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MICHIANA POINT OF VIEW

Poor need opportunity and support — not just handouts

By CHARLES V. PITTMAN

Wherever you turn today, the American eye seems to have focused on reforming poverty as we know it.

After nearly 80 years, the American welfare system has failed itself. Providing opportunity for those who are down on their luck has degenerated into providing our nation's poor a lifetime of dependency on a system that has often proven impossible to escape from, and with the taxpayer nothing to show for the billions of dollars of their money spent annually on America's poor.

In 1947, Simon Weil wrote in *Gravity and Grace* that "We possess nothing in the world, a more extreme case of everything — except the power to say 'I'."

Aren't we as today could live every day. How many times have we not watched people's lives turn on a dime? When we turn to help them, particularly those close to us, we may write them a check or give them a few bucks from time to time. But each usually does not solve the problem.

It is the opportunities which are provided to them that truly make the difference.

Opportunity is not the promise of stability, wealth or happiness, but of providing a person the dignity to control the course of his or her life. It is the portions of life that have gone bad, or improve those areas that have always been rough.

It's easy to say, "Get up, go to work, fix your kids, fix yourselves." But any one who has ever attempted to fix a

part of their own humanity knows that sometimes there are things that can't be resolved without some help.

If opportunities provided to us in this life have been what made the difference between living in the gutter or living where we do, what makes us think that the same wouldn't go for America's poor?

The challenge for us is not to provide people with food and clothing, although these things are essential, but to provide people with dignity — a much more difficult and painful task.

Or maybe not.

How do you reach people? How about convincing the network we are all a part of with a sense of benevolence, a sense of God's grace? Sometimes it's as simple as turning someone's crime or recognizing the skills of an individual and allowing them to develop those skills.

The time for handouts has ended. We must work together to make sure people have the opportunities to return to work and to be successful.

As good corporate citizens, good businesses must begin to play an active role in the reorganization of the work force in our community. It begins with the recognition that the work force they take under their wings may show up at the office the first day in ripped jeans and a sweater the switchboard phone says "hello," rather than "May I help you." But, in time, given some direction and a heavy measure of

faith, progress will come and the community as a whole becomes better.

Working together through groups supported by organizations like the United Way allows individuals in developing a sense of ownership in the community — a big step along the path to dignity.

Ownership means involvement. Not necessarily money — but investment of the heart. People don't often walk away from other people and places where they know they are making a difference.

You can see the people in this community making a difference like Mary Puzos of Safe Salaries. A recent tour of that organization left me overwhelmed with the sense that these people know their value, know they contributed.

Like Thelma Jones of Urban Youth Services of the YMCA, where our children learn that respect and dignity for each self is the key to success. Like Rich

and I don't know if I did. I was a poor person, because we were poor. We had no money. I was a poor person, because we were poor. We had no money. I was a poor person, because we were poor. We had no money.

Even though we were poor and did not know it, we learned the best lesson in life — to love one another and to do unto others as you would have others

do unto you. You see, I maintain that the poor are your best teachers. They teach you how to love and not take for granted the basic necessities of life, because every day is a struggle and many of us couldn't do it and wouldn't do what we expect the nation's poor to do. You see, we can learn a great deal from the poor — the greatest gift of all is the ability to love.

You see, the poor are so willing to help that they will go into debt to help members of their family. They truly believe that it is more blessed to give than to receive, especially with the knowledge that it can change a life.

I challenge you to ask your favorite charity if it is helping people to be dependent or independent by teaching respect, giving dignity, helping to set goals for the disadvantaged, and helping that they can succeed and that they are successful. Ask your church or place of worship if it has helped a single family get out of debt, by mentoring and educating volunteers in the religious community to help people with low-income families. The volunteers will provide friendship and encouragement for families and will be supportive of the families' efforts to work on goals that family members set for themselves — goals that will lead to stability and a better way of life. You see, we are not going to get where we are going unless we go there together.

