

Denver serves as example for area cultural support

My older son, Scott, is a second year resident in internal medicine in Denver. Kathy and I went to visit him about a month ago. We came away much impressed with the vibrant arts and cultural scene in the Mile High City.

Although the Denver Art Museum does not have half the collection of the Detroit Institute of Arts, it was absolutely filled with school kids and teachers and with senior citizens.



Phil Power

The zoo is similarly well attended, as is the well regarded Natural History Museum.

Upon checking around, I discovered that the real reason the Denver area is doing so well for all its citizens is — dreaded ideal — regional cooperation. The six counties in the Denver area have banded together to fund their arts and cultural institutions with the proceeds from a sales

tax. A little over half of the money goes to the Big Four institutions, but a bunch goes back to local arts and cultural groups in the participating counties.

It's a lot like the plan sponsored by the Southeast Michigan Cultural Coalition that would ask voters in Oakland and Wayne counties to consider a 0.5 property tax millage to raise around \$45 million a year. Two thirds of the money would go to 17 regional arts institutions — including the DIA, Detroit Zoo, Cranbrook Art Museum, Henry Ford Museum and Greenfield Village, the Holocaust Memorial Center and Meadowbrook Hall — with the remainder going to local arts institutions. For a home with a taxable value of \$150,000, the increased tax amounts of \$37.50 per year.

A similar plan was narrowly defeated two years ago in November.

Sponsors of the plan initially hoped to get it on the August primary ballot for lots of good reasons. There's less clutter and cheaper TV advertising rates than in November, and the lively gubernatorial primary race is supposed to attract a big Democratic and female voter turnout — both groups are presumed to be more pro-culture than Republicans and males.

But last week the Oakland County General Government Committee voted to table the issue until its June 3 meeting, reasoning that adding arts and culture to the August primary ballot might jeopardize votes on other vital services.

es. To their credit, Oakland County officials are meeting promptly after the May 28 cutoff date to put an item on the August primary ballot.

At their June meeting, they should vote definitively to put the initiative to a November vote, if only to give the proponents (and opponents, for that matter) time to raise money and educate the public about the pros and cons of the idea.

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In my own view, this is one of those sensible measures that merits support, if only because the survival of our precious cultural institutions has over the years been threatened by withdrawal of state support from Lansing. After all, places like the DIA and the Zoo contribute enormously to the quality of life in this region. They help local businesses attract highly educated workers and they contribute to keeping skilled graduates in Michigan after they leave college.

Sure, any tax increase — \$37.50, more or less — is a hit to the budget. And certainly, some of the institutions that will benefit already charge admission. But the funds from this proposal will go to pay for price-discounted programs for kids, teachers, seniors. Without the additional support for arts institutions from the millage, families hoping to go the Zoo for a Saturday outing, for example, will pay a lot more than they do now. And, for those of a parochial frame of mind, much of the money will go back to local arts and culture groups.

It's recently become fashionable to be tough minded about public expenditures to improve the quality of life for all. "Let the users pay for it" goes the beguiling line. Well, if the only people who are going to pay for the DIA or Henry Ford Museum are just the people who go there in any given year, over the years we're not likely to have a DIA or a Henry Ford Museum around for us to use.

At that point, the tough minded among us will no doubt be the first to ask loudly and crossly just who lost the DIA or Henry Ford Museum. I hope there will be people around who tell 'em to look in the mirror.

Phil Power is chairman of HomeTown Community Action Network, the company that owns this newspaper. He welcomes your comments, either by voice mail at (734) 953-2047, ext. 1880, or by e-mail at ppower@homecomm.net.



Hugh Gallagher

Earth Day worth celebrating March 21, April 22, every day

It's interesting what you discover while surfing the Web.

For instance, did you know that there are rival Earth Days. I was searching for information to write a column encouraging ecological responsibility, promoting irresponsible development, generally promoting tree hugging when I discovered that even Earth Day isn't as simple as it seems.

The official story is that Earth Day began in 1970 and was founded by Wisconsin Sen. Gaylord Nelson to draw attention to concerns about our eroding environment. The first Earth Day, April 22, 1970, helped introduce the word ecology into general discourse. The day has been celebrated sporadically ever since with a slight renewal in interest in recent years.

John McConnell begs to differ with the official version. He claims that Earth Day is supposed to be celebrated on the Vernal Equinox just as he intended when he founded the day on March 21, 1970, in San Francisco. He also claims support from the United Nations, President Gerald Ford and anthropologist Margaret Mead. He's none too happy with the April 22nders either. He claims that the March date is more appropriate because that's the day when night and day are in perfect balance.

McConnell does allow that many of those deluded April 22nders are sincere, dedicated environmentalists who have been misled on when they should celebrate their dedication.

The same can't be said for the folks at the Earth Day Information Center at nationalcenter.org. Click here and you get a pretty straight history of Earth Day and you figure you've got another environmentalist site. But keep clicking. A "Facts and Myths" section debunks every current environmental concern: there is no global warming, CAFE standards are dangerous, the Alaskan wilderness is the perfect place to drill for oil, governmental regulation of water and air standards is unnecessary etc. It decries government interference and rails against environmental groups.

All of this comes from the John P. McGovern Center for Environmental and Regulatory Affairs, whatever that is. This is the Anti-Sierra Club.

Every month I receive, unsolicited, a publication masquerading as an "environmental newsletter." I suspect it is secretly funded by the energy industry as its main purpose is to show that all environmental initiatives are basically wrong-headed and un-American.

By cloaking themselves in the mantle of environmentalism, the Earth Day Information Web site and the newsletter are trying to trap the

unwary into their alternate universe where pollution is good, exploitation of natural resources is commendable and any "evidence" to the contrary is politically suspect.

So Earth Day is obviously different things (and different dates) to different individuals and groups. Maybe that's why it hasn't caught on as a significant holiday, which is really too bad.

The tension between economic needs and environmental concerns has been a matter of fierce debate since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

Our Earth is worth celebrating and its future is worth debating. The tension between economic needs and environmental concerns has been a matter of fierce debate since the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution in Britain.

The Earth Day Information site argues that "a great amount" of progress has been made since the first Earth Day. What they don't say or deny is that the progress has been made because of the strong passion of environmentalists and the regulatory support of the government (especially the federal government under both Republican and Democrat presidents).

Often environmentalists have lost support because they fail to understand or acknowledge the economic consequences of their positions and refuse to consider compromises.

But maybe a healthy all-American debate on these life and death issues is the most important thing that can happen on Earth Day. We are the stewards of this world and it is our responsibility to preserve it as a livable planet for our children's children, yes, but also for all other living things.

Sadly, there are few local events planned this Earth Day with the exception of school activities. Though the recent oil spill in the Rouge River shows just how fragile our environment is to accident, sabotage or greed.

Hugh Gallagher is the managing editor of The Observer Newspapers. He can be reached by phone at (734)953-2149, by e-mail at hgallagher@oe.homecomm.net and by fax at (734)591-7279.

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