

MCC enters middle age Still here and still needed

The MCC is celebrating 40 years of “improving the quality of life in Miller”. Founded in the spring of 1971, our community organization has been fighting for four decades to make this a place where everyone would want to live. **This has meant bringing diverse residents together to work for common goals; enhancing public safety; improving schools; protecting the natural environment; promoting local businesses; and fighting for efficient government and reasonable taxes.**

Now, we want to focus on celebrating four decades of effort and achievement by one of the oldest neighborhood organizations in the country. We are thinking of having a BIG community picnic during the summer and are plan-ning to repeat the “Masked Ball” at Halloween. If you have ideas for other activities and events, let us know.

In addition, we are working to develop a new logo and slogan for the next 40 years.

MCC is invited to join in mayoral candidate forum

The MCC has been invited to join a group called “The Coalition” which was specifically formed to sponsor a forum of mayoral candidates prior to the upcoming primary election. Participation in the project will be on the agenda at the February 14 MCC board meeting. The other members of The Coalition include the Central District Organizing Project (CDOP), the NAACP, the Gary Urban League, and the Intercity Student Council, along with various sororities, fraternities, and churches. If the MCC decides to join the group, it will be furthering one of Doug Grimes’ objectives as MCC President, to promote ties with other Gary civic organizations.

Dates of **Saturday, March 12 or Saturday, March 19 at 3:00 pm** are being considered for the event.

The sponsors of the forum want to present ten questions for the candidates, and ask them what they think of each issue, how they plan to address it, and how they would implement the plan. MCC President Eric Reaves is asking board members and Miller residents to submit proposed questions. Just send your ideas to Eric by e-mail to EricEReaves@aol.com or by snail mail to 8501 Locust Avenue.

Bankruptcy bill advances

State Senator Ed Charbonneau from Valparaiso has sponsored legislation, SB 105, to deal with a situation in which a political subdivision is unable to fulfill its financial obligations. It would allow the executive and legislature of the subdivision, acting jointly, to request that it be designated as a **distressed political subdivision** by the state Distressed Unit Appeal Board (DUAB). If the DUAB agrees, its chairman can appoint an Emergency Manager for the subdivision who would take over many responsibilities of the executive and legislature. He would NOT be able to impose new taxes, but he would have broad authority to make a budget for the subdivision, negotiate contracts, control hiring and firing of employees, approve bills for payment, and do whatever else was needed to get the subdivision back on a sound financial footing. He might also recommend seeking bankruptcy status for the subdivision.

Originally the Charbonneau bill permitted creditors to petition the DUAB to apply the “distressed political subdivision” designation, but this provision has been eliminated.

SB 105 also redefines the Distressed Unit Appal Board, reducing it to three members. In addition, amendments to the original bill seek to protect creditors and excuse the state from any financial liability. Charbonneau contends that the bill is not aimed specifically at Gary, but would apply to any subdivision having financial problems. However, the Gary subdivisions are the only ones appealing to the DUAB for relief.

There has been some discussion about having a public forum in Gary to discuss the proposed legislation, but time for that is running out. In any case, SB 105 has broad support in the legislature and from Governor Daniels, so it is very likely to pass.

The garbage fee case goes on

Following the ruling of Judge Francis Webber that Gary’s garbage collection fee was properly authorized by the common council, the attorneys and plaintiffs in the case have held several meetings. The attorneys continue to believe that they are right in challenging the council vote, and Judge Webber is wrong. They have obtained a certified transcript of the meeting, which they feel confirms their judgment, and have included this in a “correction of fact” appeal to the judge, asking him to reconsider his decision. This keeps the case open for further appeal, if the judge does not change his mind.

The attorneys and plaintiffs will be meeting once again on Wednesday, February 16 at 5:00 pm in Greg Reising's law office on Lake Street, to consider further action. All the people who are named as plaintiffs in the lawsuit are invited to attend.

Most people not directly involved in the case are asking what the litigants have to gain, even if they prevail in the suit. Eric Reaves has polled the Gary Common Council members, who indicate they would vote to pass the fee ordinance if the issue were brought up again. In addition, the city is planning to ask for increases in the fee, which would involve a new ordinance that would presumably be passed correctly. In addition, carrying the case to the Court of Appeals would involve additional attorney fees, and the Miller Defense Fund is out of money. The MCC is not directly involved in the case, even though the MCC executive board has voted to proceed, so the attorneys and litigants can decide as they like what to do next.

On the other side, the city's problem is the low collection rate for the fee. People aren't paying, and the city doesn't have any effective power of enforcement. At the same time, the word is that the collection rate for property taxes, where the city **does** have powers of enforcement, is only about 70%.

