

## OBSERVATION POINT

# Suburban Coming Of Age Shown In Job Patterns, United Fund Drive



By Philip H. Power  
Publisher

For years, the image of the suburbs has been taking it on the chin.

They take their identity and function not from their own history and unique business or cultural resources, but from the fact that their physical location is on the periphery of larger central cities. They have the image of being little more than bedroom communities, spewing forth rushed commuters working elsewhere, children, and harassed housewives.

Their own identities are swallowed up by the metropolitan area news media, which continue to insist, for example, that making permanent the appointment of the superintendent of the Detroit public schools is worth two full minutes of an 11-minute evening TV news show, while giving little more than a mention to a newly elected suburban mayor.

Even the word "suburb," beginning with the prefix "sub" suggests something smaller, lower, less good, inferior.

Thus the rise of the suburban inferiority complex, a notion which ought promptly to be discarded because it just doesn't fit the facts.

**NEWLY RELEASED** data from the 1970 census, for example, shows that the suburbs now have not only more population than the center cities but, more importantly, provide more jobs.

According to a New York Times analysis, half of all employment in the 15 largest metropolitan areas is now outside the center city limits. And of all the workers who live in the suburbs, only one in four still commutes from a suburban home to a city job. The others both live and work in the suburbs.

In the Detroit area in 1960, some 693,000 people worked in the center city and 530,000 worked in the suburbs. But over the 10-year period preceding the 1970 census, the pattern reversed itself: 856,000 now work in the suburbs and only 537,000 work in Detroit.

Equally striking is the sharp rise in number of people who both live and work in the Detroit-area suburbs. In 1960, 65 per cent of the metropolitan labor force lived and worked in the suburbs. In 1970, it was 76 per cent.

If these numbers don't clinch the argument that the old image of suburbs as bedroom towns ought to be discarded forthwith,

the fact that the percentage of the work force living in the center city and commuting to the suburbs jumped from four to seven per cent over the past 10 years will do so.

**THE SUBURBS HAVE** come of age, in terms of their role in the economic system of the nation. But they have come of age in terms of their wide-ranging sensitivity to community responsibility, too.

An example is taking place right now, in the countless number of suburban folks spending countless hours working to raise money for the United Fund.

Door to door solicitation has been an important part of the drive each year, but equally impressive has been the role of suburban businessmen, living and working in the suburbs, in making the business and corporate contributions on which the Fund depends so heavily.

Literally thousands of suburban businessmen have been working for UF over the past several weeks, with a final completion date for the drive tomorrow and last reports due on October 23.

The men who have volunteered their time and effort are

busy men, holding responsible positions in their companies, but they are willing to work in the suburbs for the good of everyone in the metropolitan area.

They are men like Walter O. Muller, plant manager of Chevrolet, Livonia, and Edward Wray, controller of the Fisher Body plant in Livonia, who are heading up the drive for Livonia, Garden City and Northville.

Bill Flattery from First Federal is taking responsibility for Farmington, and Phil Werner from Michigan Bell is doing the job for Southfield. Robert E. Sturwald, store manager at Hudson's Westland, is handling Westland, and Robert S. Frellick, material control manager at Ford in Livonia is working on Inkster, Wayne and Westland.

Merle F. Vallade, also of Ford Motor Co., is leading the Redford Township drive, and Plymouth, which has its own community fund drive, is being worked by Bill Carlson of Consumers Power.

These men deserve a big pat on the back from everyone in the area. They are living proof of the coming of age of our suburbs.

THE SHAPE OF THINGS TO COME...  
YOU CAN PLAY A ROLE



Leonard Poger writes

## Property Tax Distorts Cities

The property tax is much maligned -- and it should be.

There is very little argument for it, and none of any merit.

On the other hand, though we hate to kick a good subject when it's down, there is another view opposing the property tax for a major technique of financing public services.

That view is the manner in which property taxes distort land use and development -- particularly in our suburbs.

**MOST RESIDENTS** are aware of their city and school officials grubbing around for new industrial and business developments to improve the tax base and ease the burden of property taxes on the homeowner.

This is a noble goal, but it creates a flock of problems which are impossible to straighten out in a lifetime without making demolition companies the quickest millionaires in America.

The driving principle behind

economic development policies in many city and township halls is to zone as much land as possible for industrial and business uses and hope that developers come in and build something.

At planning commission public hearings on those developments, most of the arguments in favor of the rezoning requests are that the proposed development will add to the community's tax base and ease the property tax burden on present homeowners and other businessmen.

God only knows that some property tax relief is needed, but the problem is that the city and township officials are trying to jam brick and mortar into every available square inch of land left in the community.