Charles V. Pittman is senior vice president for managers of Schatz Communications Inc., The Tribune's general manager. This was adapted from a talk he gave at the United Way of St. Joseph County Executive Breakfast in July.

Erskine's contribution to South Bend's history is undeniable

By ANDY BECKMAN

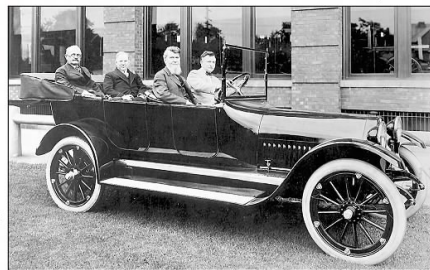
Visitors to South Bend's youth side will notice the name "Erskine" upon every corner. From the Erskine Golf Course, Erskine Manor, and Erskine Commons. The Erskine in question is Albert Russell Erskine, former president of the Studebaker Corp.

Erskine served as president of Studebaker from 1915 until 1933, and was the first to hold that office who was not a Studebaker family member. Erskine firmly established Studebaker as a major automobile manufacturer, and completely overhauled the South Bend facilities. The Erskine also presided over Studebaker at its lowest, rising from the Great Depression and forced into receivership.

Erskine was born in Huntsville, Ala., on Jan. 24, 1871. At 16, he began working at a railroad office as a \$15 per month. He later obtained a series of bookkeeping jobs before being appointed general auditor and manager of the American Cotton Co.'s operational department in New York. The Yale and Towne Manufacturing Co. tapped Erskine as their treasurer in 1901, and after a brief stint as vice president of the Underwood Typewriter Co., Erskine came to South Bend to serve as Studebaker's treasurer in 1911.

Erskine assumed the presidency of the Studebaker Corp. in 1915. He was highly recommended by Henry Goldman, founder of Goldman Sachs and also a Studebaker board member. Erskine's financial acumen no doubt aided his task of improving Studebaker's bottom line, as profits soared \$100 million in the nine years following his appointment. Studebaker stood at sixth place in sales in 1923, and trailed only Ford and General Motors in total assets.

Erskine was not obsessed with the ledger of the expense of his work force. "Men are the most important element in every undertaking. Collectively, we call them the organization," he was frequently quoted as saying.



From left to right are Frederick Fish, a Studebaker Corp. executive and the son-in-law of J.M. Studebaker; Albert Erskine, J.M. Studebaker's successor; and James Heaslet, chief engineer of Studebaker Corp. The men are seated in a 1916 Studebaker 6-50 Touring Car that is parked in front of the Studebaker Administration Building.

One attraction was paid to working conditions, and numerous employee benefits were instituted under Erskine's watch. Profit sharing was adopted, as was an accidental death and summer plan. Legal employees were rewarded with anniversary checks totaling at two years' service, and new factory buildings were equipped with complete canteens such as showers, lockers and drinking fountains.

Prior to 1920, Studebaker automobile production took place in Detroit, while the South Bend facilities built horse-drawn equipment. When the decision was made to concentrate solely on automobiles, Erskine made the critical decision to move automobile manufacturing to South Bend. Clearly, this

decision proved fortuitous for South Bend, especially in light of the many sound reasons for automobile production to remain in Detroit. Opportunities for staying in Detroit included proximity to the industry center, a large labor supply and ready shipping access via rail and water.

Consolidating automobile production in South Bend meant new factory buildings would be needed, as well as additional laborers. New neighborhoods evolved from the necessity to house the additional laborers, and the Studebaker factory complex transformed from a wagon and buggy plant to a state-of-the-art automobile manufacturing production facility. In addition to the expanding South Bend plant, Erskine authorized construction

of a 700-acre "greening ground" located on Indiana 27. The former Studebaker Proving Ground is now known as Woods County Park and a local facility for Boehr.

