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"The Eyes and Ears of The Community"

July 11, 1990

School Superintendent Matthew Prophet Says, "Reach For a Star"

By Professor McKinley Burt

We're reaching brother, we're reaching! But, does this mean that our little ones are going to be taken on a metaphoric journey to the heavenly sphere—even before the new OMSI Science Center opens? Is there to be not even a hint of an 'earthly' paradise here in education land? We quote you, "Right now, our children can't use any more innovative or curative ideas." How fortunate are those pupils, parents and taxpayers in those American cities where the principals in the National Association of Schools of Excellence have achieved such high levels of effective education; we suppose they have never heard such admonitions.

Now, it has always been said that "the best way to stop a revolution is to take it over" (if you can). If you don't believe that, just take a look at what is going on in communist Romania—or better, still, take a look at the Portland School District's "Star Program". For the past two weeks the Observer has provided space for superintendent Prophet's description of this effort: "Schools, Education or Social Services". The title, as is intended, suggests that the school district has been put between the proverbial "rock and a hard place"—by the competing pressures of governmental constraints, parental and public demands, and "the complaints about spending on social needs." Since such constraints are a nationwide phenomenon, we are prompted to the inquiry, "Hasn't anyone made an effort to determine just how it is that 22 'schools of excellence' were able to deal with the problem in such a successful manner?"

It is interesting that a careful examination of Mr. Prophet's essays reveals an almost point-to-point correspondence or answers to the precise issues being raised by the 'revolutionaries' in the struggle for an effective educational process. This, of course, is right in line with our earlier comment, "the best way to stop a revolution is to take it over." Or, at least, to "blunt" it! I thought the good superintendent put his position rather well in this respect, yea, succinctly, "We want your heart, your energy, and you. We don't need your letters or telephone calls or more suggestions, criticisms, blue-ribbon panel reports or legislative mandates." Thank you Mr. Nicolae

Ceasescu (surely, the man jests).

Equally intriguing was the belated request, "Ask your employer to become a 'partner' in the 'Star Plan'". Encourage your employer to support developing the next-generation work force through a range of company-sponsored activities and by allowing you time to make contributions..." I thought about this late-blooming gambit when Mr. Ron Herndon stopped by my house the same week. During our conversation, which included the successful fruition of his "Partners" For Success: Business and Education project, Herndon remarked that years ago I had introduced him to the concept of harnessing the clout and resources of the business sector in the effort to effect meaningful change in the educational establishment.



MATTHEW PROPHET

At this time of the early 1970s, I was making the transition from industry to teaching (Portland State University), and was finding very useful educational applications for the pragmatic, real-time functions of a highly disciplined past experience. Several weeks ago my "Perspectives" column described how these elements were integrated into my course designs. And apropos to the discussion above with Mr. Herndon, I recalled that he was a member of the Black Education Center at that time. I had first encountered these young people when as chief accountant for a local corporation I was asked to pass on their request for a contribution to what turned out to be a very committed effort to achieve quality education for African American children by means of an "Alternative School."

However, the group was working with very meager resources, scattered high rent facilities and the constraints of the usual limited financial experience of recent college graduates. After achieving an amicable relationship—considering the generation gap—I advanced the idea that I could design a concept which industry and the foundations would buy. I would emphasize two major elements, "commitment and CONTINUITY"; the latter component really translating into "REAL PROPERTY", an unachievable goal for most non-profit corporations at the time.

My 25 years' experience in industry and public sector as an accountant or administrator had already apprised me that the business/grantor community had two major concerns: 1. The public school system was sending them young people whose low level of basic skills shocked them sufficiently to get their rapt attention. 2. They were equally shocked by the 80 per cent failure rate of the myriad non-profit organizations coming to them for funds to "escalate the quality of life of the poor", or to "intervene in the deterioration of the education establishment."

