

## Don't spoil Cruise Leave the event for car lovers

So, another Dream Cruise has come and gone. For two days and nights (and then some), people lined Woodward Avenue in the northern suburbs to see cars of every description and vintage roar along the area's main drag.

Now, the only traces of Dream Cruise '99 are the occasional black streaks on the Woodward pavement left by Cruisers who burned a little rubber to show off their wonder-wheels.

Congratulations are in order, we think, for the way this year's cruise was handled — by the Cruise-goers and by the police charged with controlling them along the 16-mile route, especially the portion cutting a swath through Birmingham and the Bloomfields.

But we must also voice some concerns about the future of what's being called the largest free car event in the world.

First, the congrats:

There were very few incidents or arrests, according to police. In fact, things went so well that the police handling of this Dream Cruise has drawn the attention of a national police training program.

About 750 officers from several local departments and the state police worked together in a rare spirit of cooperation to keep things safe and sane and moving along.

And let's not forget the DPW and municipal cleaning crews who made war on the inevitable

trash made by a million people jammed into a limited area. Woodward fairly sparked the Sunday after Dream Cruise. The only reminders, as we mentioned, were the black streaks from the hot-rodders peeling out.

Now the concerns:

Big bucks, it seems, have been injected into our Dream Cruise. What started out as a novel attempt at recapturing a bygone era seems to be turning into a corporate-sponsored, super-hyped, T-shirt selling extravaganza.

The one-day celebration of the Motor City and its products now has become a three-day automotive orgy filled with Big 3 sponsorships and showcased products, the selling of cheap goods with the "official" cruise logo slapped on everything from shirts and towels to sunglasses and caps, to a horde of nonprofit and charitable groups wrestling for a piece of the dream-cruise action.

If organizers are not careful, the cruise will be crushed under its own burgeoning weight. Woodward-area residents and local police are already weary of the event spilling into Thursday and Friday, and if something isn't done, this free-spirited and spontaneous celebration is going to turn into a highly organized and staged week-long marketing ploy.

Our advice: Corporate America get out of the way and leave the Dream Cruise to the car buffs.

## School vouchers have downfalls

Sometime this fall many voters in Michigan may be asked to sign a petition to place a proposal on the November, 1999 ballot to amend the Michigan Constitution.

The proposed amendment to Article 8, Section 2 of the Michigan Constitution would pave the way for school vouchers to be used in Michigan schools, including private sectarian schools. The campaign for the petition drive is being financed and marketed with more than \$5 million from private donations.

Know that vouchers use public funds to support non-public education. The proposed amount of the voucher is generally one-half of the total state aid per student. Understand, though, that when a student leaves the public school, the entire amount of state aid is taken away from that school's funding resources. Supporters claim vouchers will benefit students, schools and taxpayers, so let's take a look at how other major public voucher programs around the country have fared.

The Milwaukee voucher program began in 1990 to offer vouchers to 15,000 low income families in poorly performing public schools. The vouchers were not to be used in religious private schools. In the first five years of operation, 18 voucher schools opened in Milwaukee. These are for profit schools run by management companies. By 1995, four of those schools closed their doors, three amid charges of fraud (such as inflating enrollment numbers to receive more money from the state). In the 1995-96 school year the voucher program was expanded to include religious schools.

In 1998, the Milwaukee voucher program served 6,200 students, about 75 percent of whom were already enrolled in an existing private school. Therefore, the movement of approximately one percent of Milwaukee's public school population created a net loss to the public school system of \$22 million and a boom to the private school system of \$29 million public tax dollars.

For comparison sake, consider another program used in Milwaukee inner-city schools called Success for All. This reading program, developed by Johns Hopkins University, has a ten-year record of boosting student achievement and cost about \$70,000 for 500 students. Milwaukee could put Success for All in its 113 elementary schools for \$7.9 million, but doesn't have the money to do that. Currently, 40 percent of voucher students return to public schools after their first year in the Milwaukee voucher program. Milwaukee has now raised property taxes — a "voucher tax" of \$5 million — to help pay for the voucher program.

