



**OBSERVATION POINT**

# Southfield Schools Nature Center Deserves Praise

By Philip H. Power  
Publisher

Driving around this area yesterday caught me up short: construction, after a long period of recession, is really booming.

There are new developments going up all over. They're building in Volk's Woods in northwest Livonia, and that nice field to the west of Plymouth on Ann Arbor Road is now becoming a big subdivision.

Southfield is on the move, and they haven't even started doing much in the "silver triangle," south of 12<sup>th</sup> Road and west of Telegraph, which will be in time one of the biggest developments in the entire state.

They're still working away at the Schoolcraft expressway in Redford Township, Livonia, and Plymouth, and Farmington City Council is again thinking about paving Drake Road.

Westland seems to be an apartment builder's dream, and the folks in Canton Township are looking for population to double in the next 10 years.

**BUT THE IRON** law of progress holds that where there is development, there is loss of nature. Of fields and forests. Of wildlife and nature.

Some people are arguing that if we are to save our natural resources for generations yet to come, we've got to stop or at least hold back the pace of development and industrialization. This may be so, but I suspect that isn't going to happen for a while—at least until a lot of people get so fed up with the kind of "progress" that our society is making to consider seriously some alternative courses of action.

In the meantime, it's pretty much got to be a holding action to save what's left of our natural resources, at least here

in the suburbs where the pace of development is so rapid.

It's in that context that a story in the weekend edition of The Southfield News & Observer is so important.

**IT CAME** WITH a picture of a line of second graders walking through a field with their teacher.

That seems like a simple kind of thing. Cute, maybe, but kind of standard for a news story.

What was important is the fact that the Southfield school system owns a 17-acre tract, in the middle of the silver triangle. They're going to keep that 17 acres as a wilderness area and nature center, to be used by the kids in the schools.

Before the spring thaw, they're going to have a bus stop and turnaround, as well as a 10-foot wide nature trail there.

"Most nature centers say, 'You can look but don't touch,'" explained James Lahde, who presented the proposal to the board. "This nature center will be a laboratory where kids can actually carry on projects."

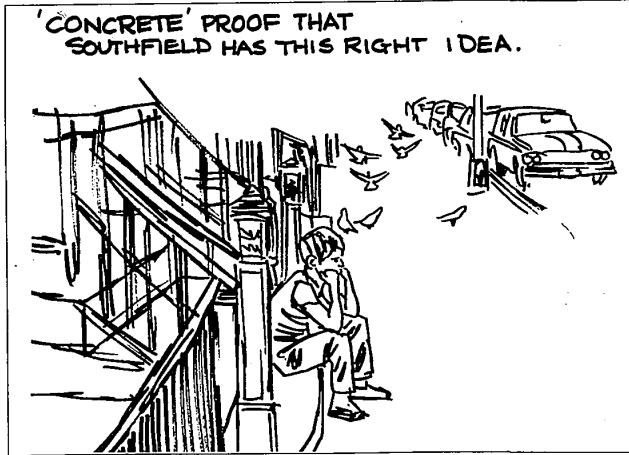
**THE SOUTHFIELD** nature center is a great idea, and deserves congratulation and support.

But further, it deserves attention from school and local government leaders throughout the suburbs.

The Southfield idea is a direct way to dealing with the pressures of development in such a way as to preserve natural areas for our children but simultaneously to pay respect to the needs of the entire area for development.

It's not a new idea, but it is under way.

It sure is nice to see something actually happening about our environment, rather than just lots of talk.



**Ref. Thompson writes**

## 'Secret' Meetings Slapped

From Genesee County comes a ruling by Circuit Court Judge Donald R. Freeman that may have an impact on the much discussed "executive" and "secret" meetings held by so many governmental units in Wayne County and particularly in the area we prefer to call Overberland.

Judge Freeman has ordered the Flint City Council to stop holding secret meetings from which the public and the press are barred.

The judge said, "It is the ruling of this court that all matters, all discussions that are held by members of the city council at a time and place where they have gathered at the request of the city manager

or at their own initiative in which public issues are being discussed, affect and involve the public and should be open to the public.

"It is difficult to conceive how any hardship can be suffered by councilmen who are required to conduct business in public view. The issue is not limited to the right of the press to attend and report. On a broader note, it is the right of the public to know everything about that which is theirs."

**THE GENESSEE COUNTY** suit was filed by the Flint Journal against the city's mayor and seven of the eight councilmen shortly after the city manager called the council

together for a discussion of the possibility of closed sessions. The city manager, at that time, said he felt the pros and cons could best be discussed when the press was not present.

The first closed session was held Jan. 7, and the Journal filed suit Jan. 21 to halt the practice.

In his ruling, Judge Freeman indicated the decision can't be applied to all meetings. He cited the 1963 Michigan Constitution relating to "formal meetings" of state educational institutions. He pointed out the attorney general's office has ruled that in such cases, private or executive meetings, at which no business of the board is transacted, are not formal meetings.

So much for the decision, which we hope will result in a similar suit in Wayne County to bring governmental units in line.

**TOO OFTEN** the press has been told at meetings in Overberland that the board, commission or council has called an "executive" session and often the group goes, closing its doors to the press and the public.

In many instances these sessions continued until the group knew everyone had left, then reappeared to pick up the agenda where it had left off and pass several items in strict privacy. In many instances, none but the board or commission knew what had transpired until the official minutes were approved for publication six weeks to two months later.

