

School superintendent Tougher questions needed

The Plymouth Canton school board narrowed down the field of six superintendent candidates to three this week and will interview them extensively next week.

All are from school districts from outside of Michigan. They are: Gary Hughes, Durand Area Schools; Charles Little, of the Frontier Central Schools in suburban Buffalo; and Robert Monson, of the Westwood, Mass., schools.

When they are interviewed we urge school board members to ask tougher questions, the main one being: How do you plan to give kids a good education under Proposal A?

In the wake of the tax shift mandated by the March 15 election, and the setting of per-pupil spending by the state, that question is the most significant. And it was conspicuously absent last week when the six candidates for the superintendent's job were interviewed.

The list of 10 questions were light-weight and could be answered by anyone who has taken a management 101 class in college. The questions focused on communication, planning, professional development and labor negotiations.

Also missing, apart from a question about school finances, was a question about school curriculum.

Developmental education being pushed by the school district has become controversial to some parents. And asking superintendent candidates which way they would go on the issue would have been a benefit.

Again, that didn't happen. The names of the 67 people who applied for the job were not made public. They should have been. Critics have complained that no women were among the six finalists. If that list would have been made public that issue could have been addressed.

The list was kept private by a Chicago consulting firm charged with narrowing down the field. By keeping that list private and allowing that firm to select the finalists, the school board has abdicated its role as the public overseers of the school district.

The board has allowed the educational establishment and professional educators to take over the role that should be played by elected officials.

Residents in Plymouth and Canton won't ever know if there was a well qualified woman among the 67 people who applied. They'll also never know if a local educator applied for the job. The very least the school board could do now is make that list public.

But while we are critical of the process used, we wish the school board the best success in selecting a new superintendent. The three finalists appear well qualified for the job and all have been involved in fine educational experiences.

However, let's hope the board asks significant questions when the second round of interviews with the narrowed down field starts next week. It's the least the board can do for the public.

A welcome limit on appeals

Our state Court of Appeals is like the funny poster they sell in office supply stores showing a harried worker with his legs spinning like wheels as he runs. In the caption, he says:

"The harrier I go, the behind I get."

The more appellate judges we add, the farther behind the court gets. The case backlog grows faster than the taxpayers' ability to pay for new judges.

In 1965, the Court of Appeals' first full year in business, there were nine judges. By the 1980s there were 18 judges. Since 1989 we've been blessed to have 24 judges.

This year we'll add four more judges for a total of 28. And that's a pittance, says Marilyn K. Hall, the state court administrator. Her "conservative" recommendation for 1997 is 12 more judges, and she adds that we really ought to have 54 to keep the workload the same as other states.

Meanwhile, Michigan's population has been virtually flat. We have seen a flight of manufacturing jobs, we have seen farming shrink, and our school enrollments are falling, but the number of appellate judges just grows and grows.

The culprit: more case filings, more appeals. Hall's numbers are mind-numbing, so we'll keep it simple: 5,200 filings by 1980, then 10,500 in 1990 and more than 13,000 in 1992 — generally a 13-percent increase a year.

Well, instead of adding more Court of Appeals judges until half the state is hearing judicial appeals from the other half, let's examine the problem afresh. Is there a way to cut extraneous appeals without harming the quality of justice?

Yes. Voters should consider supporting Proposal B on the Nov. 8 ballot. It would cut the Court of Appeals' workload by 25 percent or so by denying convicts who plead guilty the automatic right to appeal.

The Michigan Constitution (Art. 1, Sec. 20) grants "an appeal as a matter of right." Propo-

■ In real life, the Court of Appeals almost always affirms lower court decisions when the convict says he had a bad attorney, should have been charged with a lesser crime, or uses other jailhouse-lawyer malarkey. But it will send a few cases back for resentencing when the judge has departed from sentencing guidelines. . .

al B would add: "except that an appeal by an accused who pleads guilty or nolo contendere (no contest) shall be by leave (permission) of the court."

In other words, a convict still could appeal if he has a good case, but it wouldn't be an automatic right.

