

# Race for governor could be run over bumpy state roads

If you thought roads were not to be a hot political issue this election season, think again.

Two decidedly Oakland personalities — Geoffrey N. Fieger, the flamboyant Southfield attorney, and Brent O. Bair, the low-keyed manager of the county road commission — both decried the condition of state and local roads.

Almost at the same hour last week, both men complained about the roads being in a state of neglect and disrepair. But they did not agree about who was to blame.

When he officially announced his candidacy for governor Thursday morning in Lansing, Fieger minced no words in blaming Gov. John M. Engler for the poor condition of the roads.

The outspoken attorney cited Engler's "abominable neglect of the state's infrastructure for the past eight years" as a principal reason for ousting the incumbent this November.

Almost at the same hour Thursday, Bair acknowledged what many motorists see almost daily — roads potholed and crumbling.

At the road commission's "Media Day" at the county complex, Bair told reporters that roads — foremost those in Oakland — would continue to deteriorate without a massive infusion of cash, either from a higher gasoline tax or a shift in the present distribution formula.

But Bair did not blame Engler. Privately, he said Engler was "doing a good job" trying to get more federal funds for state

roads.

But the four-cents-per-gallon road tax advocated last year by the governor was inadequate to fix the roads, Bair said. "We're not going to be able to do what everyone expects."

"No matter how you shift the (existing) jobs and dollars, we're not going to be able to fix the roads at the present level of funding," he said. "Eventually we've got to do something else to generate more money, whether it's raising the gasoline tax or something else."

Michigan was ranked 45th in the amount of tax per gallon last year, when the state assessed 15 cents for every gallon of gasoline and diesel fuel, according to the road commission. With the increase of four cents per gallon, Michigan ranks 31st in the country. The state now levies 19 cents on each gallon of gasoline and 15 cents per gallon of diesel fuel.

But that increase doesn't provide the funds needed to do the job, according to road officials.

Bair said the timing of the two events — Fieger's press conference and the road commission's media day — was coincidence. "Actually, it (both happening almost simultaneously) took a lot of media attention away from us."

County executive L. Brooks Patterson disagreed with the timing. "I'm sure Brent Bair doesn't keep track of Fieger's activities,"

he said. "But I agree we need more money for roads."

Specifically, the executive would like to see the sales tax Michigan currently imposes on gasoline taxes used for roads.

"The gasoline tax is basically a user tax," said Patterson. "If we're going to tax gasoline, the money should be used for roads. That would generate millions of dollars."

As for any additional increase in gasoline taxes, Patterson said no. "I would have liked to see a bigger hike last year (the road commission wanted 12 cents per gallon instead of four). But politically and realistically we can't go back to voters for more money."

Road commissioner Rudy Lozano, a staunch Republican, said he doesn't blame Democrats in general and Fieger specifically for making roads a political issue. "It's a fact that the roads are in terrible condition," said the Clarkston resident. But Democrats should share some of the responsibility, he insisted.

"The roads have been neglected for more than 20 years," he said. "And it's going to take massive amounts of money to make them right."

But the coincidence of both Fieger and Bair talking about the poor condition of state and local roads does underscore one fact, said Lozano.

"It shows how important roads really are," he said.

## ELECTION '98

### OAKLAND DIGEST

**Oakland Digest** provides a summary of headline stories from around the county during the week leading up to April 12.

#### BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP

Upper: IHOP is hopping into town, minus its traditional turquoise roof. In keeping with the township's tony image, the International House of Pancakes planned for the Telegraph-Square Lake area will feature a brick facade, and slate-colored roof, with wood trim.

#### FARMINGTON HILLS

Crime declines: Last year may have been "the best year in history" in the city's efforts to battle serious crime, police Chief William Dwyer reported. Serious crime declined in 1997 for the third straight year, Dwyer said. Crime statistics showed a 25 percent drop in burglaries and a more-than 30 percent drop in vandalism.

#### KEEOGE HARBOR

Business owners say they want out of the city's plans to rezone Cuss Lake Road properties. A corridor rezoning plan for the roadway would allow townhouses, but business owners said the plan would end up lowering

property values.

#### LAKE ORION

Parks needs: Village parks need substantial improvements, according to several residents who spoke out at a recent council session. Residents complained of broken parks equipment and a lack of picnic tables and said trash was too rarely cleared.