These are the sort of incidents that leave the press and the public skeptical of the elected officials. There is a sort of feeling that the board was hiding something, that it was doing something it didn't want known and a general thought that it couldn't be trusted.

Such things as 7 a.m. meetings of boards of education to discuss such things as the firing of teachers or superintendents, or a matter of whether to ask for voters for additional millage. Most certainly the board members have been notified of such sessions, and probably notices have been posted for the benefit of the public—but in obscure places and barely within the time required to call a special session.

# Stars In Eyes Of 4 Schools

There's joy in four high schools in the seven communities covered by the Observer Newspapers... their basketball teams are still in the thick of the battle for the 1972 state championships.

Players on the teams representing Livonia Bentley, Redford Union, Birmingham Brother Rice and Garden City East high schools deserve more than a little applause for their feats of the past week. Each passed tests in the district tournaments and entered action in the regionals.

The winners of this week's tournaments will be three games away from the much sought crown. By the end of the week, there will be only eight survivors in each of the four classes—A, B, C and D.

**IT IS A BIT** unusual for four teams from one district to capture district titles. Overberland has done it this season, and that should make fans proud of the type of basketball played in these parts.

But the joy of today will turn into sadness before the end of the week for some of the Overberland hopefuls... three of the quintets—Bentley, Redford Union and East—are in the same tourney from which can come only one winner.

There's a great deal of satisfaction to each student body that it can boast a district champion. There's even more satisfaction for the players. That's why we take the opportunity to congratulate all of the players and all of the schools for the fine performances during the season and wish each luck in the tests ahead this week in the regionals.

We wish all could advance to the quarterfinals, or better, the round of eight, but we know that is impossible. So our hopes ride with Brother Rice in the Sterling Heights meet and that one of our three representatives makes it in the rough, tough Franklin regionals.

—Observer Newspapers

## Sense And Nonsense

Someone at the University of Michigan has a malicious, delicious sense of humor. The U-M recently announced formation of a group to be called "Project on Population and Environment."

The acronym, of course, is "POPE."

Plymouth school officials don't realize it, but they've come up with a new use for Redford Township's coveted Glenhurst Golf Course.

After attending a meeting at Plymouth's new facilities, Bill Fleming, high school principal, commented at a recent RU board meeting:

"After seeing Plymouth's new high school, I think we should scrap what we have, buy Glenhurst and build a new high school."

Mayor Eugene McKinney of Westland must have other things on his mind when he drafted a press release last week for the Westland Civic Orchestra's March 19 concert.

McKinney, who came out the winner in a tough re-election campaign four months ago, was writing about the Rackham Choir, which will be accompanied by the new Westland civic orchestra.

McKinney called it a "150-vote" choir, instead of a 150 voice choir.

**Tim Richard writes**

# Took Some Doing But Bill Finally Passed

Harry Truman used to say about some of his congressional enemies that they had to be "dragged, kicking and screaming, into the 20th century."

Well, in Lansing recently, 59 members of the House of Representatives dragged their colleagues into the 21st century, whether the colleagues liked it or not, by passing Gov. Milliken's transportation/transit package.

It had been defeated earlier on a 50-54 vote (with 56 needed for passage), and last week the majority was put together.

**CREDIT SHOULD** be given where it is due:

Reps. Marvin Stempien (D-Livonia) and Joseph Forbes (D-Oak Park) are two Overberland men who can usually be counted on to think about the next genera-

tion as well as the next election, even when a Republican governor proposes the bill.

Rep. James Defebaugh (R-Birmingham) was also for the bill and was joined by Rep. Raymond Baker (R-Farmington). Baker had been absent on the vote two weeks prior, and it was good to see him in the progressive column, giving one of the final six extra votes needed for passage.

What brought Baker around? Pressure from the governor? Political loyalty? Vision and foresight? No, it appeared he was impressed by the road benefits to his area of Oakland County. Whatever the motivation, the result was nevertheless laudable.

**WITH THE EXCEPTION** of Stempien, the Wayne County group representing Overberland was a disappointment.

Rep. Richard Young (D-DeARBORN Heights), a conservative despite his party label, voted a consistent negative pattern.

Reps. John Bennett (D-Redford), James Tierney (D-Garden City) and Thomas H. Brown (D-Westland) were conveniently absent when the big vote was taken. They may as well be recorded in the "no" column because under Michigan's constitution it takes a majority of those elected (56 of 110) to pass a bill; besides, on the earlier vote

they were all in the "no" column.

Bennett's performance is particularly annoying inasmuch as he introduces scads of bills, accompanied by press releases, in an effort to portray himself as a benefactor to mankind. But when the chips were down on a landmark piece of legislation, Bennett voted "no" the first time and was absent the second. Well, one should have expected as much from the man who opposed the open housing law, the income tax law and the boundary commission law and attempted to gut the age of majority law.

**VOTING FOR** a bill that included mass transit, even though it's an environmental necessity and a political inevitability, was still a gutsy thing to do. A number of lawmakers facing re-election fights were reportedly scared to go for it, and those who did may fully expect to get flak from the agingers and the hangers-on in the Flat Earth Society.

Michigan's House, with a bare three votes to spare, has kicked the auto state forward, and the local representatives who helped pass the transportation/transit bill deserve a double vote of thanks and applause:

Baker and Defebaugh, Stempien and Forbes.

## Editorial & Opinion

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