve each goal are detailed.

"I think we got some wonderful ideas and energy," Schechter said of the two-day retreat. "But we still don't have enough people. It takes a person with a special commitment to this focus."

"I feel I can't live with myself unless I belong to a group like this," said Joan Israel, a Franklin resident. "I feel I'm constantly evolving into a whole person and this group has helped," said Katz. "I feel empowered and making an impact into areas that were formerly men's issues," said Lerner.

1997's just begun. It's not too late to add to our personal resolutions: Join a group that you think can make a difference.

Judith Doner Berne, a West Bloomfield resident, is former managing editor of the Eccentric Newspapers. You can comment on this column by calling (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1997 or by writing or faxing, (810) 644-1314, the editor of this newspaper.

Parental worry over special ed is justified

Parents of special education students, you'll recall, hounded Gov. John Engler after his December appearance before the state Board of Education protesting planned cuts.

Engler worded his response very carefully: "There is no plan" to cut special ed. He challenged the parents to ask anyone who circulates that "rumor" to show them a document calling for special ed cuts. I was within a few feet of the exchange.

Well, it turns out there is a plan, and it has been on paper since Oct. 10. Mark

Murray, Engler's budget director, wrote a letter to the state majority leader Dick Posthumus and House Speaker Paul Hillegeons discussing the state Supreme Court's Durant decision.

In that case, 84 local school districts won a judgment that the state had underfunded them on special, bilingual, and drivers' education as well as school breakfasts and lunches. Murray wrote:

"We are asking for a Supreme Court review of this decision; however, in the meantime, it is imperative that state



TIM RICHARD

mandates... be replaced in the School Code with permissive language allowing districts to

offer these programs, but not requiring them. The School Code should also be changed to make clear that the state's requirements for special education shall not exceed federal requirements.

"I am asking for your support to eliminate these state mandates in the School Code." (Italics added.)

That's a "plan" if I ever saw one. The federal requirement is to provide special education for ages 3-21. Michigan provides it from 0-26.

The letter may explain why, in one suburban meeting with fearful parents, two GOP legislators said there is "no bill" to cut special ed requirements.

Yeah, there's no bill, but that doesn't mean the idea isn't actively being considered.

Special ed cuts are being permitted at the local level, too. The board voted 6-2 to grant three-year waivers from the class size rules.

Special ed is in the same position as Medicare, growing faster than the government's ability to pay for it. I lack the expertise to predict what cuts will be made, but I assure you cuts are coming.

Tim Richard reports on the local implications of state and regional events.

Services belie profit motive

For decades two institutions — the public schools and the local hospital — defined the core of many communities in Michigan. Today, however, something quite new is beginning to shake the values of service to the public we traditionally associate with schools and hospitals: profit motive.

It happened first with local hospitals, when people suddenly started realizing that the friendly place where your kids were born probably wasn't very well managed. As cost and reimbursement pressures mounted in the health care industry, a lot of smart people began to think of hospitals not as places to cure the sick but as profit centers.

Over the past 20 years, a lot of small hospitals have closed or merged with their neighbors. A lot of big hospitals — Henry Ford in Detroit and William Beaumont in Royal Oak are good examples — built satellite health centers and created health care networks.

And now very big, very wealthy and very well run corporations are mauling into the hospital business, buying local hospitals, slashing costs and turning what used to be community institutions into cash cows.

A case in point is an outfit called Columbia-HCA, which recently announced an agreement to buy the assets of Michigan Capital Medical Center, the No. 3 hospital player in the Lansing area. A coalition of local groups objected. Michigan Attorney General Frank Kelley sued to block the transaction. Ingham Circuit Judge James Giddings this month agreed, but Columbia-HCA says it will appeal. Where it will end up is anybody's guess.

Legalisms aside, the point here is that a fundamental transformation of the hospitals that used to be not-for-profit local institutions into professionally managed profit centers is moving rapidly and with very doubtful effects on the quality of health care, not to mention the workings of many communities.

Now the same thing is beginning to happen to local schools.

The rapid growth of charter schools in Michigan is producing a new for-profit industry: companies that sell management services to charter schools.

Charter schools in Michigan have grown to the point that this year more than 12,000 of Michigan's 1.6 million public school students are enrolled in 74 charter schools. But most charter schools are small and lack management skills, and many still on the drawing board lack the \$250,000 in seed capital and a building



PHILIP POWER

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most need to get started.

That's where for-profit companies like Synergy Training Solutions, of Farmington Hills, and the Leona Group, of Lansing, come in. For a fee, they provide these services to charter schools.

Robert Mills, head of the charter school office at Central Michigan University, which has granted most of charters to academics operating in Michigan, says that a typical fee for such companies is 10 percent of the per-pupil state aid, which is usually \$4,500 to \$5,500. A school with 200 students, for example, and around \$1 million in state aid could provide \$100,000 in business for a consulting company.

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Charter schools must abide by the same competitive bid rules as public schools, but charter schools are not required to get bids for professional services, including education management companies, lawyers, auditors and architects. And charter school boards are not elected by the public even though the funding for charter schools comes from public tax dollars, via the per-pupil state aid grant.

Where, critics wonder, are the accountability and public oversight?

And what, I wonder, has happened to the old tradition that certain kinds of activities — teaching kids and healing the sick, for example — were considered to be properly beyond the profit motive?

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