

The Hour

Chet Valiante PUBLISHER
Chris Bosak INTERIM CO-MANAGING EDITOR
Jerrod Ferrari INTERIM CO-MANAGING EDITOR
John P. Reilly EDITOR EMERITUS

Sight of cranes in uptown area a welcome scene

Norwalk sits with a number of renewal projects in various stages of readiness as the state and nation deal with the economic crisis. Much hope is placed in the stimulus package to set the fiscal ship right again.

One good sign — one we haven't seen elsewhere — is the sight of construction cranes hoisting steel skyward as the Avalon Bay project rolls along at the intersection of Belden Avenue and Cross Street on the parking lot of the Riverview Plaza.

The project will feature 311 luxury apartments in two, five-story buildings with courtyards and 15,000 square feet of retail space. Also included in the project is a 40,000-square-foot parking garage.

The company hopes to have them ready for occupancy in 24 months.

This could be the first boost for an uptown area that has languished since the flood of 1955, waiting for a major, significant project.

It is ironic that the land on which the Avalon Bay project is being built was a part of the original Main-Wall renewal project, begun with such hope after the destructive flood.

There are other local projects, which are beginning to come to fruition despite the economy. Projects such as Avalon Bay could breathe new life into the uptown area, which, we hope will be followed by other projects now in the planning stages.

New weapons to fight DWI cases in court

It's a normal defense presented by a lawyer in a drunk-driving case — attack the breathalyzer device, the major piece of evidence, as unreliable or to question when it was last tested.

The defense will get a sterner test soon. The state has purchased 150 new breathalyzers. The portable units will be used by state and local police in carrying on the campaign against DWI drivers.

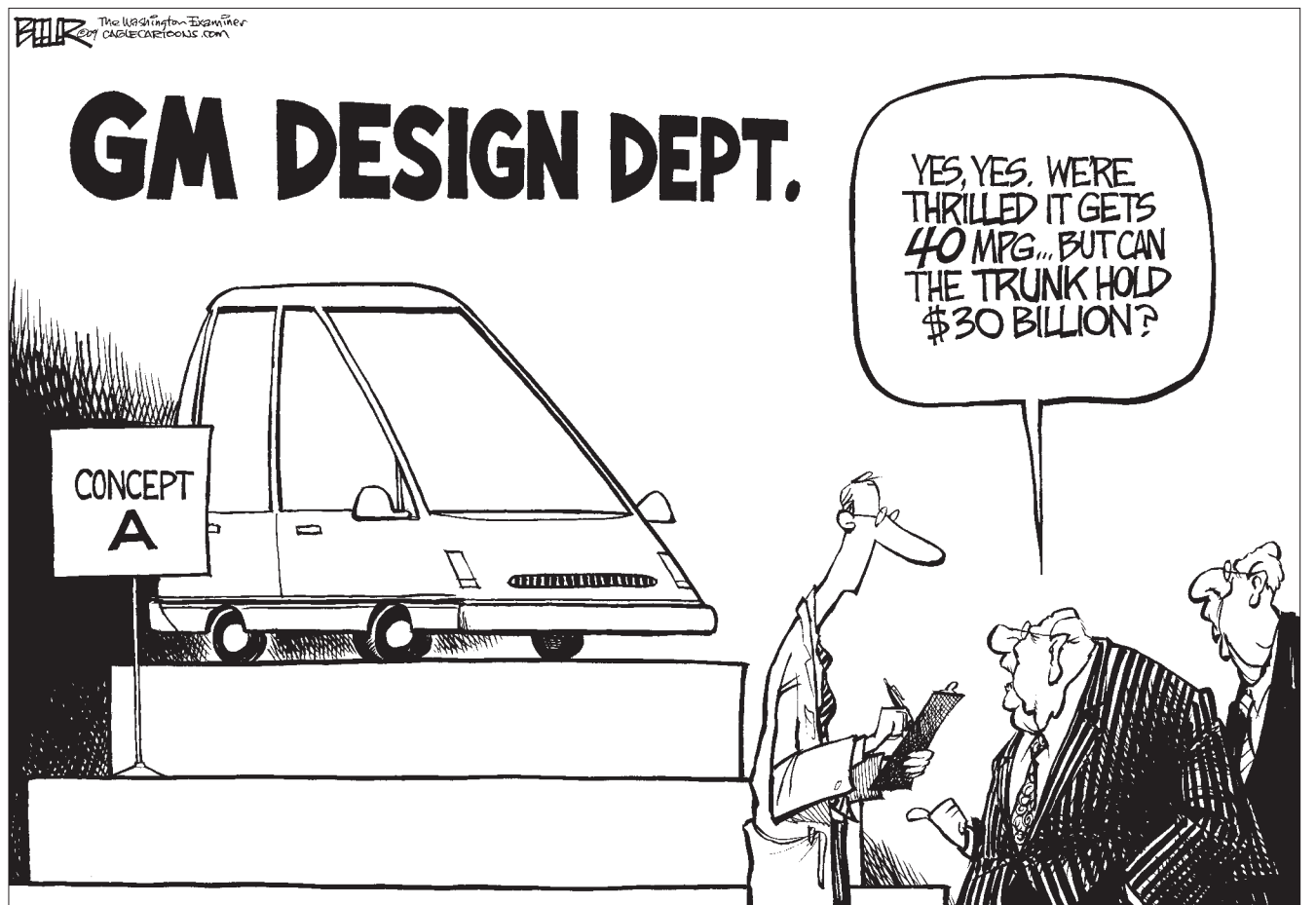
They are replacing old units that have been in service for seven years. Last year, a group of defense attorneys challenged the accuracy of the units. Let's see how they make out with the new ones.

