

## OBSERVATION POINT

By Philip H. Power  
Publisher

# Farmington School Crisis Teaches Area-Wide Lessons

Last week's budget crisis in the Farmington public schools should be of intense interest to every parent and taxpayer in this area. This is because what happened in Farmington could well take place soon in every community around these parts.

Last Monday, Farmington voters turned down a millage proposal submitted by the school board, which said at the time that if the millage was not passed all outside of class activities (including interscholastic football and band) would have to be eliminated.

The next two days saw intense local activity, with a citizens group formed to raise enough private money to keep the extra-curricular programs going.

Sunday night, the board voted to accept \$46,000 in cash and pledges from the group, and it appeared that the extra-curricular program (including football and band) had been saved.

Congratulations flowed to those involved in raising the private money, and everything looked just fine.

**BUT IN FACT**, the Farmington School Board was caught in a terrible position.

If the board had decided to reject the \$46,000, it would have slapped in the face a group genuinely involved in expressing its concern about the schools. Further, given the storm of emotions not continuing the football program would have aroused, the board would have committed political suicide by rejecting the money.

However, by accepting, the board both jeopardized what remained of its credibility and possibly copped out from its proper legal function of running the schools.

The board had said that if the millage failed, all extra-curricular activities would be cut, football included. When the board accepted the money, it decided that extra-curricular activities would go on, football included.

Who's going to believe what the board says next time around?

Further, by accepting outside money which (let's face it) was intended mainly to save the football program, the board put itself in a position of having abdicated from its responsibility to run the school system according to its own policies rather than those of outside groups.

**PROBABLY** the board took the only position it could have, under the circumstances.

By accepting the money to save the entire out of classroom program, it responded positively to the sincere concern of Farmington people to save parts of the school program which they felt important enough to tax themselves voluntarily. It also maintained some shred of credibility in carrying out its legal responsibilities to insure a sound educational program for all children.

What is not clear just now is how the board can react to future problems.

If it needs another millage and says that if it isn't passed the schools will be put on half-days, nobody is going to believe it.

Or if it gets into a further budget problem and has to cut several more programs, it will just about have to accept private money from whatever group raises it to save one program at the expense of the others. If it does this, a real question emerges about who's running the public schools: the board or outside pressure groups?

**SCHOOL BOARDS** in other local communities might well reflect on the lessons to be

learned from the Farmington experience.

First, it's unwise (as well as bad politics) to make threats which you don't intend to carry out.

Second, it's very unwise (as well as political suicide) to make threats (i.e. drop football) which you can't carry out.

Third, the reason boards of education have the legal responsibility to run the schools is to

prevent them being run for special interest groups. This reason, however, only works when there is enough tax support to run a full and well balanced program in the schools. When there isn't enough money, school boards then have a terrible time figuring out what to cut.

Fourth, the real reason why public education in this state is in a shambles is that the State Legislature has utterly failed its clear

responsibility to support it properly. Until the folks up in Lansing get property tax reform and a graduated income tax on the state law books, no school board can expect to pass any millages at all.

In that case, local boards should begin figuring out how they should react when problems similar to Farmington's hit them between the eyes.



R.T. Thompson writes

## Schoolcraft Trustees Make Excellent Choice

Regardless of whether it is a lame duck board or not, the Schoolcraft College board of trustees made an excellent choice in naming Erwin Brown, of Livonia, to fill the unexpired term of at-large trustee George Martin.

It will be recalled that Dr. Martin, who has been ailing for the better part of a year, suddenly resigned several weeks ago effective with the letter of resignation.

Dr. Martin's action took the board by surprise since he was considered to be the one trustee remaining to give guidance to the new board that will be elected in September.

Of the present group, only the at-large members—Dr. Robert Geake of Northville, John LaRue of Livonia and Dr. Martin, also of Livonia, would remain. Dr. Martin had two years remaining of his term. Dr. Geake and LaRue each have four years to go.

**ALL OTHER** incumbents decided not to run for re-election in the poll ordered by a circuit court judge in answer to the "one-man, one-vote" mandate.

## Sense And Nonsense

Livonia is negotiating to buy a centrally-located privately-owned golf course. Or as one high city official quipped: the second golf course will give Livonia "his and hers" status.

Thus the resignation of Dr. Martin put the current lame duck board in an unusual situation: Should it fill the vacancy immediately or allow the post to remain vacant for the new board to fill?

Advised by its legal counsel to act immediately, the trustees considered several names and then decided to ask Brown if he would accept appointment for the unexpired two year term.

He agreed, and we feel sure the new Schoolcraft Board will benefit by his acceptance.

