

Nature group plans park walk

Members of the Sierra Club's southeast Michigan group are sponsoring a five-mile nature hike through Independence Oaks County Park Saturday, May 2.

Walkers will gather 9 a.m. at behind the Michigan National Bank branch at 14 Mile and I-75, on the south edge of Oakland Mall.

There is a park entrance fee. A \$1 transportation will also be charged.

Independence Oaks Park is north of I-75 in Independence Township.

For more information, call June Cox at (248) 438-9522.

Bill would let malls ban teens on weekend nights

After being approved in the Michigan Senate, a bill that would enable shopping malls to exclude 16-year-olds on Friday and Saturday nights is awaiting action in the House of Representatives.

Supporters of the legislation — including senators Michael J. Bouchard, R-Birmingham; Mat J. Dunakias, R-Lake Orion, and Willis Bullard Jr., R-Milford — contend it would provide malls and shopping centers with a "tool" for dealing with loitering teens who sometimes become rowdy and get out of hand.

"It's a widely misunderstood proposal," said Bouchard, who sponsored the bill. "It's not meant to ban young people from shopping. It's meant to serve shopping centers by repealing parts of the old law that stand in the way of malls being able to effectively deal with a problem."

The problem, Bouchard said, is youngsters who use profanity, threaten security officers, intimi-

date other shoppers, block entrances and sometimes get into fights. The Fairlane Town Center, Dearborn, at one point, closed early on Fridays and Saturdays because officials claimed rowdy teens were causing problems. The mall has since resumed normal hours on weekends, but malls want the wherewithal to deal with that kind of situation should it arise again, said the law maker.

Opponents of the bill — including senators Gary Peters, D-Bloomfield Township and John D. Cherry Jr., D-Clia — contend the bill is unnecessary and could raise civil rights concerns.

"It's contrary to the Elliot-Larson Civil Rights Act to exclude somebody on the basis of age," said Peters. "Furthermore, it can lead to selective enforcement. Malls could begin kicking out people who look like trouble makers."

"I don't support teenagers or

anyone else misbehaving at malls," said the senator. "But there are existing laws that can deal with this problem. I don't support legislation that would exclude somebody on the basis of age. That's a very dangerous slippery slope."

The legislation, Senate Bill 494, was approved 24-12 in the Senate and has had a second reading in the House of Representatives. A vote could come this session.

Essentially, it would allow mall owners to exclude anybody 16 or younger — after 6 p.m. on Fridays or Saturdays — not accompanied by someone 19 or older. Some areas, such as theaters, are exempted, and a mall would have to advertise so-called "curfew policy" at least 10 days before it went into effect.

A spokeswoman for the state chapter of the International Shopping Centers Council said malls and shopping centers are not anti-teenagers. "They're some of our best customers, and many of them are future employees," Catherine O'Malley said.

Furthermore, said O'Malley, who is also general manager of the Twelve Oaks Mall in Novi, not every mall or shopping center would need to adopt such a policy. "But if we feel the need to adopt the curfew to protect other shoppers — or their right to shop — we should have the right to adopt such a policy."

All too often, O'Malley said, parents drop youngsters off at the mall and leave them there for hours unescorted and unsupervised.

With time on their hands —

and no supervision — the youngsters sometimes get into trouble, explained O'Malley. "If they have a medical problem, we're obligated to contact a parent or guardian or to provide medical assistance. So obviously, there's a safety component to our concerns."

Unsupervised youngsters sometimes cause more serious problems by shoplifting or causing vandalism, O'Malley said. "Malls and shopping centers should have the ability to deal with these kinds of problems," she said.

But Peters said the law would not provide the intended remedy. "Police will tell you that most gangs have at least one person (within their ranks) who is 19 or older. What will the malls do then?"

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