

Farmington Observer

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Farmington hires outstate police chief

By MARY GNIEWEK

Nearly four months after the controversial departure of Daniel Byrnes, Farmington has a new director of public safety.

He's G. Robert Seifert, currently chief of police in Gaylord, a resort community of 3,500 residents in the northern Lower Peninsula.

Seifert, 36, is expected to join the department March 3. He was chosen from a field of 139 applicants by City Manager Robert Deadman, who has acted as interim public safety director since Byrnes left Oct. 12.

Byrnes resigned because of a lack of cooperation from his officers during a department investigation of a brawl involving off-duty Farmington police and three teens last September. A second

investigation of the incident netted two department suspensions.

Deadman and Lt. John Santomaro, second in command of the department, denied the incident was the sole motive for the public safety director's resignation.

Seifert is aware of the conditions under which his predecessor left the department but he doesn't think it will cause any problems.

"I'm under the impression that appropriate action has already been taken," he said. "From what I understand, it was an unfortunate incident. The department has had an outstanding reputation over the years."

SEIFERT'S APPOINTMENT was approved unanimously by the city council on Monday.

'I hate to lose him. He's done an excellent job for us. It's definitely a loss for us but a gain for Farmington.'

— Donald R. Harmon, Gaylord city manager

"I think he's top notch. He has the kind of background and experience to fit our organization," Deadman said. "He's well thought of by his peer groups. We have confidence in him."

Seifert has been in charge of the 10-officer Gaylord police department for four years. His annual salary will jump from \$19,500 to a \$27,550 when he takes over Farmington's 25-member public safety force.

"I hate to lose him. He's done an excellent job for us," said Donald R. Harmon, Gaylord city manager.

"With his abilities, he has the potential of furthering his career. I'm pleased he's able to do that."

"It's definitely a loss for us but a gain for Farmington."

A second vice president of the Michigan Association of Chiefs of Police, Seifert is also chairman of the Region

Eight Law Enforcement Advisory Council.

He teaches criminal justice courses at Kirtland Community College in Roscommon, and was previously an instructor at Washtenaw Community College while he was a member of the Ann Arbor police force.

"Myself and my family miss the metropolitan area's wider range of activities and challenges," said Seifert. He is married and the father of two children.

Seifert received a bachelor's degree in police administration with honors from Michigan State University and served an internship with the Dade County, Fla., department of public safety.



G. Robert Seifert: "The department has had an outstanding reputation over the years."

Kids display ethnic roots



A tulip and a winning smile brought out the Dutch in Julia Hoogerwerf, 11.

The Arabs mingled with the Greeks and the Poles at St. Fabian's Elementary School in Farmington Hills Monday afternoon, where there was food, talk and friendship between nations.

The students celebrated their multi-ethnicity by dressing in costumes native to their homelands.

Classes at St. Fabian's have been researching family roots to promote ethnic pride and allow children to keep in touch with their heritage.

A banquet featuring dishes from all parts of the world was served. It was all part of the celebration during National Catholic Schools Week at St. Fabian's, on 12 Mile Road between Farmington and Orchard Lake roads.

Staff photos by Randy Borst



Russal Patel, 7, Jim Acho, 9, Barbara Yates, 9, and Ami Afsari, 12, look at a model of their school surrounded by the flags of their native lands.



Daisy Schwab sits at the switchboard in 1938 when Michigan Bell maintained an office above the bank at Farmington Road and Grand River. (Photo courtesy of Robert Cook)

Pre-dial days remembered

'You always knew the gossip'

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

Fred Cook's general store was a 10. The lumber yard was assigned to 3. A.H. Phelps, auctioneer, held 13.

The key to this numbers game was found in a crowded room above the main floor of the bank on Farmington Road and Grand River. Until automatic dialing was instituted in the Farmington area at 2:01 a.m. Aug. 21, 1955, the switchboard operators were the most knowledgeable people in town.

Besides having the phone numbers of the town's 600 Michigan Bell customers locked into their memories, the switchboard operators gave the time of day, knew where the town's doctors were eating dinner and summoned volunteer fire fighters to a blaze.

Before automation caught up with the town's telephone service, customers knew each operator by name. The service was personal, too.

"When a doctor went to dinner, he would call and tell us to transfer his calls for him," remembered Sadie Schroeder who was a switchboard operator for 21 years until 1935.

"They remembered us at Christmas, though. We'd have 25 to 30 pounds of candy in the office," she said.