The Cleveland voucher program started in 1996 and was funded by transferring \$5.25 million from public school funds dedicated to serving disadvantaged students. In the first year of operation, \$1.4 million of that fund was used to pay for taxis to

GUEST COLUMNIST



SHELLI WEISBERG

*'When faced with the decision to sign this petition to change the Michigan Constitution, consider that you may be giving a well-financed small interest group of people the power to change the delivery of education in Michigan.'*

take voucher students to and from school. In the 1998-99 school year, 3,744 Cleveland students received vouchers worth up to \$2,500 each. The program ran 41 percent over budget due to administrative and transportation costs, forcing the state to take almost \$3 million from public school funds to cover the overruns.

As in Milwaukee, only about 25 percent of the students receiving vouchers were previously enrolled in a public school. Most students receiving vouchers in both these cities are simply private school students getting a break on tuition, at the great expense of thousands of public school students.

Student achievement in the voucher programs is difficult to measure because private schools are under no obligation to participate in testing. Of the independent studies conducted, the reports have been mixed, depending on who is conducting the study. At any rate, none of the reports on student achievement have shown significant gains in test scores for students receiving vouchers. In Cleveland, the HOPE Academics, newly established private schools accepting only voucher students, only agreed to participate in an independent evaluation after their second year of operation. The evaluation showed that HOPE students achieved at significantly lower levels than Cleveland public school students in all subjects. The report stated that, "The newly established schools did not seem to promote greater student achievement and may, in fact, have diminished students' academic achievement." (Evaluation of the Cleveland Scholarship Program, Second Year Report, 1997-98, Indiana University, 1998).

More than 90 percent of Michigan students are educated in public schools. Public education is constantly piloting programs that respond to the demands of our ever-changing culture. Programs that work become integrated into the educational framework. Michigan public schools offer preschool, alternative education, life-long learning, special education, breakfast programs, after-school care, all-day kindergarten, tutoring programs, school to work programs, business partnerships, community service, diversity awareness, conflict resolution, and parenting education. Public education brings children and adults of all backgrounds together to work and learn.

When faced with the decision to sign this petition to change the Michigan Constitution, consider that you may be giving a well-financed small interest group of people the power to change the delivery of education in Michigan. Take the time to investigate how the public education system in Michigan works and make an informed decision. Judging from their track record, voucher programs are not delivering greater educational opportunities to disadvantaged students. The hope they have promised has turned out to be just hype.

— Shelli Weisberg serves on the Board of Education for the Birmingham Public School District.

that certain candidates had been favored by having their names placed at the top of the ballots.

More than 1,300 students were expected to register for school when classes resume for the fall in Birmingham school district's schools — Barnum, Hill, Adams, Maplegrove and Baldwin High. Hiring of 11 new teachers upped the total to 58.

### COMMUNITY VOICE

#### QUESTION:

**What's your opinion on people who drive while talking on their cell phones?**



"I think they're eventually going to hit someone."

Cameron May  
Bloomfield Hills



"They should have a speaker cell phone so they can have both hands on the wheel."

Natalie Janausch  
Troy



"I almost got hit at a Birmingham intersection because a woman ran a red light driving and talking on her cell phone."

Cathy Hegge  
Warren



"It is dangerous but I do it sometimes, but I am very careful. Some people don't pay attention while talking and driving."

Phyllis Lucci  
Shelby Township

We asked this question outside of the Midtown Cafe.

### LETTERS

#### Tougher divorce laws would be harder on families

As a family law attorney for the past 25 years, and co-founder of the parent education program known as SMILE (Start Making It Livable For Everyone), I have seen the tragedy of divorce and separation to not only the adults but especially to their children.

Changing the no-fault divorce law to make it "harder" to get a divorce in Michigan will require adults to hire lawyers and prove grounds such as abuse, adultery, desertion, substance abuse, etc. against the other parent in order to succeed in securing a divorce. This will hurt the children even more!

