

Memorial Day parade reveals good, kind hearts

In downtown Farmington, scores of people turned out despite a few morning sprinkles to watch the annual Memorial Day parade, organized by Farmington-area American Legion members.

At around 9:30 Monday morning, small groups of friends and families had gathered at carefully metered locations along Grand River. At first, everyone had plenty of elbow room; most chairs and blankets were set up at a polite distance, which grew a little smaller as the magic hour approached. The crowd seemed amazingly diverse. As teens on skateboards and roller blades scooted past moms pushing strollers, bikers with tattooed arms strode past dads in conservative khakis. We are also communities of many cultures, most of which were represented right there on Main Street as the parade passed by. Stalwart Exchange Club members, some of whom come out for this event every year, distributed American flags to just about everyone willing to do a little waving.

Kids and directors from all three high school marching bands — Farmington, Harrison and North — gave up their holiday to perform. The Miss Farmington/Oakland County pageant contestants accompanied Miss Farmington Kelly Zander, another group of young people who understand the importance of paying the respects to those who have served their country.

For those few hours during the parade and after, people forgot about their differences and embraced a common love of country and hope for peace. Seniors who have lived through worse times than these stood alongside sons and daughters who wonder how bad times are going to get.

We no longer cling to the innocent belief that wars are fought in foreign lands, that America the beautiful is also America the impenetrable. Politicians trying to protect us have expanded their powers of investigation to a frightening degree.

Once focused on national defense, our armed forces have become invaders. However, the cause, this simple shift in policy so widely accepted seems monumental — and not unlike the assumption of investigative powers that seem to consider us all terrorists until proven otherwise.

Under construction at Orchard Lake and 12 Mile roads sits a monument to what happens when good men do nothing, when an evil regime is allowed to inflict barbaric pain upon its own people. The Holocaust Museum's grey-striped walls remind us of the concentration camp uniforms; the brick facade, of the barbed wire fences.

The arguments over whether Operation Iraqi Freedom was a just war and whether the government has gone too far with Homeland Security

could go on forever and probably will. But as Farmington's Memorial Parade reminded me, that's not what really matters here.

Consider instead people like Jeff Pavlik and Becky Burns, who collected \$200 for UNICEF's fund to help Iraqi children during the few hours they were open Monday morning.

Or a group of Girl Scouts from Neighborhood Service Unit 33, which I understand includes everyone from Elton John on up, who walked the parade route promoting their campaign to send notes of support to U.S. soldiers stationed abroad.

And remember the owner and employees of Tamara Spa in Farmington Hills, who made life a little nicer for a group of military moms not too long ago, treating them to facials, massages and special treatment to help them through some very difficult times.

Last but not least, think about the veterans and their wives who have worked so hard over the years to organize Farmington's annual day of remembrance. Instead of seeking glory for themselves, they choose to honor our communities' best and brightest emergency personnel, men and women who have also performed above and beyond the call of duty.

It's no coincidence that as the Harrison High marching band played our national anthem during Monday's post-parade convocation, conversation and movement stopped in Memorial Park, from passing bicyclists right down to a car navigating Oakland Street, whose driver must have heard those glorious strains through the car's open sun roof and pulled over.

We all enjoyed the freedom of publicly bowing our heads together, asking a Higher Power for what seems so elusive in human terms: peace. Everyone listened respectfully through a round of *Hips*, played to honor those who have paid the ultimate price.

And as the last note faded, the carillon at Pined United Methodist Church chimed in with an instrumental benediction and its clear, unspoken words: "America, America, God shed His grace on thee, and crown thy good with brotherhood, from sea to shining sea."

These are the tiny bits of hope we come across as we're sifting through the day's bad news. For all we learn about what's wrong in our two communities, we can't take for granted what's right.

When you hear during this election year what's wrong with our schools and our cities, remember this Memorial Day and all the people with good, kind hearts who took the time to remember and make our community a kinder place.

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Jonli Hubred

Leadership Council looks at best ways to use land

Like many of you, my daily commute to and from work is much longer than I would like it to be.

My drive from the city of Wayne to downtown Birmingham can take me anywhere from 40 minutes to more than an hour, depending on how bad the Southfield Freeway is congested with traffic.

Day after day, my drive takes me through a contrasting landscape, from the blight and urban decay of Inkster and Detroit, to the charm and vitality of Royal Oak and Birmingham.

If nothing else, a long commute at least gives you time to think. As I pass the vacant storefronts, unkempt lots and crumbling roads of Inkster and Detroit, I often wonder how they've fallen on hard times, while places like Birmingham have stayed vibrant places to shop and live.

That is one of many questions the two dozen members of the Michigan Land Use Leadership Council are going to try to answer in the next few months.

The council was formed by Gov. Jennifer Granholm to curb the state's rapid loss of open space and find ways to save the Inksters of our region. The council is co-chaired by former governor William Milliken and former attorney general Frank Kelley, which gives it instant credibility. And it is going to need at least that.

The council's main chore is to find a way to bridge the gap between the people who want to preserve open space and those who want to develop it. Some people think it is perfectly acceptable to develop in rural areas. Local economies depend on it. Heck, many of my own friends are in the construction trades and depend on new development to pay the bills.

But there are facts in this debate that can't be ignored. Amerigis, a national research firm that documents development patterns in metropolitan areas, released a report last week that concludes the metro Detroit area is gobbling up land 10 times faster than the growth of its population.

Outlying suburbs are seeing an explosion of residential and retail development, which means the state and local governments must allocate funds to build the necessary infrastructure to take care of those people. Roads and schools must be built. Sewers and util-

ities must be laid.

It also means funds must be taken away to maintain the infrastructure in the older, inner ring suburbs like Inkster, Ferndale and even Southfield. As a result, urban decay is starting to rear its ugly head in those once-stable communities, because residents and retailers are moving away to newly developing areas like Clarkston.

But developing towns are also experiencing problems, because in many cases they are in no position to deal with the growth. Roadways are often jammed, and the construction of sewers often lags behind the rate of growth.

Members of the council got a taste of how difficult an issue this is during the last two weeks, in which a number of crowded public hearings were held across the state.

According to State Rep. Ruth Johnson, R-Holly Township, who is on the council, about 150 people showed up at the two hearings recently held in Oakland County, which has seen its share of growth and decline over the past decade.

"The hearings went exceptionally well. People from five different counties showed up and provided comment. It was a diverse crowd. We had the diversity I was looking for, from farmers to the more urban city dwellers," she said. "But it shows how difficult a task we have in front of us. There are so many different ideas and different thoughts about how this (growth management) needs to happen."

The council has to decide how far the state can go to preserve open space. It must do it in a way to protect personal property rights and maintain local governmental control. They shouldn't be able to tell a farmer he can't sell his land to the highest bidder. At the same time, the council must also provide economic tools to older cities so they can stop the hemorrhaging.

It is not an easy task. Granholm has told the council she wants some recommendations by August, which shouldn't give its members much time to digest all of the public commentary. Hopefully they can find some solutions to this problem.

I wouldn't mind encountering a little less traffic on my daily commute. And a nicer view.

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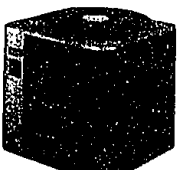
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