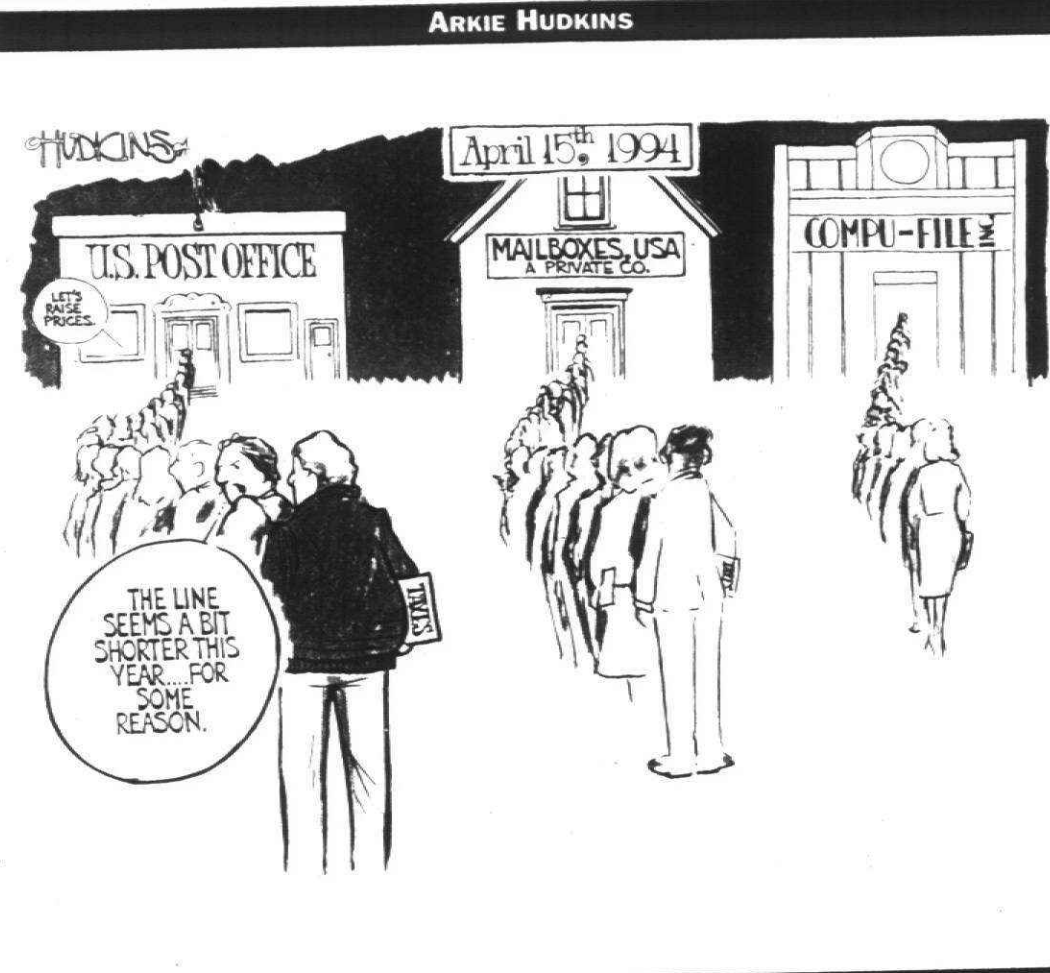
In real life, the Court of Appeals almost always affirms lower court decisions when the convict says he had a bad attorney, should have been charged with a lesser crime, or uses other jailhouse-lawyer malarkey.

But it will send a few cases back for resentencing when the judge has departed from sentencing guidelines by imposing too long a prison term without a good reason stated on the record.

Michigan's sentencing guideline system, based on actual judicial experience, is only a few years old. It's a common-sense system. The guidelines work to save many an offender from an overly harsh sentence imposed by a vindictive judge having a bad day.

Proposal B — to eliminate automatic appeals by those who have pleaded guilty — is also a common-sense solution to the cancerous Court of Appeals docket.

To weary taxpayers, Proposal B makes more sense, and cents, than adding dozens of new judges at \$108,000 a year apiece.



ARKIE HUDKINS

LETTERS

Mettetal concerns

Let's take a long, last look at Mettetal Airport. Has anyone seen a profit and loss statement regarding the operation of Mettetal Airport?

The reason is the airport has been operating at a loss under private ownership and to continue in operation, it had to be purchased with public money. Almost \$5 million from the FAA Trust Fund — or 10 percent of every plane ticket. To stay in operation no one has been told how much taxpayer money will be needed.

Is there a need for Mettetal? Does an alternative exist that has the capacity that could provide the service that Mettetal does?

