

Rabbit tracks

By John Haire
(And anyone else he can get to help)

According to an account I read by Bill Meyers, retired editor of the Lapeer County Press, Merrill Lynch is running all those ads "we're bullish on America" and then illustrating them with a herd of steers.

Things like this are the reason why "when E. F. Hutton talks," I never listen.

The legislature passed the annual subsidy for the silver-dome in Pontiac again. At a time when all state employees are going to be forced to take six days off without pay because of Michigan's financial crunch taxpayers are subsidizing multi-millionaire William Ford who is making additional millions as owner of the Detroit Lions football team.

No wonder the Tisch amendment received such support in the last election.

On approval the Association of Handicapped Artists, Inc., Buffalo, N.Y., sent us Christmas cards that were printed from drawings mouthpainted. They are beautiful with amazing detail.

When those things come through the mail there's always the suspicion of a rip-off. After all anyone can call themselves Handicapped Artists, Inc.

But in the spirit of the season, we bought the cards to send this Christmas, feeling the cards were worth the money and trusting that the money was doing double duty.

Instant reminder. Next week is just like this week. The paper will be out one day early on Tuesday with the same advanced deadlines.

I get some strange looks when I say that it's nice to see snow now.

A white Christmas and a white January, February and early March is okay, too.

But deliver me from melt and freeze, melt and freeze all winter followed by a blizzard in April.

Regardless, I'd sooner be in Michigan than Florida right now. (When I say that I REALLY get some strange looks).

The weather

	High	Low	Precip.
Wednesday	33	-12	.01
Thursday	27	-4	.01
Friday	18	-4	0
Saturday	24	-4	0
Sunday	26	-2	0
Monday	26	14	0
Tuesday			

(Recorded at Cass City wastewater treatment plant.)
Snow recorded as melted water — 1" water = 10" snow.



CHRISTMAS PROGRAM -- Children at Deford Elementary School presented a Christmas program to a packed gymnasium of parents last Thursday evening, then repeated their program for their fellow students Friday morning. Each class had its own activity. This was the kindergarten class of Martha Butcher.

47 'pink slipped' at Regional Center

Forty-seven employees at the Caro Regional Center will work their last day there Jan. 3.

Though not a consolation to them, it is far less than the 170 who were expected to lose their jobs as of a couple of weeks ago.

Layoff notices were issued to more than 200 employees Dec. 12. Because of employees with seniority having the right to bump those with less seniority and take their jobs, notices had to be issued to the larger number.

All but the 47 will now receive cancellation notices. Of those losing their jobs, 29 are direct care staff and the rest indirect.

The prime reason for the change, according to center Director Marlin Roll, is that the Michigan Department of Mental Health officials figured out that losing more than that would result in loss

of too much federal aid, as the center would no longer have the required staff-to-patient ratio. The loss of federal funds would have been more than the money saved from having to pay fewer employees.

"I don't think anyone knows where the money is coming from," he commented.

The number of residents at the state facility will continually be monitored, he said, and when the number decreases, more employees will be laid off.

Another factor which eliminated more layoffs was agreement by many employees to work 8 hours out of every 80 without pay, in exchange for which they will get an additional vacation day off or be eventually reimbursed for the time worked, possibly when they retire.

The layoff of the 47 will reduce the payroll to 685 employees. At one time, 850 worked there.

Walbro declares dividend

The board of directors of Walbro Corp., at a meeting Dec. 15, declared a fourth quarter dividend of 10 cents per share of common stock payable Jan. 30, to shareholders of record Dec. 31.

President Lambert E. Althaver noted, "It appears that sales and earnings for 1980 will be lower than originally forecast. Prospects for 1981, however, seem to be strengthening."

Althaver added that the fourth quarter dividend is a continuation of a four-year trend of 10-cent quarterly dividends.



"If It Fitz..." Midair revision

By Jim Fitzgerald

Today's question concerns conflicts of interest. So that public employees will be prepared in case of a sudden attack of ethics, should they be equipped with parachutes at taxpayers' expense?

I am not being frivolous. Howard Tanner, the director of Michigan's Department of Natural Resources, recently revealed that a state employee woke up in midair, faced with a moral crisis.

This unusual happening was made public in a newspaper article concerning brine pollution created by oil industry operations. Brine is the salty stuff used to melt ice off highways. Oil drillers often get brine along with the oil, and if the brine isn't handled properly, it damages the earth and makes farmers and environmentalists angry.

It is the job of the DNR to make sure the oil industry isn't careless with brine. There have been many charges that the DNR does a lousy job. One of these charges is that DNR employees are too chummy with oil industry employees, which is the same as criminals taking cops out to dinner.

The DNR's petroleum geologists are responsible for regulating oil field activities. One of these geologists, James Lorenz, was recently reprimanded by his superiors for accepting a free fishing trip to Florida aboard an oil company airplane.

Director Tanner told the Free Press that Lorenz "realized he had made a mistake halfway down there."

That would be somewhere over Tennessee, I imagine. Free Press reporter Eric Sharp told me Tanner also said Lorenz' sudden realization that he might be guilty of a conflict of interest "spoiled the whole trip for him."

Apparently Lorenz continued on the fishing trip, even though he didn't enjoy it, because he didn't know what

else to do. That's understandable. Put yourself in Lorenz' place. What would you have done?

You are 3,000 feet in the air. It is the pilot's plane, and you are paying no fare. When you came aboard in Michigan, it was understood the free flight was to Florida. If you suddenly become uncomfortable from sitting in the pilot's oily pocket, are you going to order him to make an unscheduled landing in Tennessee and let you off?

