

Pendulum push

Community groups do their part

Kee the passion and work smarter, together. Those are the challenges facing Farmington and Farmington Hills as they confront growing drug and alcohol abuse by youth.

The community should be proud of the admirable efforts by the Farmington Families in Action and work by the school district, police, courts, service agencies and others. They must become part of a fabric of community effort, not a patchwork, according to Estraelce Michaelson of the Farmington Public Schools, who keynoted a recent summit of community leaders, students and parents hosted recently by FFIA.

At the summit, she urged every facet of the community to unite to do what they can toward education, prevention and setting examples to youth. She challenged parents to talk and listen to their children more and vice versa. She demanded people get involved or stop complaining.

Those are lofty goals, especially in light of the major challenge facing the community. As Michaelson noted, "the pendulum is swinging" and it isn't the good.

National and county statistics show increases in drug and alcohol use among our youth. One Western Michigan University study from 1996 shows more than 80 percent of Oakland County high school seniors used alcohol, while 55 percent tried marijuana. Both figures are above the national average. And incidental local police reports show more police arrests involving drugs, especially mari-

juana.

Just this week, the parents who hosted a beer bash for students from Farmington High School pleaded guilty and apologized to other parents and the entire community for supplying alcohol to minors at the party. Their ordeal should serve as a lesson and a wakeup call to all parents.

The Farmington area offers plenty of programs to help parents who want to do a better job raising their children responsibly. FFIA's Talking With Your Kids About Alcohol, the GRIP workshop and the Managing Middle School Madness videotape are a few fine initiatives. Another was the recent presentation on "Building Family Solidarity," put on by the schools' PTA Council through a Farmington Area Youth and Family Services grant. These programs are useful and helpful but most often it's those parents who don't have time or ambition to show up who need them most. Ditto the kids.

Some great ideas and projects will emerge from the summit and its followup meetings. Look for a survey of high schoolers and their parents about drug and alcohol usage as a way to draw even more attention to the issue. More small group, peer talk among high schoolers also is being proposed.

We expect a lot from these valuable community efforts, while at the same time knowing that it's what happens at home, around the dining room table or in the family room that will have the biggest impact in pushing the pendulum back.

Heartfelt legacy for schoolkids

The glowing tributes to Lewis Schulman, former Farmington Public Schools superintendent who died Feb. 5, weren't just part of a hollow exercise to lionize a bygone public official. They were heartfelt.

And they came from trustees and administrators who worked directly with school chief, and those who only had brief encounters with the man for whom a district building and street are named. There was much to admire.

Schulman, a World War II veteran who spoke seven languages, believed knowledge was to be shared and celebrated. He didn't speak in haughty, educationalese, but with genuine warmth and understanding. He was

approachable, affable and always gracious.

His management style — in contrast to our Dilbert-esque days of indecision and committee formation — was direct. He was known to defend staff, encourage decorum and was popular despite presiding over school closings, teacher layoffs and declining enrollment.

Schulman's efforts helped transform a modest-sized district beset with board squabbling into one of Oakland County's premier school systems. School administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and, most importantly to Schulman, the district's children continue to benefit from that legacy.

Set priorities, role for the arts

Two weeks ago, the Observer Newspapers held the second in an ongoing series of roundtable discussions about the role and condition of the arts in our communities.

Not surprisingly, it was a discussion as fertile and fascinating as a compelling work of art.

While issues like taxes, crime, the economy and repairs to our crumbling infrastructure require our vigilance, there's a pressing need to broaden the public discussion about how to further enhance our communities.

Making a commitment to the arts, we believe, can foster an identity and a further sense of community. And, it can help to define our area beyond the notion of the automobile-industry capital.

Oakland County is in the midst of one of the most prolonged economic growth periods in 25 years.

But what lies beyond the economic growth and affluence? How can our shared experiences best be characterized?

Since last October when the National Endowment for the Arts published, "American Canvases," a report on the nation's cultural legacy, the Observer has felt a compelling need to ask: What is the cultural legacy in each of the communities we serve?

About every eight weeks, the Observer moderates a public discussion with those who actively participate in the arts, including art

associations, community theaters, community orchestras, patrons, museum directors and arts educators.

Our goal is to examine how the arts contribute to the overall quality of life in our communities. And, equally important, how the Observer can contribute to cultivating and promoting the local art scene.

Essentially, we hope to elevate the discussion about the arts. In practical terms, that means getting beyond the political rhetoric.

For instance, for nearly two years, representatives from the tri-county area have debated the merits of a tri-county tax to support the arts.

Basically, the idea — modeled after the programs in Denver, Chicago and San Francisco — calls for a 1/2-cent property assessment to generate operating revenue for 14 of the metro area's major cultural institutions.

The proposal has languished in the state legislature, and has never come before the voters. It should.

Although the mechanics of the bill might need to be smoothed out, the intent of the proposal should have a broader public hearing.

Historically, the arts and populism have benefited from each other.

We believe the Observer roundtable discussions offer a valuable means to clarify the public debate about the values and priorities that define our common cultural experience.

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What will you be doing for St. Valentine's Day?