Erskine later recalled that his decision to build Studebaker's new factory in South Bend stemmed in part from his personal promise to J.M. Studebaker to never leave South Bend. Regardless of Erskine's motives, South Bend history would have been starkly different had his decision been to continue building automobiles in Detroit.

Even with his considerable duties as president, Erskine was able to devote time to other South Bend organizations. In addition to serving on the South Bend Planning Commission, he chaired several fundraising campaigns

for the YMCA and the University of Notre Dame. Erskine also served on the board of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, as well as the Interstate Commerce Commission. He was elected president of the University of Notre Dame's Board of Lay Trustees in 1921, and in 1922 donated over 120 acres of land to the city. This land is the current location of Erskine Center on Miami Street.

Like many businessmen, Albert Erskine failed to appreciate the depths of the Great Depression, both personally and professionally. Studebaker continued to pay out dividends, even when the company failed to show a profit. This practice infuriated Studebaker stockholders, but had a disastrous effect on capital reserves.

Studebaker was forced into receivership, a form of corporate bankruptcy, in early 1933. Erskine reported to find the company out of receivership, but the court's vice otherwise. Several years earlier, Erskine had strategically opposed the appointment of Thomas Sisk to the board. In typical Erskine fashion, his objections were either subtle or far-fetched. Ironically, the judge appointed to oversee Studebaker's reorganization was none other than Sisk, and he would not allow Erskine to be any part of it.

In late 1933, Erskine received word that he owed back taxes in excess of \$700,000. He had overextended options at Studebaker in the mid 1920s, and the government mechanism his last liability from that transaction. About this time, the 61-year-old Erskine was experiencing complications from diabetes.

On July 1, 1933, Erskine died in his South Bend home of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. He left a note for his son that simply stated, "I cannot go on any longer."

Erskine's tenure at Studebaker is chock-full of great successes and failures, and his civic contributions remain evident over 70 years after his untimely death. By any measure, Albert Russell Erskine played a significant role in South Bend history.

Andy Beckman is the publisher for the Studebaker National Museum.

There's no good reason to fiddle with 'If I were a rich man ...'

"'If I were a rich man,' the poor and patriotic Davey Mason upon pioneers beyond his reach. 'If I were a rich man,' he sings. Today's prudently prepping question is: Should he believed (they have sung in an indicative key — that is, if he was a rich man?)

My own answer is no, the subjective 'were' is better, but on this issue you can get plenty of arguments. There appears to be no intractable rule on such "if" clauses. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary of English Usage cites Lord Byron: "I wish it was not quite so far. Another South Bend indicative: 'I wish my old land was in the warmest place about you.' So, with Robert Frost: "I wish it was Elmer and I using you."

More current examples come from The Washington Post and the Las Vegas Review-Journal. A sports writer in the Post reported a year ago that baseball fans in Baltimore were whopping "as if the pennant was on the line." (That was then; this is now.) The Review-Journal covered a woman's trial for matricide. The defendant's trial of her slain mother "as if she was alive."

In Newsweek magazine, West Coast readers wondered what Newsweek would be like "if it was produced out here." The Scripps Howard News Service quoted television's food maven Rachael Ray: "If I was in a first-star hotel."

At least as many examples could be cited of the subjective "were," e.g., in

The New York Times, "If the New York Stock Exchange were an ordinary man, his pretensions would be appalling enough." A syndicated columnist said of candidate Alton S. Felt: "If he were in Bush's hall, he would not be so certain."

And about Ralph Nader: "Even if he were on 40 ballots, it would not affect the outcome."

In the "Modern American Space" by Ryan Garner identifies three familiar conditions in which the subjective mood survives: (1) conditions contrary to fact; (2) suppositions; (3) wishes. If I were John Deere ... (2) suppositions: If I were to key stock in Martha Stewart ... and (3) wishes: I wish I were in South Bend, Indiana.

All right, you're correct. Do pitchers wiggle and see offenders wiggle? What's the difference? Lexicographers make a distinction that every writer should take to heart. To wiggle is more similes than to wiggle. The verb implies a

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