

Engler signs books, talks about future

BY TONY BRUSCATO
STAFF WRITER

Gov. John Engler spent a couple of hours at the Plymouth Historical Museum Saturday, Dec. 21, signing books, shaking hands, appearing in photographs and receiving kind words from well-wishers.

In what could very well be his last public appearance before leaving office Dec. 31, Engler reminisced about his 12 years as governor and talked about his future. Sometimes he was extremely serious and passionate and at other times had tongue-in-cheek, as he autographed books detailing his governance.

In the book, "John Engler: The Man, the Leader and the Legacy," author and Engler speech writer Gieves Whitney chronicles the Engler administration.

"He asked if I had any interest in writing a book, and I said 'I did not,'" Engler said. "He (Whitney) said he wanted to do that, and I said, 'Go right ahead.'"

"Then he got it written and asked if I wanted to do any book signings. I said, 'No, you wrote the book, you do the book signings.' Then he asked if I would do a couple, and I agreed. I think he did a marvelous job with it," Engler said.

Lansing was the only book signing stop before Saturday in Plymouth. The only other will be in Engler's hometown of Mount Pleasant.

During his stop in Plymouth,

Engler agreed to talk with the Plymouth Observer. There was no hesitation when asked about his biggest accomplishment as the state's top elected official.

"There's no question. We fundamentally changed the way we pay for education," said Engler, referring to Proposal A. "The fairness and adequacy of funding is something that's changed considerably in the last decade."

When queried if he expects future lawmakers to attempt to tweak Proposal A, Engler said, "I think there will be, but I think it will be unsuccessful. And, I think that people who vote for tweaking will shorten their careers. It continues to fulfill the promise of protecting people's property taxes and providing an equitable funding base."

NO SYMPATHY

Engler had tough words for school districts that complain the state foundation grant isn't fair.

"They should work on becoming more efficient," he said. "If we looked at some of the services being provided in the school district, they're not competitively bid, and therefore they're paying significant premiums. Don't put that as a funding problem. That's a policy choice."

"If I were running a school, I would want to put maximum dollars in the classroom, and so I would control all other costs and put money in the classroom," he said.

Engler also had little sympathy



Gieves Whitney, left, author of *John Engler: The Man, the Leader & the Legacy*, smiles as Gov. John Engler signs a copy of the book for Steven Bill, age 5 of Northville during an appearance at the Plymouth Historical Museum Saturday. Steven is the son of Gregory Bill, a State of Michigan Circuit Court judge who was appointed by Engler.

for communities that have reeled the cuts in state-revenue sharing in order to balance the state budget.

"When you look at local government revenues they've been increasing, not decreasing, because local governments have property taxes," he said. "And, even with Proposal A putting caps on it, there has been so much new construction."

In some cases, local governments have not been restrained in their spending," Engler added. "You can find examples where local governments are still hiring people. The state government is 20-percent smaller today in the non public safety area. I think there are

well-managed local governments out there, and they are doing just fine."

Engler's biggest disappointment in 12 years was not being able to get a constitutional amendment to reform the state board of education.

"We are one of only 14 states where the governor doesn't directly appoint the state school superintendent or the board of education," he said. "Nobody in Michigan can name the members of the state board of education, yet this anonymous group practically hires the superintendent. That makes our department far weaker and less relevant than sister departments across the country."

TRANSITION EXCITEMENT

Engler said he's "absolutely excited" about moving from the public sector to private life. What will he like the most about the transition? "Not talking to reporters is at the top of my list," he said tongue-in-cheek. "If there's a natural disaster, don't call me."

Engler insisted he won't miss the fishbowl of public life. "It can be tough on families, especially children. My girls are getting at an age (8) where it's perfect for them to go into the private life as well. I think 32 years of being elected to office is enough for me to be able to say, forever, that I've done my public service."

"I'm not going to be running for anything, and I don't see anything changing that. I've had opportunities to do other things, but what can be better than governor of a complex state like Michigan? Certainly not being a member of the Cabinet in Washington. I don't want to do that."

"One thing I can do, as a private citizen, is write letters to the editor and complain about what they're doing in Lansing."

Engler insists that he hasn't closed on a house yet, despite the rumors he is moving to Franklin. "I looked at homes in this area (Plymouth), as a matter of fact, and in Ann Arbor as well. Franklin is another place we've looked at. We looked at schools in Ann Arbor, Farmington and Northville."

As for what kind of work he'll eventually be doing, Engler will

only say, "I've had some good conversations."

STRONGER POSITION

Despite the recent downturn in Michigan's economy and the belt-tightening that's forcing billions of dollars in cuts, Engler believes the state is in a stronger position than it was a year ago.