**BROWN WAS** A member of the Livonia school board in the early '60s, resigned and then accepted an appointment to the college board to fill a vacancy by the death of Ward McCain.

He was an excellent member, especially with his expertise in financing, and very valuable in all discussions.

Unfortunately, Brown lost interest in college activities and did not run for a second term.

Shortly thereafter, he was appointed to fill a vacancy on the Livonia school board where once again he became one of the best trustees.

But that term ended when his company transferred him to South America for an indeterminate period of time.

**HE RETURNED** to Livonia last spring. Members of the Schoolcraft board, who remembered his work as a trustee also remembered that he was back in town. Thus, he became a prime candidate for the vacancy, and to

the delight of the veteran trustees, he accepted.

It may be a case of on-again, off-again, on-again Brown, but we feel the fact that he's on will work wonders with a new board that is going to need leadership and guidance.

Brown, with Dr. Geake and LaRue, should give the board a solid base to start from.

## Sense And Nonsense

Everyone is happy over the booming business at Livonia's Whispering Willows Muny Golf Course.

Everyone but the officials in the water department, that is. Seems they made a deal with the golf course to supply water for an annual fee of \$3,000.

But drought conditions this year will push the total over \$10,000, a reliable City Hall official stated at a recent sport function.

It's like robbing Peter to pay Paul.

Livonia Recreation Dept. Supt. John Dufour is an old pro on the banquet circuit. He seldom flubs, but . . .

Talking about the women's golf team that will represent Livonia in the state tournament next month, he said " . . . they deserve a trip to Jackson."

Tim Richard writes

## Ecology Attitude Dims

Despite occasional river and park cleanups by youngsters, despite the rare passage of environmental bills by our lawmakers, our public attitude toward the ecology continues to grow worse.

The overwhelming amount of messages reaching the public ear are aimed at educating people to increase their pressure on the environment, not at educating them to "give earth a chance."

**TAKE THE COMMERCIALS** for outdoor boat motors. What do they emphasize? Speed. Hair blowing in the wind. A gigantic wave. A projectile hurtling through the water.

Indeed, while the auto companies have slightly modernized speed and sex symbols in their advertising, the outdoor motor builders grow worse, and the motors grow bigger.

What the outdoor motor advertising doesn't show is the boat's waves slamming against the shore, stirring up silt, messing up fish spawning beds, hitting nests of small animals and

reptiles and amphibians. They don't show people in smaller boats getting their guts shaken up by the big boat's waves. They don't show songbirds being frightened into silence by the engine's roar.

Nor do they show the look of idiotic boredom on the face of the boat operator himself when he finds he can cross a good-sized inland lake with his 50-horse engine in one minute flat. What's there to do when he gets there?

Just turn around and come back in another minute flat. That's all. Unfortunately, there's no advertising to tell the consumer that a big motor on a small lake is a poor investment and harmful to man, plant and animal. There needs to be anti-motor advertising, just like there's anti-smoking advertising.

**TAKE THE SALES** pressure for mini-bikes. Dumb parents and dumb kids buy mini-bikes, and what's there to do with them?

Well, the kid can't run it on the street because it's unsafe and he's under-age. There's not

enough parkland for them because it takes 100 times as much land to meet the needs of one mini-biker as it does to handle a family reunion picnic or an entire Camp Fire Girl unit.

Now the mini-bike lobby is after the state Dept. of Natural Resources to set up trails for them. The reasoning seems to be they've spent money on these foolish little machines, and now it's up to the state to provide a place to run them.

The fact that you won't see any wild animals or hear any birds after the mini-bike trail is built doesn't seem to bother them. The kids have got to have that Freudian feeling of motorized power.

We need ads that say: "Don't buy mini-bikes. Don't build mini-bike trails."

**TAKE SNOWMOBILES.** Their television commercials show them flying through the air, that's how subliminal they get. The snowmobile is a valuable, life-saving utilitarian vehicle for rural dwellers and doctors, but it's totally out of place in society as a toy.

Yet the advertising suggests we buy snowmobiles, make a lot of noise, cut through the woods, bounce and fly and speed, speed. The other side of the story needs to be told.

We also need lobbies for hikers, bird-watchers, bicyclists - people who are psychologically stable and don't need the roar of an internal combustion engine under them to get their thrills.

Their work will be tough. Their activities don't generate the economic revenue that motorboats, mini-bikes and snowmobiles do, so they won't have the funds that the motorized lobbies have.

But they will have facts. They will have calm reason. They will have the gentle spirit of St. Francis, and sometimes those things can talk louder than money.

## Editorial & Opinion

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