Yes, the Willow Run Airport manager has stated that "there is more than enough capacity at Willow Run to house and provide a runway for all of the small airplanes at Mettetal."

Let's look at a few criteria as to whether or not we want to own Mettetal:

- Safety — the 2,000 foot runway was declared "unsafe" by the FAA in 1964 and nothing has changed.
- Liability — if there was to be a plane crash or accident at Mettetal, the taxpayers of Plymouth and Canton Township would have to foot the bill.
- Noise — just listen and you can hear for yourself. Ask any resident of Romulus about whether or not the noise and vibrations from Metro Airport have caused any structural damages to the houses in Romulus.
- Contamination — why have we not heard anything about the removal of five underground storage tanks that were leaking and left contaminated soil at Mettetal Airport within the last three years.
- Expansion — any expansion is prohibited by the Joint Operating Agreement between the state and the citizens of Canton Township.

Everyone knows that the state has already purchased land on the north and south side of Joy Road. This expansion will allow for jets to land and take off. Providing for small jet traffic is the only way for Mettetal to make any money.

- Taxes. The airport now encompasses 84.9 acres. The industrially-zoned \$1.2 million in property taxes in 1990. Public ownership of Mettetal has resulted in all of that property being tax-exempt and a loss of over \$1.2 million.

Supervisor Tom Yack, of Canton Township, stated that, "The only reason Mettetal Airport was prime for light-industrial development and there would also eliminate competition for Metro-West in Plymouth Township."

[Thus, we have a political pay-back by politicians, including Gov. Engler to Bob DeMattia, who is a financial investor in a local Plymouth newspaper, The Crier.]

Kathleen Scott, Plymouth

Indy on Powell

This letter is for all the "Indy" drivers who drive "Powell's" race track. This road is dangerous. There are potholes galore, small hills which obstruct vision, children walking or riding bikes, and of course animals.

I have a difficult time pulling out of my driveway. I can look and all is clear, but suddenly "Mario Andretti" is on my bumper. Why drive so fast down a road that throws gravel at your car, and ruins your suspension? After all, you're only going to the stop sign at Beck and you have to wait there for at least 10 minutes. What's the rush? Maybe Powell Road wouldn't look like a street from California's earthquake if some of you would slow down.

Maybe a better name for Powell would be "Township Turnpike." Slow down.

Debbie Seaton, Plymouth

Auction success

The following is an open letter to our friends and supporters in the Plymouth, Canton, Northville, Novi, Redford, Farmington and surrounding communities.

Thank you to the 500 friends from the Observer & Eccentric area who attended the New Morning School Auction on March 26 at the Laurel Manor Banquet Facility. The auction was a resounding success and your support for our school was evident in the generous bidding that took place. Some \$80,000 was raised which will be used to support the school's educational programs. We invite the community to participate in our programs for children ranging in age from 2 to 14 years. Programs range from a K-8 school to summer and Saturday enrichment classes.

We especially thank those donors who contributed to the Computer Fund. We are well on our way toward a network of computers that is child friendly and accessible to each student throughout the day. We appreciate your support.

Elaine Yagiela, executive director
New Morning School

Opinions are to be shared: We welcome your ideas, as do your neighbors. That's why we offer this space on a weekly basis for opinions in your own words. We will help by editing for clarity. To assure authenticity, we ask that you sign your letter and provide a contact telephone number. Letters should be mailed to: Editor, The Plymouth Observer, 744 Wing, Plymouth 48170. H0302

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POINTS OF VIEW

Community the loser when politicians conspire

No good deed goes unpunished. It goes an old saying that tells a lot about human nature, especially when politics is involved. It comes to mind because it has been proven again as Canton Community Foundation executive director Bill Joyner has been canned.

Don't believe what Township Supervisor Tom Yack and Wayne County Commissioner wannabe Bruce Patterson say about Joyner's political activity performed on his own time.

As foundation board president, I was fed the same line by Yack two years ago. In my naivete, I believed him when he told me that a contributor was withholding money intended for the foundation because of Joyner's support of a candidate running against one favored by the donor. A check of contributions to the foundation for the last year will show that this same person was responsible for over \$40,000 in donations. Go figure!

I also find it strange that those who expressed concern about Joyner's political activities are the only two sitting board members who have previously sought out Bill to run their own campaigns.

