

Improvements

Jobs, education on upswing

Oakland County, once the area of sleepy small towns and villages, has become a major force in economic development.

Jobs, jobs and more jobs are the watchword as development now stretches to the far reaches of the county's northern borders.

In Farmington and Farmington Hills, voters in 1998 renewed the one-third mill property tax for the SMART bus system — one of the cheapest and visibly successful anti-poverty programs government ever has concocted.

The county also is at the forefront of job creation and new developments such as Great Lakes Crossing in Auburn Hills.

Education continues to thrive in Oakland County. At Oakland Community College in Farmington Hills, there are no glittering monuments to dedicate, but the Orchard Ridge Campus of OCC is being fixed, both at the surface and the innards. OCC has used the new property tax money approved in 1995 by voters to fix parking lots, pipes and building appearances on a campus that now is 30 years old. In addition, the state has produced \$10 million for building improvements.

As promised, the money is going into physical plant and equipment rather than fatter salaries. Moreover, the level of rhetoric at the board of trustees level has diminished. No college campus in America ever will be free of campus politics, but the news from Orchard Ridge is overwhelmingly good.

Many political observers are worried about the effect of term limits, which took effect in the 1998 elections. State representatives are forced to leave after three terms.

The Farmington area gained political clout it hasn't had in decades with the elevation of Rep. Andrew Raczkowski to majority floor leader for 1999-2000. Raczkowski will be the GOP's traffic cop on the House floor, deciding when to take up bills and whether to prolong floor fights. Happily, he understands the need for keeping legislation flowing and won't fall into his predecessors' abominable habits of letting bills pile up until the final midnight.

Many stalemates

On the biggest issues, Michigan government had a term of stalemate in 1997-98. That was because the governor's office and state Senate were controlled by Republicans, the House and Supreme Court by Democrats.

There was little of the spirit of compromise we saw in the Proposal A school funding solution or during Gov. Bill Milliken's tenure. Each party was striving to develop campaign issues harder than it was working to solve people's problems.

The Senate had one plan for across-the-board cuts in the personal income tax; the House targeted specific groups for tax cuts. Result: no tax cuts.

Gov. John Engler, at the last possible minute, unveiled a plan for deregulating electric utilities that only he, Detroit Edison and Consumers Energy liked. The Senate wrestled briefly with it; the House didn't touch it. Result: no electric deregulation.

Education turned corner

State testing of public school students is here to stay. No longer is it satisfactory for a student to sit in class a dozen years and get a diploma without proving that he or she knows something of substance.

The Legislature listened to a lot of complaints about the MEAP high school proficiency tests, tweaked the details, but essentially retained the concept of statewide testing. Some suburban students boycotted the

MEAP high school tests, but State Superintendent of Public Instruction Art Ellis is determined that more students will take them, and more job providers and college admissions officers will look at them. We take him at his word and applaud him.

One of the most unheralded acts of 1998 was the Legislature's adoption of Engler's \$50 million plan for information technology "gold collar jobs." Nationally, educators have realized that 20th century America has done an excellent job of getting the brightest scholars into universities, but we've let down the middle 50 percent of high school graduates.

The Information Technology program has plopped \$20 million into two-year scholarships. Another \$30 million will go into training centers, mostly at community colleges. It's an important realization that young people need to be prepared for the 21st century world of work. Michigan has turned the corner. We applaud the change.

Dr. Death's alternative

Michigan got nationwide attention with its Sept. 1 law banning assisted suicide, its voter rejection of Proposal B to allow physician aid-in-dying, and its prosecution of Dr. Jack Kevorkian for what is essentially euthanasia.

What should have had attention is the way we've made pain management a front-burner issue — through licensing hospices, through laws allowing use of pain-killers and through continuing education in pain management for professionals.

We are prolonging the quality of life by drawing attention to the need for organ donations. Previously, Michigan was near the bottom of the list in organ donations. This can be changed.

Public schools attacked

More bad ideas than good are floating around about how to improve public schools. Some of the bad ones:

■ More charter schools. The hucksters sell these as offering competition to true public schools. Actually, they are turning in poor MEAP test scores, and those chartered by Central Michigan University have been operated in violation of laws affecting children's safety and parents' right to know. The state should be thinking in terms of closing down bad charter schools, not adding more.

■ More chartering authorities. Engler talks of allowing cities and counties to charter public school academies. General governments lack the expertise and bureaucracy to oversee schools. The idea is a bad one, and Engler should forget it as fast as possible.

■ U-M chartering. David Brandon, who chaired the Central Michigan University board during its bad experience with chartering schools, now has been elected to the University of Michigan Board of Regents. He made an ideological campaign issue out of getting U-M to become a chartering authority. Again, the idea is a bad one that hasn't worked elsewhere.

■ Tax credits and vouchers. Advocates of private schooling are itching to get their hands on state tax money, with minimal supervision. They will stop at nothing in their propaganda campaign to disguise their money lust as "parental choice." Michigan's Constitution states quite clearly that no public money is to go to private or parochial schools. Voters made the right decision the first time. We shouldn't be tricked by the "market place" flimflammy into spending public money anywhere but on public schools.

