

# community opinions

## Doc Fenkell finds cure in sports media

Two misleading statements about Neal K. (Doc) Fenkell have come to attention in the past week, one uttered Sunday by George Kell during the telecast of the Tigers' exhibition victory over Houston at Lakeland and the other — quoted to me by Doc himself — by John E. Fetzer early in '83.

After remarking that the temperature stood at 81 degrees, Kell put his tongue in one cheek or the other and commented, "Doctor Fenkell is here getting in shape."

And Fetzer, who then still owned the Tigers, called Fenkell into a meeting a year ago to discuss the ball club's expiring TV contract with Channel 4. Looking the 20-year Plymouth Township resident in the eye, he offered Doc the negotiating assignment by saying, "I need a mean, miserable SOB" to work out a new one.

It broke me up to think of Doc "getting in shape" while sitting in 81-degree sunshine, knowing he gets his exercise meeting himself coming and going in a myriad of business activities.

As for Fetzer's description, it had to be intended merely as a compliment from a shrewd man who knew from long personal association that putting negotiations in Doc's hands would mean the ball club would never finish second best.

"I said, 'Well, I'll do it,'" recalls Doc. "We made a money deal and it took me six months to get the job done. The contract gave Channel 4 commercial TV rights for five years and was the biggest the tigers ever negotiated. Then we got the cable thing started."

The Fenkell professional resume covers three typewritten pages. In summary, this Hillsdale College graduate has taught school, worked in public relations for Ford, Packard and the Young & Rubicam Ad Agency, owned a piece of a chili food processing firm, developed oil properties as president of a drilling company, sold advertising 10 years for "Michigan Living Magazine", maintained a Morgan show horse operation for 18 years, owned and raced standardbreds — and has been on the Tigers' payroll 30 years. It's a lot for one man to have done at age 61.

Doc now is a full-time consultant to the 82-year-old Fetzer, who recently sold the Tigers to Thomas Monaghan, and all of whose assets have been transferred to the John E. Fetzer Trust. It is this entity which is sole owner of the Pro Am Sports System (PASS), an emerging sports cable production company with Fenkell its key organizer.

Fenkell warmed up for this role by running the Tiger Television Network for

### Caution! Please!

#### EDITOR:

I'm glad to be stopped by a train in Plymouth when: I see the man in the car ahead of me risk his, his wife's and children's life by going through the gates with a train coming. Thank you.

SUSAN DALE  
(WIFE OF A TRAIN  
TRAFFIC CONTROLLER)

## Through Bifocals

By Fred DeLano



many years. PASS will make its debut on the air Tuesday, April 17 with Bill Freehan and Larry Osterman sharing the microphone as the Tigers host Kansas City. But you won't see the game here unless Omnicom joins the system and offers PASS attractions to customers. Such negotiations are under way.

PASS will air 80 Tiger games this season, all supplementary to the ones you can see on Channel 4 or national networks.

"Our ultimate goal is to have a live event 365 days a year at a ratio of 200 local live events and 165 on the road," says Fenkell. He points to the Tigers, Red Wings, Pistons, University of Michigan and Michigan State as forming the basic schedule, augmented by boxing, horse racing and other events.

Tradeoffs with similar systems in Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Louis, Kansas City and such areas will sweeten the viewing pleasure.

"We're trying to keep the price under \$10 a month for subscribers to the 194 local cable franchises in the Detroit

market," Doc said. His own role as PASS develops? He defines it only as "trouble shooter," which is the first time I've ever heard him guilty of an understatement.

A farm boy who grew up near Marine City, Doc has found the winner's circle time after time. At the pace he's working, he hopes the TV cable industry will bring one more victory.



NEAL K. (DOC) FENKELL

## A few 'people' make a difference

Every once in a while I get an uncontrollable urge to retreat from the usual observation, cynicism and wry comment I reserve for this space.

I want to talk about other things — you know — things like what wonderful weather we've been having (it has been lousy), how good life is (I just figured out my taxes and owe the feds AND the state more money), and how lucky I am to be living (last week, when I caught the famed bronchial-flu combo, I felt like I was dead anyway).

I usually want to talk about friends in those columns too. I want to talk about the friends who have helped me out of



## From the Inside Looking Out

By Cheryl Eberwein

trouble, the friends I've helped out of trouble, and the friends I've just shared a few laughs with. Invariably when I approach those thoughts, however, my suspicions mount and I begin to feel just a little bit daft and sentimental.

Instead of giving in to soft-hearted words and lowering my journalistic armor a bit, I'm going to discuss people instead. They're all people I know — some reasonably well.

I ran into some interesting situations this week. How do you console someone who has just lost their car to a thug who had nothing better to do than rip off a 1980 Chevette? That was the question I pondered a few nights ago. The car, of course, is replaceable, but the personal possessions inside are not.

I looked for ways to present the positive side of the incident to the person in need. I struggled for appropriate condolences, words of wisdom. I guess my efforts were semi-successful when she finally laughed and said "YOU are the only thing worth laughing over in this whole situation."

And what was I to say to the person who

knew when to call me and say hello when I was down? How was I to explain the frustrations and tears which became evident over the phone too quickly? I guess I never really had to, because that person never asked. But I knew I could explain — any time I needed to.

How about the person who stopped to make sure I was okay after twisting my ankle on some ice while running? Or how about the person who called me, after I had waited for so long to hear from her, to tell me she was moving — permanently — across the country. What about the person, just newly met, who seemed to know my thoughts even before I spoke and seemed somehow a mental clone?

I didn't keep track of all the people I talked to last week about so many different things. But they were all people who made my week unpredictable, a little easier, a little harder and, ultimately, more worthwhile. Amazing the difference a few "people" will make in life (which I suppose has actually been worth living again since I finally got over that dreaded flu bug.)

### Fighting MAD?

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