"Help my mom and dad clean the house."

Elizabeth Racey
second-grader



"I'm gonna send Valentines to the whole class."

Andy Lenz
second-grader



"I'm gonna give my aunts and uncles a card."

Kevin Rafferty
second-grader



"Share."

Jamie Black
second-grader

We asked this question at Our Lady of Sorrows Elementary in Farmington.

LETTERS

Starr guilty of treason

The president is a victim of a witch hunt. A relative handful of radical Republicans, with Kenneth Starr as their point man, have for years sought to undo in the courts what the American people did at the ballot box, elect Bill Clinton president. First, Kenneth Starr invented the Paula Jones suit against the president and then he was appointed "independent" counsel to investigate the alleged involvement of the president in the alleged Whitewater scandal.

Granted, during the legal maneuvering involved in defending himself from Starr's witch hunt Bill Clinton may have suborned perjury. Nevertheless the greater crime is Starr's. He — motivated by partisan politics — has for years sought to undermine the president, punishing him, as well as his family and friends, emotionally, financially and politically for the "crime" of winning the 1992 and 1996 elections. I believe Starr's witch hunt can justifiably be called treason.

Our government is founded upon the peaceful transfer of power from one party to another. When one party seeks to undermine that transfer by use of force, treason is obvious. Starr, his allies and dupes (i.e., Paula Jones) have sought to undermine the Clinton presidency by numerous and unending showtrials, while a witch hunt of this type may not be as obvious or as effective as brute force, it is still damaging to the body politic — still treason. If Clinton is impeached as a result of this witch hunt, America will have to face many more of these until some faction takes up arms, either in self-defense or in rage over their inability to "get" an "enemy" politician, and we tear ourselves apart in civil war. That is where the Starr witch hunt is leading us.

Tony Wentworth
Farmington Hills

Tiresome half-truths

How much longer does Time Warner think they can bully this community before the decent hard-working people of this community stand up and say, "I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore!" and begin catapulting their convertor boxes through your office window?

Time Warner is a guest in this home called Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi. A guest who not only takes advantage of his host's generosity but robs him blind. A guest whose manners have been so appalling they would surely give Miss Manners a fatal stroke and make Emily Post turn over in her grave.

Time Warner has nearly doubled the cost of cable since acquiring MetroVision in January of 1995. In December of 1996, Time Warner

claimed they raised rates because they were offering more channels. We as a community bought the rationale, we didn't like it, but we dealt with it. Except Time Warner didn't tell the community the full story. The fact is that the 14 channels that were added in December of 1996 were added as a cost-saving strategy for Time Warner. Time Warner wanted conformity with its other franchises which had already been upgraded in December of 1995. This allowed Time Warner to operate one facility rather than four or five and save hundreds of thousands of dollars a year.

This time, Time Warner conveniently points the proverbial finger at Rupert Murdoch and Fox. However, once more this is not the complete story. Time Warner's cable division posted increased profits of 38 percent for 1996 and a projected increase of 17 percent for 1997. Time Warner is also projecting a pre-tax profit of \$5.9 billion with \$2.8 billion coming from their cable division for 1998. This leads to the question, that if things are so profitable at Time Warner, why are we the consumer being squeezed dry like a sponge for cable?

The truth is Time Warner is deeply in debt from acquiring Ted Turner's media empire and Time Warner's entertainment division like Warner Bros. Studio and Warner Music are losing money after making bad deals and bad movies. In other words, we the consumer are picking up the tab for Time Warner's ineptly flawed fiscal management practices.

Tom, Time Warner should feel privileged to be in our homes every night. Instead, it's as if Time Warner expects us to pay tribute to them as if they were a techno-demagogue for bringing us the miracle of cable TV. You have been given great power, but with all power comes responsibility. A responsibility to the community you service.

The people of this community are not simpatons and are growing tired and angry of Time Warner's attitude and half-truths, not to mention higher cable rates. I remind you, Time Warner is here at our leisure. You can be replaced.

Stephen Dibert
Farmington Hills

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, 33411 Grand River, Farmington Michigan 48335. Or they can be faxed to (248) 477-9722.

TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of the Farmington Observer and Enterprise.

40 YEARS AGO — FEB. 12, 1958 (ENTERPRISE)

Favorable reports were given on several of the school construction projects in progress in the Farmington school district. According to architect John Allen, work on the Ten Mile elementary school addition was going well.

Enrollment in Farmington schools dropped 21 students, from 6,070 to 6,049, since the start of the 1957-58 school year.

25 YEARS AGO — FEB. 10, 1973

The Farmington area could have an ice rink even though city residents turned down a \$1.25 million bond issue in November. Rosetti Associates, Inc., which operated a privately owned rink in Grosse Pointe, made overtures to purchase land to build a private rink.

2 YEARS AGO — FEB. 12, 1996

Farmington Hills resident Janet Good was watching the trial of Dr. Jack Kevorkian unfold with more than a passing interest. "I may need his services," said the Republican feminist, who in 1996 was diagnosed with terminal pancreatic cancer. She died in 1997.

Farmington Observer

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— Philip Power