

Feb. 20th 1994

Dear editor:

I feel somewhat uncomfortable draping myself in the mantel of self-righteousness so I will try to be brief. As a former member of Fort Worth's Steeplechase club and a past president of that organization (1974 - 75) I have been disturbed to say the least to read about the recent police raid of the club's annual business meeting at Ridglea Country Club. I know how some writers at the Star Telegram delight in pointing out the peccadillos of the west side's rich and famous, but I do believe that there is a serious issue involved here that has either been missed by the club's officers in their remarks to the press or they have not been properly quoted.

Nowhere have I read the slightest apology on the part of those who are supposed to run the club. Not to the people of Fort Worth. Not to club members. And most important of all not to debutants past, present and, hopefully, future and their families. Instead, what has been quoted are whining excuses that nothing wrong has been done. Rather than at least expressing regret, the officers seem more interested in finding who the squealer was. I am especially disturbed by the presence of strippers at the gathering and the kind of message that current Steeplechase leaders have sent to mothers and fathers of prospective debutants about how their daughters, not to mention women in general, are regarded. The Steeplechase is not a fraternity. Its main function has always been to honor the daughters of respected Fort Worth families. The club's annual business meeting should not be some kind of animal house smoker or stag party, and those who are responsible for this have served the membership badly.

Nobody denies that in the last few years there has been a general dunning down and coarsening of society. We can surely see it here. The annual debutant balls held by the Assembly, the Steeplechase and other social organizations are meant to provide people with a few brief moments of grace and beauty and - dare I say the word - class. After the recent Ridglea Country Club incident, I really do not see how the current officers can even maintain the illusion that women are highly regarded. It might be that they just don't care or that they are so out of touch with simple public good manners that they saw nothing wrong in having strippers at an important club meeting, a club founded to honor women. I imagine that many families here will think twice before they make the substantial commitment of time and money to have their daughters presented by the Steeplechase Club.

To restore credibility to the club, the current officers should resign and a new slate of officers be selected by the advisory council and submitted to general membership vote. That would be the classy thing to do. The current leaders of the Steeplechase club are good men from good families, but they have not led well, and they have further embarrassed all club

members by the clumsy manner in which they have handled the disclosure of the recent incident. I do hope that the club can clean up its act. Of course, maybe they just don't care. Who knows? Perhaps in the not too distant future when the club sends out its formal announcements inviting debutants and their families to participate in the coming year's social events, the invitation might state that for presentation at the ball formal gown or G-string will be optional.

Sincerely,

Stuart Gentling