"The unemployment rate is below the national average, and we're a state that's more competitive, that has improved significantly. Our credit rating is strong. There are only eight AAA-rated states, and we're the largest. All the states today are coming out of the recession period with deficits, and that will be a challenge here."

Engler said he's talked with Gov.-elect Jennifer Granholm but won't disclose what was discussed. "Everything I told her is private," he said. However, the departing governor said there are a number of top issues for the incoming state CEO.

"We still need to continue to push on legal reform, and we need to push on the infrastructure needs we have. We've done the planning on the rebuilding of I-94, and that needs to go forward. I believe strongly that we need to continue competition for public education," said Engler, referring to charter schools. "That may be a way to help some of these higher-cost and lower-performing districts to improve more rapidly. Detroit would be a good example of that."

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Team Farmington seeks bowlers Middle school lacrosse league opens

Team Farmington Special Olympics 11th annual Bowl-A-Thon will take place Saturday, Feb. 15 at Drake's Lanes in Farmington Hills.

There will be two sessions of bowling at 10 a.m. and 1 p.m. The bowling format will be three games of nine pins no tap. Refreshments will be provided at both sessions.

Last year was the best year ever as \$31,000 was raised. Local business community, civic groups, police, firemen, schools, churches and private

contributors and many others from outside of the Farmington community, went the extra mile to support this very worthy cause.

"We have a new goal to raise over \$40,000 this year," said Mark Fisher, event chairman. "The special Olympics are terrific young people who have mental and physical challenges but who have great Olympian spirit as they take part in the many sporting events offered in Team Farmington Special Olympics."

Team Farmington is a year-round training and educational program open to all athletes with mental impairment who are or have been involved in the special education program run by the Farmington school district and reside in the district.

Students from many surrounding school districts are involved in these programs as well.

For additional information about the Bowl-A-Thon or to register to bowl, call Nancy Meloche at (248) 898-6021.

Farmington Hills Recreation invites all interested seventh- and eighth-graders to get in the game by joining its new Middle School Lacrosse Travel League.

The program consists of a boys league and a girls league. The emphasis will be on learning the fundamentals of the game and promoting sports-

manship. Practices will take place 2-4 times a week starting in March.

Games will be played April-May 2003 and parents must provide transportation.

League fee is \$100 per player for residents; \$105 per player for non-residents and includes a team jersey, balls, field time and goals.

Registration begins Dec. 17 and all players must register by Jan. 27. Coaches are needed.

For more information about these and other programs, contact the city of Farmington Hills Special Services Division at (248) 473-1800 or stop by the Costick Center on 11 Mile between Middlebelt and Inkster.

OBITUARIES

Owen J. Furman

Services for Owen John Furman, 65, of Livonia, were held Dec. 30 at Redford Presbyterian Church in Detroit with the Rev. Doug Carter officiating. Burial followed at Grand Lawn Cemetery in Detroit.

Mr. Furman was born Nov. 2, 1917 in Detroit and died Dec. 25, 2002 at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Superior Township. He retired in 1980 as superintendent of transportation for Michigan Consolidated Gas Company and was a life member of the Masonic Lodge Zion #1.

He is survived by his wife, Dorothy; son, David (Patricia); granddaughters, Sheila (Curt) Sigro and Rhonda (Scott) Treadwell; and great-grandchildren, Vanya and Shane. He is preceded in death by his son, Dennis.

Arrangements made by Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home in Farmington.

Evelyn A. McQuiston

Services for Evelyn Alice McQuiston, 84, of Farmington Hills, were held Dec. 31 at Heeney-Sundquist Funeral Home in Farmington with the Rev. Kurt Lambert officiating. Burial followed at Glen Eden Memorial Park in Livonia.

Mrs. McQuiston was born Oct. 3, 1918 in Detroit and died Dec. 27, 2002 at Botsford Hospital in Farmington Hills. She is survived by her sons, Phillip (Dianne) and Edward (Linda); daughters, Patricia Page and Karen (Ron) Groboski; sister, Bernice Rice; brother, Elmer Kovalski; seven grandchildren; and five great-grandchildren. She is preceded in death by her husband, Robert.

John Henderson

Services for John Henderson, 57, formerly of Livonia, were held Dec. 26 at St. Patrick Catholic Church in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

Mr. Henderson was born in Detroit and died Dec. 23, 2002, at Columbia Hospital in West Palm Beach, Fla.

He worked as a mechanical engineer for Albert Kahn Associates in Detroit and was a member of St. Patrick Catholic Church.

He is survived by his wife, Jayne; son, Mark; father, Roy; brothers, Robert (Jane) and William (Judy); and sister, Janet (William) Elwood.

Those wishing to make memorial contributions may send them to the American Diabetes Association, 4620 N. State Road 7, Suite 208, Lauderdale Lakes, FL 33319.



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