

Take What's Yours

Bob Repoley

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Editors' Note: People Concerned About Urban Renewal (PCAUR) is a community based organization that has resisted the expansion of Wayne State University and demanded local control of all renewal projects.

Their main political strategy is to build neighborhood block clubs and to agitate for the rights of the citizens of the Warren Forest area. This article taken from an article in the weekly paper, The Community Reporter, was written by Bob Repoley. PCAUR may be reached at 831-5664.

In a brief demonstration a group of young people from the area surrounding Wayne State confronted that school over the use of the Matthaei Gym facilities. Their actions on Dec. 13 succeeded in closing down the pool area for a short time as well as raising some important issues.

About twenty-five kids of all ages and ten adult supporters gathered on the Matthaei grounds at around 1:00 pm.

The Matthaei complex includes large areas for outdoor and indoor recreation. It is the center for W.S.U.'s athletic programs.

The goals of the group were to use the swimming pool and other facilities at Matthaei. The building has been traditionally closed to the community during the school year.

Upon arriving at the main entrance, the group found that they were not welcome. A student worker was allowing only persons with student or university I.D.s to enter.

Not wishing to create an incident, the group decided to by-pass the student and were able to gain entrance through a side door which led directly to the swimming pool.

Almost as soon as they had entered, university officials bid them unwelcome. They said that only students and university personnel could use the building.

This was no surprise to the group. Earlier in the week, many of its members were in the same building talking to Mr. Havel, who is in charge of the programs at Matthaei.

At that time, they demanded the use of the building. Their reasoning was that it was a public building and they were the public. This community pays the taxes that built that structure and has a right to use it.

Many people had to pay for the Matthaei complex with the very houses that they lived in. When the university expanded, a huge area of housing was demolished and not replaced. Some of these same residents now want to use the building that displaced them.

Havel's main argument against letting in the community was that the building was used to capacity already. Apparently, he wasn't there on Saturday. There were only two people using the pool at that time and ten using the gym.

University officials seem to be the only ones resisting the community. A girl swimmer who was there thought that it was a good idea to share the pool with the community.

A lifeguard suggested at least two nights a week for community use. He said providing supervision would be no problem. But before he could talk further, his boss told him not to answer any more questions.

University officials and police declared that the community group was creating hazardous conditions in the building. Lights in the pool area were turned off and both sides waited quietly for the other to act.

Finally, the community decided that they made their point. Declaring that they would return, the group left by the front door.

Plans are now being made for a return to Matthaai with a larger and stronger group. The final goal of the community is to be able to use the Matthaai facilities all year long and for reasonable number of hours.

Some things are very clear already. The University will resist further efforts of the community to gain their rights.

But the University is dealing with a lot of tough people that are tired of being pushed out and around. The people are taking the offensive and are preparing for a long struggle.

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