Why is it that those who enjoy most their own First Amendment freedoms seem to be the first to want to deny Bill Joyner the same? Why would Yack and Patterson "protest too much" in the local press? Best assured it is not their concern for the community that motivates them.

Anybody who is at all familiar with the political scene in a place like Canton Township knows well that the supervisor, regardless of who it may be, has tremendous control over developers and would-be investors in the community. Canton is booming. Many stand in line for a piece of the action.

And every one of them knows that

GUEST COLUMNIST



REV. WILLIAM MYERS

there is a price for doing business in such a community, regardless of its name. The unspoken rules say this toll is paid in either of two ways. First, it can take the form of direct contributions to non-profit organizations within the community, like the foundation. American Yazaki tops the list in this area with its concern for the community in which it does business.

Or, these funds can be channeled into the personal or political coffers of the elected officials. A review of recent history in Plymouth and Plymouth Township more than illustrates this point. Those involved were so blatant in feathering their own nests that the media in southeast Michigan began to speak of the "in-castigious politics" of those communities. The money is always there while a community is growing. It's just up to the politicians to decide where they want it to go.

It looks like this penchant once associated with the Plymouths has now moved south. The seemingly magnanimous comments about building up the foundation's endowment by channeling half of its income in that direction are but a smoke screen for the passive euthanasia that is about to take place.

The truth is that the current political establishment of Canton has no concern

whichever for less fortunate residents of the township. An organization dedicated in part to caring for people does not meet their needs. But not so regarding their own political hides.

The good people of Canton are about to get a front row seat as this drama unfolds and the human cost of unabashed partisan politics is unveiled within their community.

Those pulling the strings think they are just ridding themselves of Bill Joyner. Unfortunately, the baby is being thrown out with the bath water, and a lot of people who will need help in the months and years ahead won't get it.

Bill Myers is a former Canton resident who now lives in the Muskegon area. The Observer accepts guest columns from persons interested in community affairs. For more information about writing one, contact Jeff Counts, the editor, at 459-2700. Our fax number is 459-4224.

Parking problems mar great day for charity run

Pleasant Ridge turned out to be not so pleasant.

Some of us who participated in the Race for the Cure at the Detroit Zoo early Saturday morning found that out the hard way.

When the zoo lots filled, we headed for nearby streets, including those in the community of Pleasant Ridge.

A bunch of no parking signs greeted us, and were reinforced by a policeman. No parking here, he said, go a few streets further south.

Ready to follow his directions, although getting a little frantic about the distance back to the zoo and the time, we came upon the Pleasant Ridge Community Center, and its buttoned-up-tight outdoor municipal pool.

Its empty parking lot beckoned invitingly, although it was clearly marked "Parking restricted to authorized vehicles."

No one would be using an outdoor pool, we speculated, and we won't be cluttering their streets, so we pulled in, then scampered the several blocks to the zoo.

It was a gorgeous day. And thousands from all over metro Detroit had turned out for what has become the largest race in Michigan.

Along with 300 cancer survivors,

many ran in memory of grandmas, moms, daughters, friends and co-workers who had died from breast cancer.

But the atmosphere couldn't have been more upbeat.

Registration was efficient. Music played as people "grapevined" in an aerobic workout. A rainbow of balloons beckoned us to the starting gate. People were turning fear and grief into something positive.

They had paid anywhere from \$13 to \$20 to run, walk or race/walk the 5K distance. And through the donations of corporate sponsors and dedicated volunteers, none was tapped off for administration. All that money will go directly to research, education, detection and support for fighting breast cancer.

A spirited group of volunteers offered water, verbal support and time splits as we wended our way around the zoo through the friendly streets of Huntington Woods.

Crossing the finish line, we were greeted with pink carnations and lapel pins. An assortment of fruit, bagels, muffins and juices awaited — supplied by those corporate sponsors.

So we headed for our cars on a high, the combination of the endorphins, people and day itself. As we approached the lot, we noted that our car



JUDITH DONER BERNE

had been joined by maybe 20 others, neatly lined up.

And they had one thing in common — a rectangular piece of paper attached to the windshield. Yes, a ticket.

In our minds, Pleasant Ridge was capitalizing on the parking overflow. It would cost us \$25 more to have participated in the race.

A dispatcher at police headquarters wasn't sympathetic. "We have our orders," she said.