TheHour.com POLL

Do you think people should be able to own wild or exotic animals?

Yes	No	Unsure
5.95%	89.29%	4.76%

To VOTE in The Hour Poll, visit www.thehour.com



Norwalk students stand to gain when best practices shared by all schools

Norwalk public schools' district improvement plan includes as one of three top priorities, behind improving literacy and numeracy, improving communications districtwide between schools and the central office and with parents. This is a critical goal and one we at the Norwalk Education Foundation welcome.

In order to offer a quality public education to all of Norwalk's children, there must be an equal playing field for the 10,500 students who attend our 19 schools, and this requires improved communication and collaboration across all schools and among our school leaders.

The need for improved communications in Norwalk public schools is well documented in two recent reports about the district, the Cambridge Report and the CREC Special Education Review. The Cambridge Report was a district evaluation authorized by the state Education Department. Norwalk was one of 12 urban school districts identified by the state with the greatest need for improvement. The CREC report studied the Norwalk public school district's special education program and services.

The CREC report states that "historically, Norwalk schools have operated in a decentralized organizational structure where schools primarily operate independently of central office, and the lines of authority between and among schools, central office, and the Board of Education are unclear."

There are many pockets of success in our district, such as those schools recently identified by Connecticut Coalition for Achievement Now or those making adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind. ConnCan has rated four Norwalk schools among the highest performing schools in the state for closing the achievement gap.

ANOTHER VIEW

Lauren Rosato

Kendall School placed fifth out of the top 10 elementary schools in the state for the average percentage of fifth-grade black students within goal range across all subjects. Brookside, Kendall and Tracey elementary schools respectively placed third, fourth, and sixth out of the top 10 elementary schools in the state for the average percentage of fifth-grade Hispanic students within goal range across all subjects. For middle schools, Nathan Hale placed seventh for black and ninth for Hispanic eighth-grade students within goal range across all subjects. To have four schools ranked among the best top 10 in the state is quite amazing.

These successes, and the many more not mentioned, are the efforts of many people, often led by the school principal and greatly impacted by the environment set by that leader. But because our schools operate in an isolated, decentralized environment, there is little continuity across schools or sharing of best practices between schools. Steps a school has taken to reach success in one area or another are rarely shared with other schools. And often, once a successful leader leaves or retires, a school's success may falter.

