

# Boys Town Politics: A Tip Of The Iceberg Was Exposed

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Special Writer

**BOYSTOWN, NEB.**  
A devastating expose of this internationally revered institution (and incorporated town) by the Omaha Sun Newspapers has been honored by the Universities of Nebraska and Missouri, as well as the journalism fraternity Sigma Delta Chi and the Suburban Newspapers of America.

Earlier this year, a task force of Sun reporters uncovered the fact that the world famed institution had accumulated a net worth of \$209 million. Moreover, Boys Town's administration has continued soliciting millions of Americans to contribute to its annual income - which in 1971 amounted to more than four times the cost of caring for the boys.

The wire services and

newsmagazines which initially transmitted this news across the country have covered only the top of what appears to be an iceberg. For the Sun's courage in being willing to probe into so sacred an institution evoked further expose, written by the Rev. Clifford Stevens, a former columnist for the Archdiocese of Omaha's official periodical, The True Voice.

**FATHER STEVENS**, who has written a biography of Boys Town's founder, the widely beloved Father Flanagan, charges that the successor designated by both Flanagan and the board of directors - Rev. Edmund Walsh - was bypassed for the post of director, as "a pawn of ecclesiastical politics."

The late Archbishop Gerald Bergin and layman Ted Miller, Boys town's chief fund raiser, were responsible, writes Father Stevens, for the appointment, instead, of Rt. Rev. Nicholas Wegner, the current director.

And this column has learned that Msgr. Wegner, now 72 years old, is a close personal friend of Rome's powerful and ultraconservative Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani.

As for layman and chief fund raiser Ted Miller, when he died in 1962, he left an estate of more than \$4 million. But Boys Town's public relations director Henry Straka attributes this to Miller's "skill as an investor," rather than to his having received any (regular) percentage of the contributions.

"Miller had become independently wealthy as a fund raiser for the Moose and the Knights of Columbus," recalled Rev. Francis Schmitt, a 30-year staffer at Boys Town. But Miller, while living in Mooresburg, Ind., had no sooner seen Spencer Tracy's award-winning MGM portrayal of Father Flanagan, than he traveled to Boys Town and got the job of chief fund raiser.

**MILLER'S INFLUENCE** lives on - especially his consummate skill in writing art-rendering letters of appeal. His style was emulated almost word-for-word in Msgr. Wegner's annual pre-Christmas appeal letter - sent last fall to no less than 34 million U.S. homes.

"There will be no joyous Christmas season this year for many homeless and forgotten boys ... With your help we can make a home at Boys Town for as many of these homeless boys as we can accommodate."

Unmentioned in this letter was the fact that Msgr.

Wegner turns away at least 1,500 boys per annum. He admits, however, that the resident \$15 million, 1,600-acre campus has an average of only 655 boys. Father Flanagan planned for at least 1000.

Director Wegner's Christmas appeal also stated: "We employ no solicitors or fund raising organizations." True enough. But the Sun further discovered that Boys Town annually spends more than \$3 million on fund raising - including more than 100 women, who work in a five story building in downtown Omaha. This building, while owned by Boys Town, has no other marking than an ancient "Wells Fargo" sign.)

**MILLER'S SUCCESSOR** as fund raiser, Henry Lucas, pleaded with The Sun not to reveal this interesting operation, because:

"It's so easy for the public to get the wrong idea. People will think we're rich. We want people to think the boys send out the mail."

And sure enough, there on Director Wegner's Christmas appeal letter is an illustration showing two boys mailing stacks of letters.

Omaha's Archbishop Daniel Sheehan, under Boys Town's charter, has the power to put this sleazy business to an immediate end - or even to begin to share Boys Town's impressive wealth with similar institutions overseas, or possibly, the nearby and financially distressed Girls Town.

But instead of retiring Director Wegner, Archbishop Sheehan, during a press conference just after The Sun's expose, commended the manager - for what he called "getting everything structured at Boys Town."