"PEOPLE WOULD say, 'Get me this person. And you always knew where they were,'" said Virginia Kiraly of Brasstown, N.C. "They'd ask you everything. You always knew. No one in town knew more." Mrs. Kiraly worked

for Michigan Bell for six years until she married in 1939. She moved to North Carolina 13 years ago.

The party line system used when Mrs. Kiraly worked for the company had some advantages for the curious.

"You could listen in. I don't think they can do that today. But you always knew the gossip in town."

With six persons on a party line telephone, neighbors generally had a good idea about each other's business. When one phone rang every phone along the party line rang while customers counted to see if the call was for them. Each phone was assigned a certain number of long and short rings.

"Everyone ran and listened," said Mrs. Kiraly. "That used to be fun."

Working for the phone company during those times had a few advantages.

The operator on the night shift brought a cot with her so she could sleep. Only persons with an extreme emergency called during the night.

On a slow day when each operator worked alone there was time to read and sew.

SOME DAYS weren't so quiet. Mrs. Schroeder remembers a day in 1924 when she and her sister, Daisy Schwab, chief operator, watched as the bank downstairs was robbed.

"My sister was coming back from the post office on the Warner block. One of the robbers tried to stop her from going into the bank. But she didn't know who he was or what was going on at the time. She crawled behind him and a pole to get back into the building.

"When she came in I told her, 'Get your headset on. The bank's being robbed.'"

"We were too busy to be scared."

The crew put in a call to the Oakland County Sheriff in Pontiac and alerted everyone in town to the robbery. Although the get-away car's tires were shot out as the robbers escaped, the crime is still unsolved.

"People were bawling us out because we couldn't answer their calls. They didn't know the bank had been robbed," Mrs. Schroeder remembered.

The operators' room contained a large picture window overlooking the bank's main floor. The operators had a bird's eye view of the proceedings.

"One man looked down through the window, realized what was happening and went and hid in the men's room," said Mrs. Kiraly.

AFTER THE excitement was over, the sheriff offered the operators \$2 so they could buy dinner. They refused.

"We couldn't leave the switchboard without a good explanation for the telephone company," said Mrs. Schroeder.

In 1938, the phone company moved its office from the top of the bank building to the south side of the structure to better accommodate employees.

Then, in 1955 the switchboard operators who could tell you which family had a newborn child and which candidate was winning the presidential election were replaced by circuits.

At a cost of \$130,000, Michigan Bell built its new station on Grand River and Power, and Farmington became part of the Greenleaf exchange.

Death claims bank robbery suspect

By MARY GNIEWEK

A Detroit man sought by the FBI in last week's armed robbery of the Michigan National Bank in Farmington Hills was found dead Friday.

The body of Ernest Rhodes, 47, of 274 Harmon, was found on a street in Detroit's Cass Corridor Feb. 1, three days after the armed robbery, according to the FBI. The \$46,000 taken from the Hills bank has not been recovered.

Police ruled out foul play following a Saturday autopsy performed by the Wayne County Medical Examiner's office. The report stipulated that Rhodes died of heart failure brought on by high

blood pressure and hardening of the arteries.

FBI agents identified Rhodes from a photo taken by the bank's automatic camera and obtained a warrant for his arrest Friday on charges of armed robbery.

According to Detroit police, Rhodes was on parole after serving seven years in the State Prison of Southern Michigan at Jackson for a 1971 Detroit bank robbery conviction.

The FBI was tipped off Friday by a caller who saw Rhodes' photo in a newspaper bank robbery reward program advertisement.

"He was on federal parole so we were able to obtain his arrest photo and

positive identification occurred," said John Anthony, an FBI spokesman.

"We were in the process of trying to locate him and arrest him."

THE AUTOPSY was ordered because of speculation that narcotics might have been involved in the death, Anthony said.

"We had to rule out the possibility of murder and rip-off for the money," he concluded.

Farmington Hills and Detroit police are working with the FBI in the continuing investigation of the case.

Detroit police also said they had planned to arrest Rhodes at his apart-

ment north of Detroit's New Center area Friday night.

The Farmington Hills bank robbery occurred Jan. 29 at 9:45 a.m. inside a trailer office at 35100 Grand River, east of Drake Road.

According to Farmington Hills police, the suspect pulled a gun and ordered the bank manager to open and empty a safe.

No customers were in the office at the time of the robbery, and no shots were fired.

It was the first bank robbery of the year in Farmington Hills and the first bank holdup at the Michigan National branch which opened in November 1978.

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