Voice of the Opinion Board:
Opinion Board a Presence on Campus Through the Years

By Clay Hewitson
Contributing Writer

At a Mennonite college, seeing a Confederate flag proudly printed out on computer paper hanging on a board in the corner may seem surprising. It may be even more shocking to see a picture of Osama bin Laden with bullet holes through it hanging nearby. Such potentially offensive images are greeted with much consternation and opinion on campus, even some fierce objection to them, yet they are allowed to be displayed thanks to the campus opinion board. An open forum where students can post any pictures or comments they wish, the opinion board has been around longer than most students can remember.

According to Hubert Pellman, former professor at EMU, the opinion board originated somewhere between 1957-1958 in response to the changing times of the country as a whole. "The sixties were rapidly approaching and the youth of the country were beginning to undergo a change in their whole philosophy of life," Pellman remembered.

Many college campuses were experiencing new and radical ways of thinking. While EMU didn’t experience this to such a large degree as other colleges, the opinion board was the result of this new mode of thought," he added.

Originally located in the old Administration Building, at first students could post their comments on the opinion board without faculty approval, as long as they signed their names, but this eventually changed under EMC President John Mumaw. Mumaw, also the president who requested to read every issue The Weather Vane before it was printed, put the opinion board under glass and all opinions had to be submitted to, and approved by, the faculty administration before they were posted. After Mumaw’s resignation in 1965 and the introduction of Myron Ausberger, censorship of the board ceased and students could once again post will.

Current Professor of Communications Jerry Holsopple, who attended EMC as a student from 1975-1980, said he doesn’t think "the board was censored while I was at school and as long as students signed their name and didn’t use any obscene language they could pretty much post anything they wanted."

Holsopple said he thought "it was good the students had an outlet to voice their opinions like that."

After the Administration Building was destroyed in a fire, the opinion board was moved to the newly built Campus Center where it has remained to this day. While the board has always served as a way for students to voice their thoughts, many current students also wonder whether the administration takes their postings seriously.

"I enjoy interacting with other students on the board, but I also want the faculty to take notice of my concerns as well," said senior Matt Dawson.

He continued, "Sometimes I think the only reason we have an opinion board is so the faculty can get all of our negative comments in one place and then ignore them. So if we raise a complaint to the administration they can just say 'write it on the opinion board and then never do anything about it.'"

Some students are also afraid to post comments on the board for fear of faculty reprisal for unpopular views or actions, since every opinion has to have a name signed to it.

"One time I posted an opinion about how unfair and arbitrary open hours were," recalled one anonymous source, "and I gave an example of how I had broken them on one occasion. Next thing I knew the administration had hauled me in and was punishing me for the 'offense.' I don’t really consider the board a very safe place at all."

Despite these concerns, students are still pleased they have an opinion board at all if its usage is any indication. The topics of controversy that have been discussed are wide and varied.

In addition to the Confederate flag and bin Laden debates, the board in past years has seen discussions on the effectiveness of the SGA, the true nature of the Student Initiated Endowment Fund, how much liberty the Theatre and Philosophy majors should have on campus and probably most heatedly, the building of the Commons.

Many of the past opinion board articles are archived in the Hartzler Library under the direction of Harold E. Huber, who runs the historical section of the library.

You Never Know What You’ll Find:
A Trip to the Green Valley Book Fair

By Wendy Hess
Contributing Writer

The 25,000 square foot building had housed "only a few hundred" of one of the popular Harry Potter books, but "they didn't last long."

Michael Evans is part of the family that owns the Green Valley Book Fair south of Harrisonburg, in Mt. Crawford. The fair is open six times a year, for about two weeks at a time. Truckloads of books arrive for each fair; each one contains between 15,000-30,000 books. Green Valley buys books that have been returned to the publisher from bookstore chains that overbought, such as Books-A-Million. "For example, one large pellet size cardboard box might contain children’s hardcovers from XYZ publisher," explained Evans. "This is why books are between 60-90% off retail price. The Harry Potter book sold for $3.00; the regular bookstore price is $6.99."

The current season ends this Sunday, Dec. 9. Some may feel that is not long enough to do adequate Christmas shopping, but Evans keeps the real reason for the holiday in mind by explaining, "We want to have time to be with our families."

Green Valley advertises in print newspapers and on the radio.

Jared Stoltzfus (left), Chris Fretz, Rachel Medley and Brian Roggie glance over the current debates on the opinion board.