

OBSERVATION POINT

Statewide Gun Control Law Would Help Suburbs Best



By Philip H. Power, Publisher

Last week Detroit passed a tough handgun control law, complete with mandatory fines and prison terms for violators. Is such a law needed here in the suburbs?

Talks with local law enforcement and local government officials revealed widely ranging views.

Livonia Mayor Edward H. McNamara, for example, feels "there is no need for such a code out here. We don't have a problem - or else our people have poor aim."

By contrast, Westland Mayor Eugene McKinney earlier this year advocated a local gun control ordinance, arguing that "there is a serious arms problem in our country" and suggesting that local controls would enable Westland to be a responsible member community in the metropolitan area.

Farmington Township Supervisor Earl Teeples, a former police officer, doesn't see the need for a local ordinance. "Most of the people here came for solace and tranquility," Teeples says, "and once in a while a burglar comes by and householders purchase a gun for protection of a home. If a man invests in a \$100,000 home, he should be able to protect it."

Southfield Mayor Norman Feder says his city's crime problem is not like Detroit's, but that if a gun control law would help cut deaths he would support it.

Southfield Police Chief Milton Sackett adds that a purely local gun control law would be ineffective, pointing out that piecemeal controls merely enable people from one community to pose problems in another where the laws are not so strict.

REDFORD TOWNSHIP Police Chief Edwin Gleza points out that 95 per cent of homicides are committed by unregistered guns. But Gleza adds that "gun control is no good unless enforced. The trouble today is that the person arrested on a bad check charge is more likely to be convicted than is a person using a gun unlawfully."

Bill J. Robbins, Redford Township supervisor, agrees and adds that possession of a gun itself leads to violence. "In many cases, it's the law-abiding citizen who has a gun permit that ends up shooting a member of his family, a friend or a neighbor. Having a gun on hand is too much of a temptation, especially when anger enters the picture."

Farmington Director of Public Safety Robert Deadman agrees that the fact of gun availability increases the probability of someone's being shot. But he adds that "a gun control ordi-

nance won't have much effect on the local level because guns are a metropolitan-wide problem."

CLEARLY, local opinion varies on gun control. But three main areas of agreement emerge: (1) The crime problem here in the suburbs is not the same as Detroit's, where the homicide rate is at an all time record; (2) mere possession of handguns in a home makes a shooting more likely than not; (3) purely local ordinances would be ineffective.

The cutting edge of the gun problem here in the suburbs is homeowner fear of burglary. Many homeowners buy handguns on the theory that they will thereby be better able to protect their home and family in the event of a burglary.

Deadman, for one, suggests that such a strategy seldom works. "Handguns used by homeowners for protection are ineffective," he argues. "First, unless the homeowner does a lot of practice, they are inaccurate. Second, the gun is almost never available at the time the homeowner might need it. Third, when a homeowner pulls a gun on a burglar, you get into a shootout situation where someone is likely to get killed."

When these dubious advantages of having a handgun in the

house are weighed against the clear fact that possession of guns increases the risk of violence, just why the average citizen should want a handgun is not clear.

But what is equally clear is that piecemeal local ordinances

are not going to solve the problem.

Yet again, it's a matter that must be coped with on a broader level than a local one. The State Legislature should enact some kind - any kind - of legislation to

start the process of banning handguns except for law enforcement personnel. It will take years to accomplish the result, but the rising tide of violence in our society makes a start imperative right now.



LOGJAMS IN THE Middle Rouge River can cause flooding conditions and form stagnant pools of smelly water where mosquitoes

breed. This coming Saturday's "Rescue the Rouge" project is aimed at getting rid of many of these logjams. Will you help?

Tim Richard, Emory Daniels Write

Day Here For Rouge Cleanup Groups

The moment of truth is coming for our young environmentalists.

That moment is this Saturday, Sept. 25, at 8 p.m. at a half-dozen points along the Middle Rouge River in Observerland.

What we'll learn Saturday is whether 5,000 persons will turn out for the second annual "Rescue the Rouge" cleanup project.

Last year's turnout was a good one for the Jaycee-coordinated project. But the big question facing the environment this year is the possible "sophomore slump" - the human tendency for a movement to start out with a bang and then degenerate to a whimper.

The Rouge cleanup in northwest Detroit a month ago demonstrated just such a slump.

IN FARMINGTON last Saturday, a crew of 500 volunteers spent all day hauling 25 truckloads of debris from the branch of the Rouge which runs through the city limits.

When the day ended, at least one branch of the creek was free of logs, brush, barrels, old tires and discarded air rifles. A microscope will show the remains of water pollution in the Rouge but, at least in Farmington, the human eye will see a clean river.

The river probably will not remain clean because man can be counted on to dump his discards in the creek and on its banks. But the massive cleanup did establish that many persons in the community care enough about clean water to spend a day restoring the Rouge to its natural condition of many years ago.

The cleanup was such a success that city officials are considering repeating the operation next spring or summer. Knowing man's nature, a second cleanup will be needed by then.

THE FARMINGTON project covered only the section of the river within the city, not the township, and last week a township man called us wondering why his area was left out.

The Farmington branch of the Rouge, he pointed out, consists of the Seelye Drain and the Mianow Pond Drain, both of which begin in the northwestern reaches of the township. Any junk tossed in there is bound to have been washed down by city spring waters into the city section. Why not start the drive in the township? he asked.

On top of that, he noted, the problem is more than just debris clogging the stream. It's pollution - from septic tanks, from farmers' pesticides, from golf courses' and gardeners' fertilizers.