## 72 Blue Plate Special On Sale

Today is the day the Department of State's "blue plate specials" go on sale, the day the 1973 passenger car and motorcycle plates begin getting mailed out to people who have ordered them, by mail - and the day they go on sale at the branch offices.

Secretary of State Richard H. Austin says this year, as in previous years, prepared license plate application forms have been mailed to most of the vehicle owners in the state. People have been encouraged to send in their orders by mail even before the Nov. 15 date for the start of distribution.

"The early applicants will be first in the state to get their new license plates by mail."

**THE PASSENGER** and commercial vehicle plates sent by mail are made of light weight aluminum. The plates sold at the Secretary of State branches will be galvanized steel, as are the single plates used for trailers and motorcycles.

This year, according to Austin, "The mailing system has been even further speeded up, and the form has been simplified, so we are able to assure that owners will have their new plates within three weeks or less of the time they apply."

He cautioned owners to check the prepared forms to be sure the address, county code, and other information is correct. He also called attention to the need for completing the required insurance information and for signing the form before returning it. Feb. 10 is the deadline for mail orders.

"The applicant has just one place to sign this year. The time is marked with a large red 'X' to make it stand out."

This is the second year vehicle owners can pay for their plates by check, whether they buy by mail or from a branch office. However, Austin pointed out, "Uninsured motorists who pay \$45 into the motor vehicle accident claims Fund will have to send us either a certified check or money order for that particular fee."

**THE NEW 1973** plates are dark blue, with white reflectorized paint on the lettering and numbering. The colors were chosen on the basis of high visibility.

They are a far cry from the world's first known vehicle license plates - which originated on chariots in the Roman Empire before the birth of Christ.

They are also a far cry from the first Michigan license "plates" issued in 1905. Those were simply small round metal discs which were attached to the dashboard inside the car. Each motorist had to make his own exterior plate, for fastening to the rear of his vehicle. These were made of wood - or often, of leather - with house-type numbers tacked on. The first standardized Michigan plates weren't issued until 1910.

Since 1918, Michigan's plates have been produced by convicts at Southern Michigan Prison near Jackson, producing nearly six-million plates a big job, and work on the plates you are buying now began last February. Shifts of almost 200 men each work around the clock for nine months of the year in order to get enough plates turned out.

Your 1973 commercial or trailer plates must be on your vehicle by March 1. Passenger car and cycle plates have to be on by April 1.

## Nature Films, Talks Available

Park naturalists of the Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority are now providing lectures (accompanied by films or slides) with an environmental education theme to local schools.

There is no charge for this service, which is available annually from Nov. 1 through March 31.

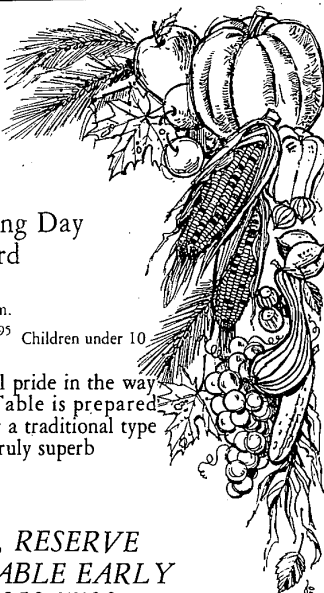
Six different programs are available with one for kindergarten through second grade, and five for grades 3 through 12.

The first program is entitled "Let's Watch Wild Animals" and will give children a close look at such southern Michigan animals as the woodchuck, opossum, raccoon, blue heron and several others.

Topics for grades 3 through 12 include "Animals Do the Strangest Things," "Nature's Clean-up Crew," "Scavengers," plus programs on "Spring," "Reptiles and Amphibians," and your metropark system.

Appointments should be made well in advance of the scheduled nature lecture date, and visits are limited to one-half day, with naturalists providing up to three lectures and the programs are designed primarily for large school and assembly groups.

The principals in schools throughout Livingston, Macomb, Oakland, Washtenaw and Wayne counties may arrange for this service by contacting: Huron-Clinton Metropolitan Authority, 600 Woodward, Detroit 48226.



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