The last thing a child needs is to have one parent be required to tear apart the other parent in order to secure a divorce. This is good for lawyers as it will make divorce case harder and more expensive, but it is not good for the family. The other requirement proposed, having a couple serve a four year separation term before a divorce, is also harmful to children because it leaves them in limbo and prolongs the emotional conflict children normally sustain when their parents separate and divorce.

Divorce is hard for everyone. No one enters it thinking that because you do not have to tear apart the other parent it is something easy to do. But, changing our laws to make it more difficult will not force people to stay together. It will only exacerbate problems which already exist and hurt children even more.

**Richard S. Victor,**  
Former Chairperson Family Law  
Section, State Bar of Michigan & Co-  
Founder SMILE

#### Save the Allen House

I grew up in Birmingham and have been a homeowner here for more than 10 years. I have recently heard the historical Allen House in Birmingham is being taken away from us, the residents, and turned into an historical museum. My question is why? And on whose authority can this be done?

The Allen House brings huge numbers of people into Birmingham from all over Michigan, the country and other parts of the world. Many of these Allen House guests might not otherwise even know our city exists.

Many of the people here for events held at the Allen House are staying at our local hotels, eating in our restaurants and shopping in our downtown. Also, I often notice the Allen House receiving media attention because it is such a unique venue for an event.

I live close to the Allen House and often hear and see the bustle of events and gatherings. I agree Birmingham has many wonderful things that could be showcased, but why not combine this idea with what is presently happening at the Allen House? Why take away such a fabulous venue for unique gatherings? I would also imagine the Allen House would generate income of some kind for the city. I understand there has been a sizable donation of more than \$200,000 to help make this conversion. Why not use this money to bring these two ideas together?

Just look at the Hunter House (historical home next to the Allen House) — open nine or 10 Sundays a year for a few hours... Every Sunday morning I could count on one hand how many

people I have seen pass through those doors. Why would we want to impose this same drab fate to the Allen House? Who would want to take this property away from us to turn it into a museum that you see once and then that's all there is?

I would bet most Birmingham residents do not know about this, and if they did, would not be pleased.

**Karen Gome,**  
Birmingham

#### Double tax

The Headlee Amendment to the Michigan constitution was designed to protect us from rampant taxation that we do not approve. Local communities have become very skillful at calling these taxes by another name to avoid the Headlee Amendment and in doing so violate the law in worse ways than most criminals.

The latest was the Oakland County Board of Commissioners decision to add another 57 cent surcharge to our phone bills to fund a 911 upgrade. They already have a 46 cent surcharge on our phone bill for 911 whether we use the system or not.

According to the Michigan Supreme Court a fee must be directly related to the cost of the use of a service. It must be directly related to cost of use. It must also be voluntary. This surcharge is designed to upgrade a general service that is available to all but not used by all. This is not voluntary. We have no choice. It also is not related to our use but to the counties use of its phone system. This is already budgeted through our tax dollars once, so this surcharge is a double tax.

Taxpayer United and several other advocate organizations are preparing to fight this illegal tax in court. I would ask all residents of Oakland County to become familiar with this issue and let the commissioner know that we will not allow this form of lawbreaking to take place. Since the county claims this is a voluntary fee and I do not agree with the charge I am not going to pay the surcharge on my phone bill. Let's see what happens.

**Mike Collins,**  
Waterford

#### 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 Birmingham Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, Michigan 48009*

### TURNING BACK THE PAGES

This week in history as reported in past editions of The Birmingham Eccentric.

75 YEARS AGO — 1924

Floyd Blakeslee, county prosecuting attorney, upheld the claims of The Birmingham Eccentric of irregularities in the printing of Republican ballots for the Sept. 9 primaries and County Clerk W. Harry Cryderman said he would have the ballots reprinted and redistributed at his expense. The investigation showed

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— Philip Power