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Trustee seeking new job

Janice Rolnick, a trustee on the Farmington Board of Education, has been nominated to be a director of the Michigan Association of School Boards.

As a director, Rolnick will help guide the activities of the MASB, which serves as a lobbying group in Lansing for more than 500 Michigan school boards.

"At a time when education is becoming a major public issue, it is essential that school boards in Michigan be involved in a strong, unified manner," said Rolnick, who recently completed a term as president of the Farmington Board.

"But it is equally important that suburban school districts like Farmington be represented when those decisions affecting us are made."

The state association acts as a clearinghouse for information as well as offering training programs for board members. It publishes news on legislation, tenure decisions and attorney general opinions.

In addition to sponsoring annual "orientation workshops" for new board members and officers, MASB sponsors semi-annual conferences and seminars on leading educational issues. MASB also provides consulting services in labor relations and policy development as well as sponsoring group insurance programs.

"PERHAPS MASB's most important role," Rolnick said, "is its involvement with the legislature. Rarely does a day go by when there isn't some piece of legislation affecting schools up for consideration. MASA needs to be in there fighting to maintain Michigan's strong system of free, public and comprehensive education."

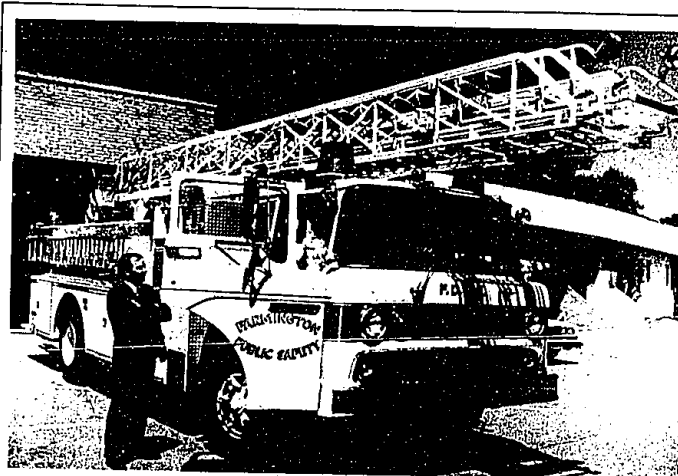
Rolnick was elected to the Farmington Board in 1978 and was re-elected in 1982 when she was chosen to serve as board president.

A former teacher at the elementary and community college levels, Rolnick graduated from Wayne State University and has completed graduate work at the University of Michigan and Michigan State University.

Rolnick's consumer advocacy work and her class in "Food Awareness," which she originated, has earned commendations from the Michigan Dental Association and the Novi Community School Board.

MASB directors will be chosen by member school boards in August.

The Farmington Board of Education is a member of the MASA, having voted on June 7 to spend \$2,896 for the annual dues.



Another big green machine has come to town in the form of this shiny new fire engine which is being checked out by Farmington Public Safety Director Bob Seifert and Fire Marshal Norm Maddison (seated in truck).

Tall boy Fire truck arrives

By Tom Beer staff writer

The blessed event occurred last Friday. Wrapped in a bundle of light green, the new arrival weighed in at 37,000 pounds and measured out at 325 inches.

"I'll mean another mouth to feed, or make that another tank to fill — for the city of Farmington's Public Safety Department.

The addition is a new fire truck, and Farmington's public safety officers were as proud as any first-time father as they displayed the piece of equipment in back of the city hall last Friday.

On order since last February, the new truck, to be designated Engine No. 1, cost the city \$130,000. It replaces a General Motors Corporation truck the city bought for \$12,000 in 1953.

"We're just seeing if it works," said Public Safety Commander Norm Maddison over the purr of the 225-horsepower Caterpillar diesel engine which powers the truck.

"It'll be awhile before it goes into

service. We have to load on all the equipment and train our people how to use it."

In addition to Caterpillar, three other firms were involved in building the truck. To a standard Ford truck chassis, a body and pump from the Pierce Manufacturing Company of Appleton, Wis., were added.

The ladder, which stretches 65 feet, and its assembly came from the Skyhook Corporation of Ottawa, Kan.

LIKE MOST fire trucks today, Farmington's Engine No. 1 is painted light green, not the traditional "fire-engine red."

"That's because of night visibility," Maddison said. "Green is so much easier to see at night."

The other two trucks have standard (24-to-48-foot) ladders. The taller ladder on the new truck can be operated by just one firefighter compared to three or four needed for the older units.

City negotiates tax break for apartments

By Tom Beer staff writer

The checks are in the mail, or soon will be, according to the city of Farmington.

Two apartment complexes — Farmington Place, which contains subsidized senior citizen housing, and Jamestown Apartments — have overpaid their 1981 and 1982 taxes and are due refunds by the city.

That was the result of a recent negotiated settlement between the city and the complexes. The settlement was reached while the issues were being decided by the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

Under the settlements, Farmington has agreed to reduce the assessed values for 1981 and '82.

In the Farmington Place case, the 1981 assessed value was reduced from \$1,998,000 to \$1,400,000. The '82 valuation was dropped from \$1,998,000 to \$1,500,000.

A refund of \$59,810.85 will be due the owners, Farmington Place Associates. Farmington's share of the refund is \$15,523.55. The school district will pay the remainder.

