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"First & Foremost," October 18, 2007

GRAB THE ROPE

We need to pull this ship of state to prosperity

By Ron Kitchens

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Grab the rope.

That is what you are likely to hear if you find yourself on a ship, becalmed and threatened. That is what you will hear when you have no wind to sail by or engines to propel. You must resort to kedging to get out of trouble.

The act of kedging goes back as long as boats have traveled the water. Kedging is the act of having a light anchor -- a kedge -- loaded into a rowboat and taken out as far as the lines tied to it will allow. After dropping the anchor, every man, woman and child on the main boat grabs the rope and pulls the line as if his or her life depended on it, literally hauling the ship to the anchor.

This is repeated again and again until the ship arrives at its destination or the winds once again blow.

This sounds like a lot of work. But if it is the only way to overcome a tide that is pulling you into the rocks, then doing the hard work yourself is the only choice.

This reminds me a lot of where we now find ourselves in Michigan. And like a ship's captain we have a choice. We can either decide to do the hard work and pull ourselves forward, or we can hit the rocks, knowing that there will be casualties but hoping that by a miracle some of us will survive.

We live in a time of psychological recession, a time when we hear every day about the bleakness of our future.

We hear a lot about who is to blame for our economic lot in life.

But we hear very little about what each of us can do to determine a path to a renewed future.

I believe the future of this region will not be written by those who have buried Michigan. Nor by those who would rather place blame or talk of partisan politics. The future of

Michigan will be written by those who grab the rope and pull this ship of state to prosperity.

I believe that prosperity will sound a lot like the words of Ewing Kauffman, who said, "The best social program in the world is a well-paying job with health care benefits and a retirement program."

This is to say that it will be businesses and individuals that will change our future, not government and politicians.

It will be people like you and me who will create Michigan's future.

I understand that all this talk of kedging and grabbing the rope probably has you thinking to yourself, "This is all well and good, but what can I do as one person?"

Here are four simple things you can do to change the future:

1. Speak positively about our state and future. There are great things happening all around you. Take time to see them.

Nothing good ever happens without an optimist first speaking positive things into existence.

2. Invest in education. Support your schools and your children, and commit yourself to lifelong learning.

3. Support companies in this region. Support them with your consumer dollars as a customer, support them as a capital investor, support them by spreading the word of their greatness.

4. Embrace your talents and the talents of your children.

Let me share just one more story with you.

I have a 40-foot boat named *Blessings* that claims for its natural attributes the fact that it is old and heavy.

But as they say of such creatures, it has charm. On most weekends in the summer, you will find my family anchored just offshore at Oval Beach.

When it is time to head back to our slip on the Kalamazoo River, it is my wife's responsibility to haul up the anchor as I start the motors and get us underway.

One Saturday afternoon this summer as we began the process of heading back to our slip, our boat's motors died just as my wife had unhitched the anchor. We began to rapidly drift toward the rock seawall and soon found ourselves in an area too shallow to allow for the engines to be started.

My wife, Lyn, finally got the anchor rope tied and the immediate danger stopped.

I quietly and ever so calmly -- OK, maybe not so quietly -- told her that I would come forward and we could pull the boat together to deeper water; we would kedge ourselves off the sand bottom.

She just as calmly explained to me that she could handle it herself, which is exactly what she did.

My just-about-to-turn-50-year-old wife grabbed the rope and pulled our 20,000-pound boat nearly the length of a football field against the tide.

Want to change the future of this community, the region, the state or even the nation? Do as Lyn and hundreds of people in this community do every day.

Grab the rope!

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