A call to the Pleasant Ridge Community Center confirmed that they did not use the facility until 1 p.m. that day. So our parking did not interfere with any activity.

It somehow doesn't seem right that people should end up paying more for a

parking ticket than for a cure for cancer.

I suggest that Pleasant Ridge donate at least half of the parking ticket money collected to the Race for the Cure. And that race officials work toward that community's future cooperation.

After all, the city of Huntington Woods allowed thousands of people to run through its streets. Pleasant Ridge could endure a few cars on its roads and in its un-such community center lot — for such a worthy cause.

Judith Doner Berne is a managing editor at the Observer & Eccentric Newspapers. She can be reached at 901-2563.



JOHN STORVICK/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Remembering: Karen Myers of Livonia was among those participating in Saturday's Race for the Cure.

More calls than metros
Robert Mira sold his truck with an Observer & Eccentric ad. "I received many more calls than either Detroit newspaper," he told us.
You will, too, when you
Reach Michigan's Finest Suburban Market

Computer problems plague library patrons, court staff

I thought I had it bad until I listened to Friend of the Court staffers tell their woes about handling child-support payment.

My problem is vexing, but it won't make me go hungry. It's the computers in the Wayne-Oakland Library Federation (WOLF). They are very slow and very inaccurate.

I wrote about those miserable computers a few years ago. I pointed out that where you used to see one or two people standing using the old-fashioned card catalog to look up books, you now see a dozen people sitting at computer terminals for 20 minutes at a crack.

No longer can you flip through a drawer of the card catalog like a deck of cards and glance quickly when one interests you. Instead, you have to (a) type in a key word, (b) scroll down, (c) stop at what you think is the correct entry, (d) call up the entry, (e) read it, (f) exit the entry and (g) print out the information.

It's user-hostile, and I said so in print. I implored the WOLF pack not to extend the computer system. In reply, I got a dumb letter from Alpha WOLF, the director, telling me how great computers were for librarians.

The dummy totally missed the point. What about the library patron??

Against my reasoned advice, WOLF expanded the use of computers. Recently I had to hunt for a classic play, "The Importance of Being Earnest" by Oscar Wilde, for my Great Books group. The computer indicated no copy in my local library, but there was a copy at "ORIN," their abbreviation for Ortonville. Nuts, I thought, that's 35 miles away.

Distrusting the computer, I walked over to the 822 section of the bookshelves, and guess what? Not just one or two copies of "The Importance of Being Earnest," but 13! Right, a dozen plus one.

On the occasion of National Library Week, April 17-23, I renew my plea that WOLF scrap its idiotic computers and go forward to the card catalog, and I add the testimony of Ellen Abbott, who does Friend of the Court (FOC) in rural Osceola and Mecosta counties.

FOC works on divorce cases. It accepts child-support payments from (usually) dads and writes checks to custodial moms, so the kids can eat. Michigan is installing a new computer system in FOC offices, starting in smaller coun-



TIM RICHARD

■ I wrote about those miserable computers a few years ago. I pointed out that where you used to see one or two people standing using the old-fashioned card catalog to look up books, you now see a dozen people sitting at computer terminals for 20 minutes at a crack.

"My own office is behind because of the new computer system. The state-mandated computer system is a nightmare," Abbott said, calling it "not user-friendly" and complaining that state experts "won't listen to the product users."

Gosh, that's exactly what I said about WOLF's computer.

"My office has taken a giant step backwards in enforcement," Abbott told a state Senate panel headed by Sen. Robert Geake, R-Northville. "Now I'm lucky to issue checks once a week. I used to have a payment history. Now I have (from the computer) a financial history, which even I can't understand."

Abbott warned that in May larger counties will start having the state computer system inflicted on them.

Sounds like state bureaucrats don't pay any more attention to the users than the head of the WOLF pack does.

Tim Richard reports regularly on the local implications of state and regional events. His Touch-Tone voice mail number is (313) 953-2047, Ext. 1881.

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COMMUNITY VOICE

QUESTION:

What kind of year will the Tigers have?

We asked the question at the Canton Public Library.

After yesterday, they have a challenge.
Lisa Verdittelli
Canton

'Ha, ha, ha. Middle of the road.'
Lori Witkowski
Canton

'I hope they do great.'
Cathy Mast
Canton

'Hopefully, great.'
Connie Davis
Canton