This can be dangerous, and few officials are willing to stand up and say "no" once or twice a year to a developer.

ONE ONLY has to look at the

visual pollution and distorted land use policies along major mile roads in Detroit and its suburbs to see the damage the property tax philosophy has done.

All of this points out that once

the property tax is abolished or reduced substantially as a means of public services support, city officials can start planning their community intelligently without worrying about filling up every piece of grass in town.

Emory Daniel writes

## Radical Proposal? Only To Politicos

There has been a lot of indignation in the suburbs about revenue-sharing.

Most common complaint is that each municipality feels it should have received more than the amount doled out by the federal government.

A key difference between the receiver and the giver has been whether the money should be allocated back to local communities on the basis of how much that area sends to Washington, D.C. in taxes or if it should be returned proportionately to those cities with the greatest need.

**SOME** Southfield councilmen, for instance, are quite upset that the federal government has lopped another \$8,000 from that city's "share" while increasing Detroit's allocation by some \$9 million.

Some Southfield officials believe that all cities have problems, even the affluent, and money should be redistributed to cities on a more nearly equal basis.

A fellow-councilman, however, suggests that Southfield isn't an island unto itself and has a "brother's keeper" obligation which justifies having its wealth

redistributed to those who need it more.

**WHAT IS** surprising to this writer, however, is that the revenue-sharing concept is acceptable to the general public and government leaders, while the now defunct idea of returning \$1,000 per person as suggested by George McGovern was considered "radical."

Is it "radical" because part of the money spent by the taxpayer is returned directly to him instead of the politicians? Or is it considered "radical" because the dollar amount is \$1,000 while Southfield stands to get only about \$30 per head under federal revenue-sharing?

The value of an idea should be measured by its logic and practicality. When an idea is considered "radical" or "moderate" because of the amount of money involved, then that's a pretty good indication of how materialistic our society has become.

Frankly, if federal revenue sharing is a good concept, then I'd like Uncle Sam to share the money with me. I trust myself more than politicians, in spite of Mrs. Roman Gribbs. Besides, it's my money they're sharing.

Corinne Abart writes

## Better Architecture For Better Living

Suburbanites, long classed as "blah" members of the establishment by sociological commentators, want more -- more than canned music, art reproductions, massed produced ceramic knick knacks and row houses.

For people in Observerland communities, there is one more major river to cross. It is the one which leads to the look of the total community -- the use of the space bounded by the city limit signs.

Architect Jacqueline Joseph, formerly of Plymouth and now Southfield, calls architecture "the mother art." She quotes Winston Churchill: "We shape the buildings and the buildings shape us."

This is more than a statement on architecture. It directly relates behavioral psychology and sociology. The environment has a lasting influence on the way a person acts and reacts.

If he is happy, if he sees beauty around him, if he has enough private space protecting his territorial imperative, if there are enough open areas of sky and growing things, then he may react in a positive way.

**BUT IF HE IS** crowded, pushed, numbered and forced into a molded repetitious pattern, then his individuality, the last bastion of humanity, is in jeopardy.

If our structures are four-walled examples of mediocrity, it is because the residents have let it happen. If our houses are row on row identical with only a snatch of outer trim variance, it is because the people have bought and accepted them. If the streets are lined with ersatz Tudor or pseudo Williamsburg, it is because we let it happen.

Miss Joseph says good design doesn't cost any more than bad. But what individual can look at a drawing of a proposed building

and say "That will be good" or "that will be bad?"

Not many.

Yet it is his tax money that supports the city. The individual's voice could still be raised before planning commissions and council meetings. He could demand a higher better form of architecture in his community.

**LOCAL ARTS** councils could initiate a yearly award for the best piece of architecture in the community, to be judged by an outside panel of experts.

Private citizens could start petitions to remove the art and sculpture of a building from the tax assessment. What builder will put a piece of sculpture in front of his building if the \$1,000 or so extra is added to the tax assessment?

The name of the game is "cut costs" not "add costs." The tax structures of most communities encourage mediocrity and high density. The first thing a man who buys open land with a high assessment is try to get it zoned multiple or for business. How else can he get his money back?

A homeowner who makes improvements in his home will find his assessed valuation higher on the next tax roll. An incentive to keep improving? Hardly.

**SUBDIVISIONS** can be pleasant neighborhoods, unless the developer has raped the land of every tree and extended it ad infinitum.

Subdivision size could be limited, if the taxpayers demanded it, but it seldom, if ever, is.

It is the architects who must have final approval from the builders and developers and they in turn from money lenders, planning commissions and city councils.

The individual with a group of like believers behind him, could control the shape, the feel and the look of the community.

## Editorial & Opinion

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