

Auto race track controversy upstages festivities

By PAT MURPHY
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They gathered to commemorate improvements along Eight Mile Road — and beautifying things to come.

But they quickly became embroiled in the new auto racing track proposed along Woodward Avenue south of Eight Mile in Detroit — with pickets outside, insisting it would destroy the quality of life in southern Oakland County as well as tranquil and viable neighborhoods adjacent to the state fairgrounds.

The so-called "Big Four" political leaders of southeast Michigan — Dennis W. Archer, mayor of Detroit; John C. Hertel, chair of the Macomb County Board of Commissioners; Edward H. McNamara, executive of Wayne County; and L. Brooks Patterson, executive of Oakland County — gathered for the leadership luncheon of the Eight Mile Boulevard Association Thursday at Vladimir's in Farmington Hills.

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But the auto race track controversy upstaged everything.

"I thought it was a good meet-

ing," said Kevin F. Kelley, supervisor of Redford Charter Township and a member of the association's board of directors. "It's a controversial topic, and people wanted to know what the political leaders had to say."

As part of their two-minute introductory remarks, in answer to questions from the packed audience or privately, the each of the big four voiced their respective position.

Hertel, who is also executive director of the Michigan State Fairgrounds, said he is pushing for the race track as part of the extensive development proposed by the Nederlander Theatrical Organization, including theaters, motels, a senior citizens center, shopping facilities and affordable housing.

Noise levels, he insisted, can

be minimized and brought down to acceptable levels, as demonstrated by recent tests.

Archer said he favors the development, "but not at the expense of the quality of life in those neighborhoods."

McNamara said the development, but only the noise problem is adequately addressed and if neighbors are convinced it is acceptable.

Patterson said he generally favors the development because it would contribute to economic development in the area. "It's important that Eight Mile (and other major corridors) look good," he said.

Not only to impress visitors, Patterson continued, "if it looks good, chances are it is good."

Asked if the Silverdome would be a good site for a race track — once the Detroit Lions move back to Detroit — Patterson said it would be up to Pontiac officials who control the property. "But don't worry," the executive said, "it's a valuable parcel of property, and it will be put to good use."

Carla A. Gibbs, chair of the association board of directors and regional manager of Detroit Edison in Oakland County, termed the luncheon a success. "We had more than 400 people attending," she said, "that shows support (for improving Eight Mile) and it shows commitment." Since the association was established seven years ago, the association has led the effort to rid the Eight Mile corridor of trash — including some of the offensive adult entertainment establishments, according to Mayor Archer.

The association's greatest success to date, according to Gibbs, is the planting of 24 perennial gardens to beautify Eight Mile.

But future projects are also important, insisted Gibbs, the daughter of former Detroit Mayor Roman Gibbs who was in the audience.

"We're in the process of upgrading bus stops along Eight Mile," she said. At some locations, the association intends to build shelters to shield riders waiting for the bus, she said. At other locations, it will be beautifying existing shelters.

Those kinds of improvements are more than welcome, according to Oakland County Commissioner Ruel E. McPherson (D-Hazel Park), one of the luncheon goers. "There's a lot more to do along Eight Mile Road than planting flowers," he said.

CHAMBER NOTES

The following is a listing of Farmington-Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce activities. For more information, call the chamber at 474-3440.

■ Education/Work Force Development Committee meeting — 3:30-4:30 p.m. Monday, May 22, chamber office.

■ Oakland Chamber Network "Back to Business" mixer — Tuesday, May 23, Post Bar, 22828 Woodward Avenue in Ferndale.

■ Morning Connection — 8-9 a.m. Thursday, June 1, Best Western Executive Hotel Suites.

■ Chamber Challenge 9-hole golf outing & dinner — 3-7:30 p.m. Thursday, June 8, Cattails Golf Course.

■ Membership committee meeting — 8:30-9:30 a.m. Friday, June 9, chamber office.

■ Ambassadors Club meeting — 8:30-9:30 a.m. Tuesday, June 13, chamber office.

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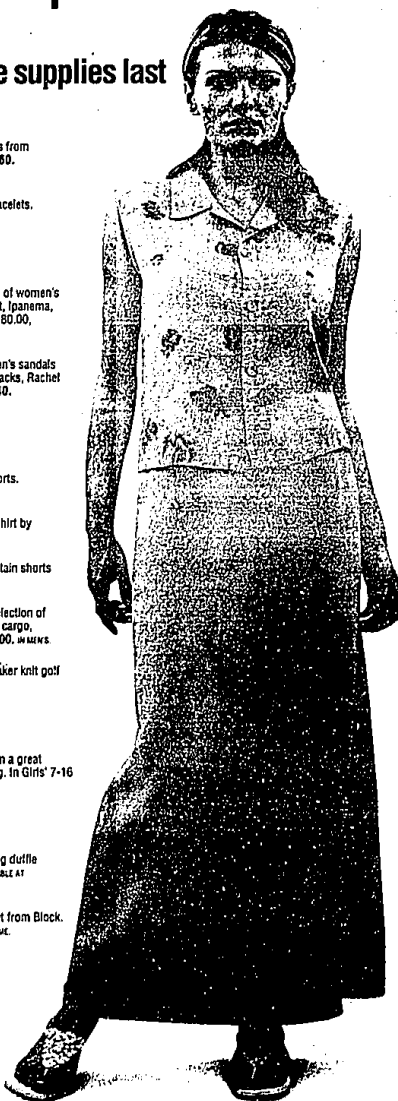
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