#### OXFORD

Reluctant appointee: Village president Tom Athans was appointed to the Oxford Emergency Safety authority, but he's not exactly thrilled with the post. Athans has been outspoken calling for board membership to be reformed. While both the village and Oxford Township send members to the board, Athans says the municipality has too little control over its actions.

#### ROCHESTER HILLS

He's the chief: Dan Jacobson is the city's new fire chief. Jacobson, 34, is currently maintenance supervisor for the Great Oaks Apartments complex. He will become chief June 1. Before that, he'll spend two weeks working with retiring chief Bill Gray.

#### SOUTHFIELD

Veto override: The city will give Federal Community Development Block Grant dollars to HAVEN and the Women's Survival Center after all. Council members overruled Mayor Donald Finner's veto, voting 6-1 to provide a combined \$17,000 in federal block grant money to the domestic violence shelters. Fracassi argued that block grant funds weren't the proper method for supporting shelter programs.

#### SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP

Police seek funds: Renewal of two police millages await voters in the township's August primary election. Police seek to renew 1.3484 mills for basic services. The department includes six officers and a sergeant.

#### TROY

In the picture: The local League of Women Voters is taking the city's municipal cable station to task for splicing incumbent Councilman John Stevens into its April 6 presentation of the league's "Meet the Candidates" forum. Stevens was absent from the March 23 forum. His comments were taped later and inserted into the program by cable staffers.



in business: Matt Vera (left) his wife Jewly and their partner Stephen Cumby say they took sentiment following last year's crash involving two Detroit Red Wings and a team employee into account when founding their new limousine service. Though alcohol wasn't determined to be a factor in that well-publicized crash, the trio says it will offer alcohol free packages and will periodically test its drivers for drugs.

## New limo service says it will put safety first

Nearly a year ago, the euphoria spawned by the Detroit Red Wings' Stanley Cup win came to an abrupt end with career-threatening injuries to Vladimir Konstantinov.

A road limousine carrying a partying Konstantinov, a fellow player and a team masseuse crashed for no apparent reason on Woodward Avenue in Birmingham. The three were hospitalized, but the driver — whose operating license had been suspended — suffered only minor injuries.

Now, as that anniversary date approaches, three entrepreneurs in Oxford Township are launching a limousine service that will undoubtedly capitalize on concerns about safety and licensing standards spawned by the tragic crash.

The timing of their business venture is coincidental, according to Stephen Cumby and Jewly and Matt Vera, partners in "Extreme Limousine," a service that had its first professional gig Saturday — a birthday celebration for a Pontiac police officer.

"We were talking about operating a limousine service before the (Red Wing) accident happened," said Vera, a 1987 graduate of Lake Orion High School. They made the transition from talk to action in September when they came into some working capital, he said.

"We were tired of working for other people who didn't seem to appreciate what we did," he said. "The (June 13 accident) was bad for the entire limousine rental business, and we

don't want to make too much of that."

Even so, a limousine service that carefully screens its drivers and demands periodic drug testing is bound to be noticed in the peak season for proms and graduations. There's undoubtedly a niche for a service that can convincingly assure parents about the safety of youngsters entrusted to its drivers.

Drinking and drug use weren't determined to be factors in the Red Wings' crash, but the accident nonetheless prompted concerns about driver safety.

Toward that end, Extreme Limousine will have zero tolerance for alcohol use in their vehicles, said Cumby, a 1985 graduate of Hazel Park High School who has been a chauffeur as well as an over-the-road truck driver. Some of their packages include bubbly cider for special occasion toasts. "But if we see that a minor has been drinking, we will take them home immediately," he said.

For adults, however, their packages include ice coolers that can be stocked as the customer chooses.

After all, noted Cumby, elegance, style and personal preference is what a limo service should be about. "That kind of elegance has been missing," he said, "and we hope to bring it back."

The company currently has three vehicles, a stretch limo, a Cadillac and Chevrolet Suburban, "all brand new and sparkling," according to Jewly

Vera, the 1990 homecoming queen for Oxford Christian Academy. The vehicles were certified by the state last week, and the partners expect the business to take off as soon as word of their service starts to spread.

They have contacted the Red Wing hockey club, in case the organization is looking for a limo service during the upcoming playoffs. "But we haven't heard anything," said Cumby.

So far, the company hasn't needed to hire drivers, Cumby and Matt Vera intend to handle the workload until business requires more people.