Research shows that when there is collaboration among schools, there is progress. Hamilton County in Tennessee is a district showing improvement in closing the achievement gap. One of the greatest lessons they have learned about school progress is that "Transformation requires teams of people who share a vision and take leadership roles to make that vision come true." A strong leader alone can't change one school. To transform a whole district, it takes teamwork.

The NEF is embarking on a new program, Teacher to Teacher, that will help to foster inter-district learning and lesson sharing. Drawing on its popular TechSmart Teacher program that has been providing teachers with technology training for 10 years, the new program will provide targeted training in all curriculum areas under the guidance of the district's instructional specialists. Just as important, NEF will identify program liaisons at each of the city's 19 schools. These liaisons will identify needs at their school and share best practices and program ideas with their counterparts at other schools, helping to foster a collaborative environment.

The NEF has successfully used the liaison model with our after-school literacy program Power Hour. Last year, Power Hour delivered to 256 children 1,200 hours of literacy instruction through 47 teachers, all managed by 11 literacy liaisons. This year, in its second year of operation, the liaison model enabled a 41 percent enrollment increase to 361 children.

The NEF would like to see our district operate more collaboratively, like Hamilton County, where teams of people share a common vision and work together to make the vision come true. We encourage school leaders, administrators and Board of Education members to work to change the existing decentralized structure to one where best practices are shared among different schools, and they learn from each other. Where teachers and parents are heard and valued, where all students are held to the same high educational standards in dynamic and positive learning environments. With open communication that fosters collaboration, this vision will come true.

Lauren Rosato is executive director of the Norwalk Education Foundation.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Norwalk Symphony deserves the support of the community

To the Editor:

After reading the article last week regarding the financial woes that the Norwalk Symphony is experiencing, I would like to encourage support of this fine organization.

As a resident of Norwalk, I believe we have been incredibly fortunate to have this wonderful resource in our town for 70 years providing us with quality musical performances. Also, as assistant

director, at the New Canaan Library, I have experienced great satisfaction in partnering with the Norwalk Symphony in introducing the instruments of a symphony orchestra to children in the (Not) Just For Kids series. The popularity of these programs, noted by an increase of 40 percent in attendance over the past three years, is very rewarding.

Musicians from the Norwalk Symphony present an interactive

program featuring a specific section of the orchestra at each session. Children interact with the musicians, their parents and other older adults and learn about the instruments and about the orchestra. It is a wonderful introduction to music. What a shame it would be if the Norwalk Symphony ceased to exist.

Cynde Bloom Lahey, assistant director, New Canaan Library

Changing law on marijuana use would set dangerous precedent

To the Editor:

The idea to make possession of less than one ounce of marijuana the same level crime as a traffic ticket is a dangerous precedent. It is sad to read that some people do not realize that it is a gateway drug.

Most heavy drug users start with alcohol then marijuana and move on to other drugs such as cocaine and heroin. Joints that are sold can be cut with other product. They can also be laced with cocaine or powdered heroin. Gamma hydroxy butyrate or

GHB, the date rape drug, is also used. The joints are soaked in liquid GHB, dried and sold.

Wake up. The stuff you had way back cannot compare to the marijuana today. It is 10 to 20 times stronger and your children are around it every day in all

schools. So it is too simplistic to say a little bit is OK.

Do you want that person driving next to you? Any drug of this type diminishes our ability to operate any type of machinery.

Joseph Santo
Santo Driving

Letters rules

We welcome readers' views, but retain the right to reject any letter and to edit for length and clarity. Letters should focus on issues, rather than other letter writers. Letters must be limited to 300 words and include contact information. Writers are allowed one letter per week. Send to letters@thehour.com, fax to 840-1802 or to 346 Main Ave., Norwalk CT 06851. Please submit by only one method.