We're happy to report that National Bank of Detroit, a co-sponsor with the Keep Farmington Beautiful Committee, will consider expanding its participation if there's enough interest elsewhere. The City of Farmington was a pilot project for NBD

this year. We hope they will see fit to expand it.

THIS SATURDAY, if you're so inclined, you could show up at a local headquarters at 8 a.m. and offer your services. Locations: Northville - the track rack. Plymouth - Wilcox Lake pavilion.

Livonia - Levan Knoll on Hines Drive. Westland - Merriman Hollow (also the main headquarters).

Garden City - Hines Drive east of Middle Belt.

Redford Township Redford Union High School.

LAST YEAR'S GROUP of volunteers was so enthusiastic that the Observer Newspapers' team had trouble stopping kids to get their names and club affiliations for the pictures we shot.

They were more interested in doing a job, they told us, than in getting their pictures in the paper. That, we thought, was a tremendous attitude, and we hope 5,000 people will have the same kind of spirit this year.

R.T. Thompson writes

Four Months Pass ...Still No Clues

Almost four months have passed, during which Livonia Bentley High held its commencement exercises and now students are back in classes for the start of a new school year, and nothing has turned out to lend any bearing on the hit-and-run death of Chris Beattie.

Chris would have been a member of the June 1971 graduating class at Bentley, she would have been attending college somewhere at this moment, but her life was snuffed out by a driver who ran her down on Sped Ruff Road in Livonia and sped away, leaving the critically injured girl alongside the road. She died shortly afterwards.

All of this took place in broad daylight, in late afternoon, yet Livonia police today are without a single clue. None has come forward with information that would enable police authorities to put the driver behind the wheel of the death car.

Even the fact that the bereaved family has offered \$1,000 in a secret witness fund hasn't brought any response.

We have a feeling that there is a secret witness who will tell a story when \$1,000 is involved.

To make things easier, we repeat the secret witness rules. The information must be in a letter form with no identification of any kind. One corner of the letter must be ripped off and a five digit number written on the letter and the fragment. Mail the letter to Secret Witness, Box 333, The Observer Newspapers, 36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich., 48154.

If the tip leads to the conviction of the guilty party, then the \$1,000 will be paid in cash provided the fragment with its numbers fits perfectly into the letter and the numbers are identical.

Better Sidewalk Than A Casket

The need for sidewalks along heavily trafficked thoroughfares is becoming more and more apparent as the caskets are being dropped into the earth.

But between now and the next casket, it will be rare when a length of sidewalk will be laid because of the "expense" of special assessment financing or because of the "solace" of our beloved "rural atmospheres."

THROUGHOUT this area, a pattern is developing which is pushing the sidewalk question into the open as a crucial problem facing suburbs which have grown too fast.

The sidewalk issue is being hotly aired in Plymouth, Farmington, Livonia and Southfield and has not escaped discussion in Garden City and Westland.

Tragedies include the hit-and-run death of a Livonia girl on Henry Ruff most recently and the death of a Farmington Township girl on 13 Mile. Both were on streets without sidewalks and, in the latter case, the girl was on her way to school in early morning hours.

Livonia is now discussing how to place sidewalks along Henry Ruff and whether the cost will be borne by homeowners or split between the city and schools. Farmington Township is still studying how to put the legal clout to developers who built subdivisions without sidewalks along the mile roads.

Plymouth Board of Education for the last two years has agreed to pick up the bussing tab for the younger tykes but has warned sidewalks should be built soon before the educational budget is drained.

TWO WEEKS ago a group of parents stormed the Farmington Board of Education demanding their children be bussed because of dangers existent from the lack of sidewalks. The school board, already operating with deficient funds, finds it difficult to underwrite further transportation.

Plymouth Township considered an at-large millage levy to finance walks and decided against this route. Special assessments may, instead, hit the pockets of direct benefactors. Plymouth is working on the problem and some kind of action is expected.

In Livonia and Farmington, however, an added objection is that sidewalks may destroy the "rural atmosphere" of these communities. This atmosphere, idylized as it might be, is a myth! Because the suburbs have become urbanized, the alternative of not building sidewalks is killing more children.

THE SIDEWALK problem in suburbia is more than a "somebody's gotta pay" dilemma. It is a problem which has developed because some residents with blinders still think they are grazing on open field when the pasture, indeed, is doomed to become a megalopolis, for better or worse.

The desire to maintain that which has already passed by the wayside has created a service lag which also is evident with dirt roads, open ditches, septic tanks, sump pumps and mud.

Apparently, sidewalks will be the first scythe to slice into suburbia's "civic lag" of growing from farm villages to urbanized cities.

And it is a welcome appearance. Far better to cut down a myth in one mighty swoop than to cut down two or three more youngsters whose lives are certainly more "expensive" than a few tons of mortar.

Meanwhile, we must live with what history has taught us - myths die hard but people die easy.

EMORY C. DANIELS

Editorial & Opinion

OBSERVER NEWSPAPERS, INC.

Philip H. Power, Publisher

The Livonia Observer • The Redford Observer
The Westland Observer • The Garden City Observer
The Plymouth Mail & Observer • The Southfield News & Observer
The Farmington Enterprise & Observer



Published by Observer Newspapers, Inc.
36251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, Mich. 48150

Serving the communities of:
Livonia, Plymouth, Farmington Township, Canton Township, Farmington
Farmington Township, Redford Township, Garden City, Westland,
Southfield, Lathrup Village, Franklin, Bingham Farms,
Village of Beverly Hills