ARKIE HUDKINS



LETTERS

Sellers, beware

Electronic lock-box seller, beware! The old adage "Buyer, Beware" no longer applies when it comes to real estate. The new adage is "Seller, Beware."

The Western Wayne County Board of Realtors, whose area includes Garden City, Westland, Wayne, Livonia, Canton and Redford to name a few, has decided to force its members into using an electronic lock-box system.

Oh, they say it's a voluntary program and if enough Realtors do not choose to participate, they will let it drop. But, at the same time the board is telling Realtors if they do not act now, this system will cost them at least three times as much later.

Now the board is trying to say that the primary reason for Realtors to use this system is for the security of the homes that are listed.

Let me share with you a couple of reasons why I feel it is seller, beware:

Damage to your home is becoming an issue. These electronic lock-boxes are extremely bulky. They are causing damage to storm doors, doorjambs, etc.

With an electronic key pad, Realtors in good standing can let themselves into your home anytime they wish. No longer will it be necessary to call the homeowner and confirm that a showing is convenient or allowed. You could be in the middle of dinner or taking a shower, when — surprise! You have a Realtor and clients in your living room.

If your home is listed with a Realtor who is using an electronic lock-box, your home may not be getting shown by Realtors without. There is at least one local real estate office whose policy is that Realtors without key pads cannot show these homes.

When a seller chooses a Realtor to list with, that Realtor usually becomes a seller's agent. A seller's agent has a responsibility to then work in the best interest of the seller. How can you work in the best interest of the seller if you are excluding a large majority of area Realtors from showing a property? Answer — you can't.

So, you see, "Seller, Beware" indeed is the new adage. I do not know why the electronic lock-box is being forced down the throats of local Realtors, but I can tell you the current system works extremely well. It is a secure and convenient way to allow access to your home while listed. Your home can be shown by all Realtors when you choose to allow them in. Exactly as it should be.

There is one more old adage that also applies — "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Jackie Perrydore
Garden City

Thoughts on Clinton

It is no secret that there is little affection between the Clinton administration and the U.S. military establishment.

From Clinton's early half-hearted salutes, to his guys in the military policy, to his defense budget cuts, the administration's hostility toward things military has been well-documented.

How ironic it is that now the most pacifist wing of the Democratic Party is seeking to use a violent and strangely opportunistic military action in Iraq to save the Clinton presidency.

And amazingly, the most hawkish and pro-military wing of the Republican Party is accused of undermining the morale of our brave troops in the field by impeaching their commander in chief even while the battle is raging.

America's military are trained professionals who do their jobs and keep their personal opinions and feelings to themselves.

It would be unseemly of me to even suggest that news of the impeachment of Commander Bill Clinton would be met with unrestrained jubilation, hats-in-the-air hoots, and hardy cheers from our military troops in the Persian Gulf and around the world.

So I won't. But ... what do you think?

Walter Warren
Westland

Paying the way

When a citizen in the United States pays Social Security taxes on his wages and salaries for 40 years, he is entitled to benefits when he retires. The only fair, reasonable and redeeming feature of the Social Security system is that if one contributes, he receives benefits.

Writers to your paper suggest that retirees who can live without Social Security checks do so. They have even suggested that the well-to-do elderly who receive government retirement checks are unfair, uncaring and shamefully greedy. All throughout the word, the "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" mentality has been recognized as covetous, immoral and thieving.

Neil Goodbred
Livonia

COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What's your New Year's resolution?



"Let's face it — I don't know! Why break 'em?"
Calvin Voye
Canton Township



"To be more organized in my daily life."
Joe Hejka
Livonia



"Stop smoking."
Mary Johnson
Detroit



"Quit smoking. Why? They're \$30 a carton!"
Mary Ann Litynski
Farmington Hills

We asked this question at the Livonia Mall.

Observer Newspapers

SUSAN ROBIE, MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2149
HUOH GALLAGHER, ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR, 734-953-2118
PEG KNOXSPILL, ADVERTISING MANAGER, 734-953-2177
LARRY GEIGER, CIRCULATION MANAGER, 734-953-2234
BANKS M. DISHMON, JR., PUBLISHER, 734-953-2100
STEVEN K. POPE, VICE-PRESIDENT/GENERAL MANAGER, 734-953-2252
RICK FIGURELLI, MARKETING DIRECTOR, 734-953-2150

HOMETOWN COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK, INC.

PHILIP POWER, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD JEANNE TOWAR, VICE PRESIDENT/EDITORIAL RICHARD AGKIAN, PRESIDENT

OUR MISSION: "Because we publish community newspapers, we think about community journalism in a fundamentally different way than our bigger competition. They consider themselves to be independent from the stories and communities they cover, swooping in to write the unusual or sensational and then dashing off to cover something else. We regard ourselves as both accurate journalists and as caring citizens of the communities where we work."

— Philip Power