When they do hire drivers, however, no amateurs need apply. "We will only use experienced drivers with exemplary records," he said. Their future drivers must also agree, as a condition of employment, to submit to periodic, unannounced drug testing — something not currently demanded for a chauffeur's license.

The company also intends to use a subscription provided by the Secretary of State's office that notifies employers when a driver gets a ticket.

Hopefully, the additional concern about safety and elegance won't translate into rates that customers find unacceptable, said Cumby — although he's convinced slightly hire rates would be a willing trade-off for most knowledgeable parents.

Additional information is available by calling (248) 969-8892.

### OAKLAND JOURNAL

**Oakland Journal** is a roundup of Oakland County news and notes collected from government, school, civic, community and neighborhood sources. Please write: Oakland Journal, c/o Oakland County editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Fax number is (248) 644-1314.

#### RELIGIOUS DISCUSSION

Lay people and clergy are invited to the first Detroit Parliament for World Religions, April 28 to May 1 at Oakland University. Family, parenting and interfaith marriage will be among the items discussed in a grass roots setting. Harvey Cox, author of "The Secular City" will deliver the keynote address, 7:30 p.m. April 28. Workshops will meet 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday and Friday. A Festival of Sacred Performing Arts will be presented, 7:30 p.m. April 30. Registration

#### RECYCLING JAMBOREE

SOCRRA will hold a recycling jamboree 4-7:30 p.m. April 23 in the Royal Oak Kinross High School cafeteria, 1800 Lexington Blvd., Royal Oak. Exhibits will focus on reducing, reusing and recycling waste materials. There will be a Detroit Edison Environmental show at 4:30 p.m. The program is free. SOCRRA, the Southeastern Oakland County Resource Recovery Authority, is the trash handling agency for Beverly Hills, Birmingham, Lathrup Village and Troy, among other area communities. For more information, call (248) 288-5150.

#### MONEY MATTERS

The Womencenter at Oakland

Community College's Orchard Ridge campus is presenting "Money Matters: The Ten Percent Solution," a seminar on money management tips for women 7-9 p.m. April 21. The seminar will be held in J Building Room 308. Admission is \$10. The campus is at 27055 Orchard Lake Road, south of I-696, Farmington Hills. Additional information is available by calling (248) 640-1540.

#### LAW DAY

The Oakland County Bar Association is sponsoring Meet The Lawyer, a program dispensing free one-on-one legal advice, noon to 5 p.m. Sunday, May 3 at Tel-12 Mall, Southfield. The event is part of the 11th annual Oakland County Law Fair, to be held that day at the mall. For more information on Meet The Lawyer, call Shirley Robertson, (248) 334-3400. For more advice of the law fair, call 46th District

Court Judge Stephen Cooper's office, (248) 354-9377.

#### LAW EXAM

A free LSAT preparation program, including a practice test, is being offered 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 25 at Oakland University through the OU College of Arts and Sciences. LSAT scores commonly help determine admission to law school programs. To register, or for more information, call (248) 370-3125.

#### GRAD SCHOOL EXAM

Students preparing for the Graduate Record Examination are invited to attend a workshop series sponsored by the Oakland University College of Arts and Sciences. A seven-week Tuesday-Thursday series is scheduled for Birmingham Seaholm High School, beginning April 21. A five-week Saturday series begins

April 25 at Oakland University's main campus. Cost for either workshop series is \$295. To register, or for more information, call (248) 370-3125.

#### CAMP EVENT

A benefit concert featuring the musical trio "Me, Him and Her" is scheduled for May 3 at First United Methodist church, Royal Oak. The event will raise contributions for Camp Rain Bear, a first-of-its-kind Michigan camp for children with HIV and AIDS. For more information, call Loisann Arnold (248) 486-3872 or Kate Wade at (248) 549-7337.

#### WALSH REGISTRATION

Sign-ups for summer classes has begun at Walsh College. Students can register for classes at campuses in Troy, Novi, Clinton township and Port Huron. Summer classes run May 15 to July

#### HABITAT FOR HUMANITY

Oakland County 4-H Clubs are joining with Habitat for Humanity to raise money to construct houses in the Pontiac area. 4-H youngsters will build Lego houses to call attention to the Habitat for Humanity program. They seek sponsors to help them acquire Lego materials. For additional information, call (248) 858-0889.

#### MENTORS PLUS

Mentors Plus, a program of Oakland County Youth Assistance, seeks positive adult role models for youngsters 5-16. Call (248) 858-0041.