

## Taking a lesson

Adults could learn from students' efforts

A handful of students at Farmington and Harrison high schools have shown in the past week that they are the ones with level minds, open hearts and concern for others.

It is a lesson from which adults may learn. When Daniel Lee was killed in a traffic accident on March 31, the community was not only saddened, but outraged with the condition of the intersection in front of Harrison where he lost his life.

While adults complained and parents discussed the safety problems at a forum, three students, Andy Metry, Nevin Hill and Tony Kalos, decided to take on government to draw attention to safety concerns with 12 Mile.

The students drew attention to safety problems as part of a class project, under the direction of first-year teacher Jenny Barto. The assignment for their American government class was to get involved in "active citizenship."

The three students contacted County Commissioner Terry Sever, R-Farmington Hills, with questions about a left-hand turn signal. Their research showed it had been requested and denied a few times because the intersection didn't meet certain criteria.

The students decided to videotape the intersection and document what they saw as accidents waiting to happen. The video captured stacking between the east and west entrances, with cars dashing through red lights in order to make their long-awaited turns.

Students felt a three-pronged approach would improve safety: a dedicated left-turn signal, no right turns on red at the stop light and creating a left-turn lane. Calling a halt to right turns, they said, would increase the gaps in traffic and allow more cars to move through the area.

The county has jurisdiction over 12 Mile Road, and Road Commission Director of Traffic Safety Dave Allen said the left-turn signal, the most easily accomplished, would be implemented in preparation for a new signalization system tentatively approved by the Federal Highway Administration. Meanwhile, other efforts are under way to improve the safety of the roadway.

In an unrelated effort, a number of students from Farmington High School have stood their ground and asked parent Mark Mergener—who has been concerned and critical of teachers' language and their choice of class materials—to back off.

In addition to the students who wrote letters to the Farmington Observer supporting

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their teachers, students Catherine Brouillette, Matt Gwynn, John Sloan III and Patti Wheeler offered their thoughts at a recent school board meeting.

School administrators say they have discussed Mergener's concerns with the specific teachers, but the parent has promised to attend each board meeting to discuss each of his complaints.

The students asked Mergener to stop. They also defended their teachers and called their mistakes human, not criminal.

"The teachers at this school care so much about each and every student that they will go out of their way to do anything that they can to help," Wheeler said. "They are great people and great teachers. ...The people being targeted are phenomenal educators and ... have committed no crime. They are innocent, and deserve to be left alone."

The students also defended teachers' choices of class materials, saying a number of famous novels throughout the centuries have contained profanity and sexual content.

While Mergener's comments truly have distressed students, they had the courage to stand up and offer support to their teachers, showing that what they learn from their teachers and the encouragement and direction they receive far outweighs some mistakes.

Students at both high schools who have taken the time and courage to get involved, consider their feelings and those of others, and to take action, should be lauded.

It is rare when adults have such similar courage and energy. And in both cases the students offered reasoned analysis of both issues—12 Mile safety and the behavior of teachers.

More importantly, they stood up for what they believe is right. And in both cases, they stood up to adults and a system, not knowing if they would be rejected or lambasted.

With young people such as these, who have the courage of their convictions, the future is in pretty good hands.

## Partnerships necessary for arts

There are those who look at the \$28 million in gifts given recently to the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, and claim that with such private support there should be less need for public funding. (The donations were part of a \$125-million fund-raising campaign to finance a new administrative office building, renovate Orchestra Hall, erect a high school for the performing arts, and build the DSO's endowment.)

Overlooked in the celebration of generous philanthropy, however, is that the state of Michigan also supplied \$10.75 million or nearly 40 percent of the recent financial contributions.

The answer to perpetuating cultural institutions and enhancing the cultural life of the region isn't simply to rely solely on the good will of wealthy individuals and foundations. On the contrary, the future funding support for cultural institutions must be based on a deeper partnership between the public and private sectors.

Ten years ago, the state unwisely cut back on public funding to the Detroit Institute of Arts. As a consequence, the museum reduced staff and hours of operation. Sure, the DIA has succeeded in finding alternative means for funding, but what about the long-term impact of the negative perception about the area's support for culture?

It would be imprudent to associate Gov. Engler's imposed cutbacks in the early 1990s as the direct cause for the unprecedented successful fund-raising campaigns at the DSO, DIA, Detroit Zoo and other cultural institutions. The reason those campaigns have succeeded has more to do with the historic growth in wealth during the 1990s, than from any policy to reduce public funding to the arts.

To simply claim that those with the financial means to donate money should be obligated to support the arts and culture misses the

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most significant feature of a pluralistic society. Art and culture in a democracy should represent a diversity of perspectives and sensibilities. The privileges of wealth shouldn't be a prerequisite for determining which cultural institutions are supported.

A broader public debate about the nature of the private-public partnership is needed. Those with great financial resources should continue to demonstrate their support, but there's a role for others.