Duly noted . . .

YES TO LAND-BASED CASINO. In response to a request from Councilman Roy Pratt, the MCC has voted to support a proposal which would retain two gambling casino licenses for Gary and would permit one of the licenses to be used for a land-based casino, presumably adjacent to I-80/94. This arrangement would be expected to generate more revenue than the current setup with two licenses at the same lakefront location, and would encourage other development along the interstate.

THE NEXT BOARD MEETING OF THE MILLER CITIZENS CORP. WILL BE HELD ON MONDAY, FEBRUARY 14, AT 7:30 P.M. IN THE MEETING ROOM OF THE MARQUETTE PARK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH ON GRAND BLVD. Members are invited to attend and participate.

Contact the MCC between meetings at P.O.Box 2645, Gary, IN 46403, or call 938-8831 or e-mail mceaton@aol.com. You can also visit the MCC website at www.millercitizenscorp.org.

NEW SIGN CONTACT. For many years, Joyce Davis of the Lake Street Gallery has taken on the job of updating the community activity sign at the corner of Miller Avenue and Grand Blvd. Unfortunately, Joyce recently fell and broke her wrist, so she is unable to perform this task. For at least the next while, Nichole-Charlene Botsford will be handling the job. Persons desiring to advertise on the marquee sign should contact her by phone at 951-0151 or by e-mail at NicholeCharlene@comcast.net. The fee for displaying messages on the sign is \$10 per week.

DANCE BENEFIT. The South Shore Dance Alliance on Lake Street is joining with the Southlake Children's Choir in the annual "Leap into the Arts" fundraising event at the Halls of St. George in Schererville, from **6:00 to 10:00 pm on February 25**. Tickets are \$50 and include dinner, an auction, and a performance by some of the best dancers in the Region. For more information, visit the internet site www.leapintothearts.org.

SKI EQUIPMENT AVAILABLE. The Douglas Center on Lake Street has been open every Saturday from 1:00 to 3:00 pm, and has equipment available, at no cost, for cross-country skiing. Just pray for continued wintery weather!

Revitalizing Marquette Park

As a representative of the MCC, Eric Reaves has been working on the RDA subcommittee dealing with creation of a Marquette park conservancy, to help finance and manage the park after improvements are completed. He reports that the subcommittee has reached agreement on the composition of the conservancy board of directors and on a draft version of the conservancy by-laws.

Both the RDA committee and the MCC Lakeshore Committee have been dealing with revenue issues for the park. Data from recent years indicate that it is worthwhile for the park to impose and collect parking fees. Now, the Lakeshore Committee is preparing recommendations on fee structure and financial controls for the future park operation. They plan to present a proposal to the RDA committee, which will be considered and, hopefully, adopted. **The next meeting of the Lakeshore Committee will be on February 17 at 6:00 pm in the meeting room of the Woodson Library on Lake Street (the third Thursday).** Anyone interested in lakefront developments is welcome to attend.

DUAB hears Gary appeals

At the meeting of the Distressed Unit Appeal Board (DUAB), on January 7, the City of Gary, the Gary Sanitary District, and the Gary Public Transportation Corp. (GPTC) all asked for tax relief in the coming year.

Questions for the GPTC focused on revising the (expired) union contract to cut costs, and amalgamating with the Regional Transportation Agency (RTA). The GPTC had rejected a proposal for joining the RTA last year, because they thought it was not equitable, but they were submitting a revised proposal this year.

The Sanitary District announced that they were saving \$4 million a year by cancelling the operating agreement with United Water. They continue to have a problem with low collection rates for the garbage collection fee, but they were informed that they should forget about increasing collectins by turning customers' water off for failure to pay garbage collection fees.

The City of Gary explained how they had worked to reduce costs, in cooperation with their financial monitors. Discussion ensued concerning the transfer of animal control and the health department to the county, both of which had been turned down when the city offered no compensation to the county for taking on these functions. The DUAB members were also critical of salaries, expenses, and support staff for the Gary Common Council.

Members of the public spoke after the city's presentations, and most of them opposed the requests for tax relief. Tom Eaton spoke for the MCC, noting that we had initiated the whole tax cap movement and were the only people in Indiana who were still not benefitting from it. Many speakers echoed the theme that the Gary taxing units were not going to be any more able to operate within the tax caps next year than they are now. John Vinzant delivered a cogent criticism of the way the tax relief burden was distributed, so as to make property tax **rates** strongly progressive.

In the near future, the DUAB will decide, in private session, whether to grant relief to the Gary agencies (at the expense of Gary taxpayers). If the requested relief is granted, it should still result in some reduc