The 'troops' were dispatched to find and photograph a suitable available building that could house a school, bookstore and related activities. The exercise culminated in my design of short one-and a half page cover letter addressed to twenty Oregon grantors. Drawing on my experience the theme was simple; "We're committed and we're competent as herein documented, but, just as importantly, ten or fifteen years down the line your board of directors can speak proudly and point to the physical presence and continuity of their original contribution." It all worked like a charm, not only for this project but for several of my both Black and white students after I incorporated the technique into my "Urban Economics Class". The school is still there, of course, and functioning; you saw the photograph on the front page of last week's Observer.

Now, that, like "Schools of Excellence," is just one of the many kinds of meaningful contributions that can be brought about in a social/business/educational climate that PERMITS EXCELLENCE! Few of us are naive enough to believe that Mr. Prophet single-handedly runs the educational show in Portland—or even that he is the 'author' of this play. No knowledgeable person will rise from his seat shouting "Author! Author!" I am not about to make him the whipping boy. To completely define the parameters of this position in the particular case one would need to go back a number of years—to the reign of the "friendly redhead" after whom the orange administration building was named—and assess the interplay between the office of superintendent, school board politics, and the cabals that actually ran Portland. We'll do some of that next week.

Then, too, we need to take a hard look at these "famed" Base Line Essays, the Curriculum and Lesson Plan Models, and the ephemeral "Local Consultants"; wasn't it Shakespeare who might have been commenting upon all these things, "O, what a tangled web we weave, when first we try to deceive"?

U.S. Secretary of Labor Slated to Visit Jefferson High School

During a visit to Portland on July 13, U.S. Secretary of Labor Elizabeth Dole will tour three classrooms at Jefferson High School, meeting participants in The Private Industry Council's Summer Training



Elizabeth Dole

and Education Program (STEP). Secretary Dole will visit a classroom where students are learning about legal rights, a life skills class covering topics

ranging from the consequences of teen parenting to conflict resolution, and a computer lab.

STEP efforts throughout Washington and Multnomah Counties are primarily funded by The Private Industry Council through the U.S. Department of Labor and the Job Training Partnership Act. In Portland, STEP is operated in partnership with Portland Public Schools and the Leaders Roundtable—a group of business, education and government leaders who have joined together to combat youth unemployment. Members of the Leaders Roundtable will be on hand to greet Secretary Dole during a brief reception at Jefferson High School. Fifty-six of the 325 Portland youth being served through STEP this year are funded by private business.

Dennis Cole, president of The Private Industry Council, stated, "The support of Portland Public Schools and the business community has been vital to STEP this year. As federal funds have diminished, businesses are stepping up to the plate to sponsor our young people, helping build our future labor force."

Portland's STEP program is a

national model which offers basic skills, life skills and work experience to low-income young people who are between one and four grade levels behind in reading or math. Following morning classes, STEP participants spend the afternoons working in summer jobs, and are paid for both activities. The program's goals are to improve school retention rates among disadvantaged youth, to decrease the incidence of teen parenting, to prepare youth for higher achievement during the school year, to provide work skills, and to improve self-esteem. The summer component is followed by school-year support which includes one-on-one involvement with student advocates.

While in Portland, Secretary Dole will be speaking to the City Club and making campaign appearances. Attorney General Dave Frohnmayer will accompany Secretary Dole on her visit to STEP. There will be a ten-minute reception for invited guests at Jefferson High School at 10:00 a.m., followed by a tour of STEP classrooms. At 10:45 a.m., Secretary Dole and Attorney General Frohnmayer will speak with the media on the front steps of the school.

Neighborhood Community Policing Award Narrations



Lieutenant Charles Moose and Sharon McCormack from NE Coalition of Neighborhoods

Lieutenant Moose's strategic policing and planning efforts in cooperation with residents and community groups has fostered a new sense of mutual respect, teamwork and empowerment between citizens and the law enforcement efforts of the Police Bureau. His work on the Neighborhood Association Police Officer Program has energized the officer's and community's efforts on new and effective methods to help solve neighborhood problems.

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