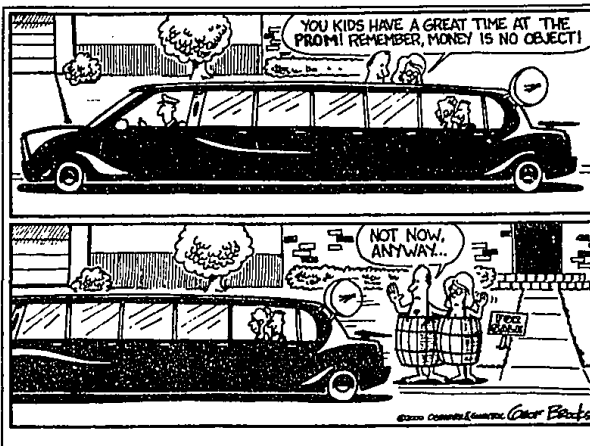
Arguably, the much talked-about cultural tax could be a catalyst for such a debate. A cultural tax would levy a quarter of a mil on property. The tax revenue would support the region's cultural institutions and local arts/cultural groups. (Currently, the issue is mired in political wrangling among the Oakland and Wayne county commissions.)

Perhaps we all must realize that the quality of culture is a mirror of a society's collective soul.

Ask your county commissioner where he/she stands on the cultural tax issue.

While we have not taken a position on the tax itself we support an open and frank discussion about our responsibility for the quality of culture in our region.

GEOFF BROOKS



## LETTERS

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, that's why we offer this space for your opinions. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity we ask that you provide a contact telephone number and if mailing or faxing a letter, please sign it. Letters can be mailed to: Joanne Maliszewski, 33411 Grand River, Farmington, MI 48335, faxed to Joanne at (734) 459-2700 or emailed to jmaliszewski@oe.hometown.com

### Proud of her

The staff at Flanders Elementary are proud to work for Mary Joyce Reader. She is a principal who leads by example and we feel fortunate to have her as our educational leader. She has high expectations for herself and her staff. She values each and every member of our team and insists on examining issues from everyone's point of view. Her primary concern is the welfare of the children in our building. She empowers each of us to be the best that we can be. She believes all children can learn and knows that with school personnel and parents working together, all our goals can be achieved. She instills this belief in each of us.

Mrs. Reader has made many positive changes since her arrival at Flanders. Just a few include: the development of a comprehensive literacy program and collaborative consultation model, a strong technology component integrated into the core curriculum, and enrichment classes for fourth and fifth grades. She has also been instrumental in improving the physical appearance of the interior and exterior of the building. Mrs. Reader always gives credit to those involved in helping with any given project. She prefers to let others "shine." She doesn't look for personal recognition but takes pride in the accomplishments derived from a team effort.

Through her effort and example, Flanders has become an excellent place for teachers to teach and children to learn! She is a dedicated individual who is admired by those who know her. Her vast knowledge and understanding of educational issues serve as a foundation for all of us. We are proud to be part of her team. Together, under her leadership, we are committed to helping all children succeed.

Flanders Elementary School staff

### Rousing success

The morning of April 29 dawned clear and bright as 300-plus young anglers showed up in Shiawassee Park to match wits with 600 rainbow trout at the annual Kids Trout Derby, sponsored by the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills.

I would like to ask all of the children and adults attending the event to join us in thanking the following businesses and individuals

for their generous donations used toward the purchase of the trout for the derby: Yankee Consignments Inc., The Benchmark, Garden City Upholstery of Farmington, Motor City Harley Davidson, Farmington Ram's Horn Restaurant and Lynda and Roy Lindhardt.

The following people also graciously donated their time to sign in the entrants, make sure the many questions were answered and assist the young anglers: Teresa Vestelevich, Sharon Palonka, Mary Hauger Jr., and Judy Derek. Thank you one and all for a great day!

Joe Derek

City Naturalist  
Department of Special Services  
City of Farmington Hills

### Is he kidding?

House Bill 4777, the "Job Creation and Regulatory Responsibility Act," would allow the state of Michigan to preempt from local units of government the right to enact ordinances and regulations related to the legitimate concerns and interests of its citizens.

The bill is co-sponsored by Rep. Andrew Raczkowski who claims that "the legislation takes nothing away from local governments which they currently already have." Who is he kidding?

The reality is that House Bill 4777 is the most serious threat to home rule in the history of the Michigan Legislature. Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi led a successful statewide march on Lansing at the request of the Michigan Municipal League to oppose this bill. If the Farmington Hills City Council had not also actively opposed this bill, some 21 areas of local government would have been diminished by the state takeover.

Moreover, the proposed legislation has all the earmarks and fingerprints of Big Tobacco and its business allies who would like nothing better than to eliminate municipal tobacco control laws in Michigan. If it passes, it would put a stop to more than 60 local, indoor, clean air and tobacco advertising victories in Michigan, including Marquette's 100 percent smoke-free ordinance.

Albert Zack  
Farmington Hills

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— Philip Power