That would take a lot of gall, not brine. Chances are you would keep your mouth shut and continue on to Florida. But what if you were wearing a parachute?

I don't know how many public employees are vulnerable to offers of free trips from wealthy industrialists seeking favors. Probably thousands. That's a lot of parachutes, which cost money. But how much is it worth to protect the integrity of a government bureau?

If Lorenz had been equipped to jump when he suddenly realized he was halfway to a mistake, the fishing might not have been as good in Tennessee, as in Florida, but he would have escaped a reprimand and the DNR would have been spared an embarrassment.

There is no denying that state revenues are at a low ebb. To save money, a legislator even suggested Gov. Milliken should fire his state-paid housekeepers. If

there is the possibility that the governor's wife may have to do her own dusting, is it reasonable to suggest that many public employees should be fully outfitted, at taxpayers' expense, to abandon ship instantly at every unexpected flick of conscience?

I say yes. No matter how long it takes a bureaucrat to realize he's flying toward a conflict of interest, he should always be able to bail out. He shouldn't be forced to continue on a free trip when he's no longer having fun, and he shouldn't have to buy his own parachute.

To cut costs, many taxpayers would volunteer to pack the parachutes.

The average 100-watt light-bulb will give about 750 hours of light.

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The Haire Net

It used to be that the Main Street decorations in Cass City were the poorest of the Christmas decorations in Cass City.

This Christmas they are the best. The decorations today stand out better than any before on Cass City's wide street. The street has always been the Waterloo of anyone trying to make downtown festive looking at Christmas. The rest of the year, of course, we all rejoice in the convenience of the 100-foot wide roadway.

Maybe the decorations look better now than they did back in the 1950's because there is little competition around town. Back when we were known all over the mid-west as "Christmas Town" the thousands of visitors saw a spectacle that was unique and, yes, breathtaking.

There's no picturing for you that didn't see it just how great it was. You can tell about the animated black light displays, the live nativity display, the Mother Goose rhymes cut from papier mache and the dozens of Santa with sled presentations that adorned the lawns.

But you can't capture how it really was. That's because the real zing came from watching the visitors oh and ah about it all while the kids just looked on in shiny eyed wonder.

It was inevitable, really, that it couldn't last. Each year it took more and more time for fewer and fewer persons.

Perhaps a more major cause was that the original purpose of it all was forgotten.

Towards the end it was no longer the erection of the displays in the spirit of Christmas, just to spread a little joy of the season.

Success wasn't measured anymore by the reaction of friends and neighbors. It was measured by the number of stories and pictures that appeared in the metro newspapers, on radio and television.

It became a battle to see who was getting the most time on the airwaves and the most ink.

The displays were built around "peace on earth, good will towards men," but the owners forgot the message they proclaimed.

So it's gone and we couldn't bring it back even if we wanted to. The cost of energy today is just too much. And, sadly, towards the end of the "Christmas Town" days everyone had trouble keeping lights from being stolen or vandalized.

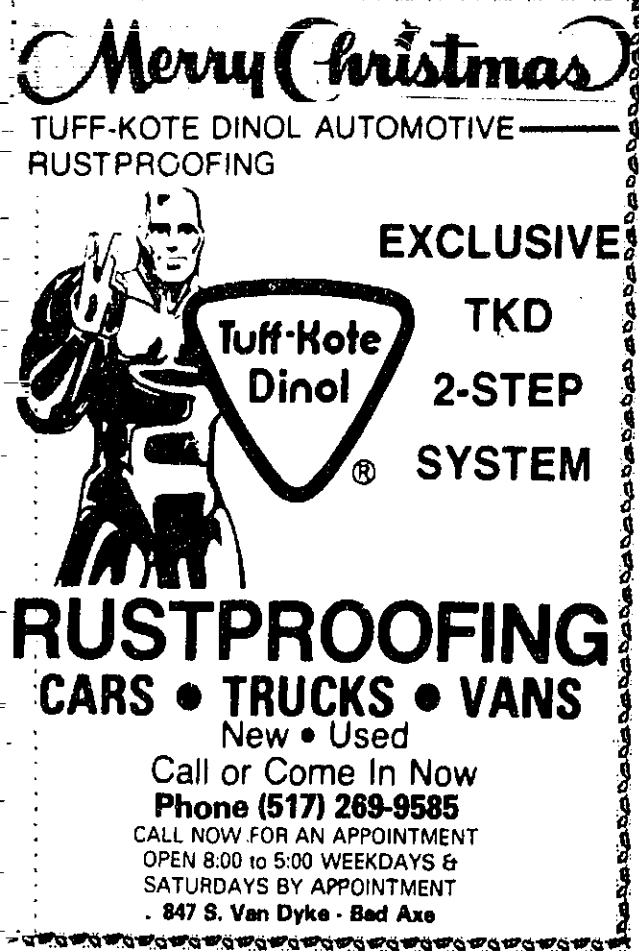
So we'll never again be "Christmas Town." In a way that's too bad. But there is a brighter side. More than most we've maintained a little of the small town caring and sharing.

That friendly neighborliness that makes living just a little better.

Most of us aren't too busy or too aloof to say Merry Christmas as we walk down the street. What's more, we expect and get a similar greeting in return.

It's not that we are any more friendly or caring than our big city neighbors. How many of you would walk down Woodward Avenue and say "Merry Christmas" to the throngs passing by?

So count your blessings and rejoice.
Merry Christmas.



Merry Christmas
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