As part of the settlement, Farmington Place's owners have agreed to accept a higher assessed valuation than established by the tax assessor, John Sailer, for 1983. This year's assessment

will increase from \$1,998,000 to \$2,200,000.

Farmington City Manager Bob Deadman issued a report on the settlements to city council, which approved the payments at its July 18 meeting.

"THE NEGOTIATED settlement was brought about because the tax assessor (Sailer) and our special attorney (Leo Goldstein) thought that it was a fair approach to the developer, who had suffered some start-up costs and some delays in getting revenue out of the project," Deadman said.

"And, quite typically, that's taken into account by the tax assessor."

Deadman said that there was a "serious discussion" about how a property like Farmington Place should be assessed.

"It's a federally-subsidized project," he said. "Many of the rents there are subsidized. What came into play here was the question of how you assess that kind of property."

Farmington will reduce Jamestown Apartments' assessment from \$1,869,000 to 1,719,000 for 1981 and '82. The '83 assessment is \$1,821,500.

According to the settlement, Farmington owes Jamestown Apartments \$3,305.25.



The senior citizen complex located in downtown Farmington is one of the apartment complexes which is getting a tax break.

Two other apartment complexes — Farmington West Apartments and Drakeshire Apartments — had been contesting city of Farmington tax assessments in the Michigan Tax Tribunal.

However, attorneys for both complexes withdrew their cases, according to Goldstein.

"We were going to go ahead and argue that they should get an increase (in assessments) if anything if they pursued it," he said.

THE TAX TRIBUNAL is the next step up from the local boards of review for those wishing to complain about their assessments.

"Anyone whose property is assessed can appeal (to the tribunal)," Deadman said. "They (the tribunal) make a decision.

"In our case, they (the complexes) appealed to the tribunal, but we negotiated a settlement before the tribunal made a decision. And the tribunal agreed with the settlement."

Leaks bog down probe into meter tampering

By Diane Gate staff writer

Although media coverage on theft of electrical power implicated Bob Mechlign (owner of Bob Saks Auto World in Farmington Hills) three weeks ago, law enforcement officials have yet to take any legal action and they are backing off from further comment.

"Apparently some press source leaked out (information) too soon and the prosecutor got hostile," according to Michigan State Police Lt. Larry Copley. "They're clamming up, and I think that's what happened."

Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson failed to return calls to the Farmington Observer after three days of inquiries. His secretary would only say the office "has no comment on the investigation."

WDIV, Channel 4, in a report said Mechlign played a major role in the operation, and the reporter's source was a law enforcement official, according to assignment editor Paul Manzella.

Meanwhile Mechlign can only sit and wait to see if any action will be

taken against him.

Although Michigan has been advised by his attorneys to remain silent on the case, he does say his business hasn't been affected by the television news story.

He denies his utility bills were ever abnormally low.

"I will say my energy bill runs from \$7,000 to \$8,000 a month," Mechlign said. "It has never changed, and our bills are current."

The average auto dealerships monthly bills run anywhere from \$3,000 to \$4,000 a month, according to Edison officials.

Michigan State Police Lt. Richard Maloche's only comment on the nine month investigation was, "I hope we'll be able to discuss this at greater length next week, because the prosecutor will have made a decision by then."

The electric tampering by various customers began in January of 1982, involved approximately \$130,000 in fraud, and was discovered by Edison in May, according to Bernhard Schneider, Edison Group vice president.

Edison expects to recover all of the lost money, he said.

The gas and electric power tamper-

ing, which is considered a major fraud scheme by law officials, was reported to involve at least 60 commercial and residential customers in metropolitan Detroit and included several automobile dealerships. Some of the businesses involved, according to Schneider, had bills as low as \$20 a month.

The principal figure in the tampering method is William Jones of Taylor, who offered to alter utility meters for a \$700 fee.

After pleading guilty on charges in Oakland County and Wayne County he was sentenced to two years probation and was to begin helping investigators on the case. But Jones was hospitalized after suffering a concussion and fractured skull in a beating.

Information that was gathered by Edison was turned over to the police who are conducting the investigation.

"We have let the law enforcement take their course, and we can't start pointing our finger or we'll get in trouble too," Schneider said. "Our main concern was to catch the person who was doing the tampering."

Schneider wouldn't discuss the tampering method Jones used or how the theft was discovered, but he said there

is "upward of \$1 million" stolen every year through fraud. Edison recovers more than half of the lost revenue.

In 1982 Edison regained more than \$500,000 from 2,500 thieves, who were generally individuals who tampered with one meter, Schneider said.

"We analyze our bills, check the seals that are present on our meters, and we also have other methods in trying to detect theft," he said.

Edison has set up a process where thieves that are caught must pay the company the original amount that was due plus an investigation fee. Edison usually requires a deposit before they provide services to the individual again.

"That (investigation fee) is to reimburse us for the cost to uncover the theft," Schneider said. "Rather than have all the customers pay for what the person who did the stealing should pay for."

Tampering with electrical meters is dangerous and thieves could injure themselves. Statistics show that the odds are they will be caught, he said.

The money Edison doesn't recover

due to tampering is not significant, and costs 50 cents per customer per year, according to Schneider.

"Possibly the thought that gets lost

in this (investigation) is that those people are the minority, and most people wouldn't think of doing this, because they are very honest," Schneider said.

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