

Newsman trades hats

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"Learn to write, it's important," said Trafelet, quoting advice from Tom Greene, a former capital correspondent and colleague at WBBM Channel 2. "You can learn the business on the job. But learning to write is so important."
"Unfortunately, I don't do a lot of writing, (at work)," Trafelet said.

SINCE GRADUATING with a bachelor's degree in journalism from Michigan State University in 1970, Trafelet has been an assignment manager at two news stations. He went to work at Channel 2 immediately after graduation; he's been at Channel 7 for 15 years.

Trafelet and 100 other editorial employees form the backbone and guts behind the glitz and glamour of the on-air news readers at Channel 7. Today, while Trafelet shares a computer terminal, many of the station's reporters still use manual typewriters — a seemingly passe feature for a television station otherwise technically advanced in news gathering.

"Commuting telephones are great," he said. "In the old days, reporters had to call back here and we had to make the calls for them."

Trafelet talks about the work/writing styles of TV personalities with an editor's familiarity.

"Dave Gilbert gets in here at 3 p.m. and he's literally out the door," Trafelet said. "He'll do a story for 6 p.m. and even 5 p.m. Cheryl Chodun is the opposite end. Her story might not start until 10 p.m., but she gets in here at 8:30 p.m. or 9 p.m. and starts pounding at the phones."

REPORTERS HAVE something to say about him, too.

Dave Gilbert, who lives in Farmington Hills, recalls the time Trafelet sent a news crew behind his house as a joke and told him they were developing low-income housing nearby.

A fellow assignment manager yells in jest, "John, you're sweating in the back," as Trafelet poses for a picture.

"If I knew John lived right down the street when I bought my house, I would have bought further north," joked Jim Herrington, the station's political reporter.

Trafelet appreciates and acknowledges the easygoing camaraderie — the same kind of closeness he cites among fellow firefighters.

"It's the thrill of the hunt for information, it ebbs and flows all day," said Trafelet, as he launches into a story about how he and reporter Mike Holfeld scooped the other stations with a story on a raid on a machine-gun factory in Dundee in Monroe County.

"It's fun working a story when no one else is there," Trafelet said.

EVEN AS a child growing up in Okemos, Trafelet showed signs of his calling. "My fifth grade teacher wrote on my report card, 'Your son is too noisy,'" Trafelet said.

Now he gets paid to be.

With his adrenaline pumping, some would think Trafelet would just want to go home and put his feet up. He enjoys "cocooning" — burrowing into home life. He also enjoys being a DINK — the buzzword for people with double incomes, no kids — with his wife Claire Carmichael, 37.

Carmichael now works for MDI Creative, a marketing firm in Detroit's Renaissance Center. She's a former producer for "Good Afternoon Detroit" and for Jerry Staneck's "Newshawk."

The couple owns two dogs, Blsmarck, a schauzner, and Garbo, a soft-coated wheaten terrier.

But excitement is in Trafelet's blood. On his belt, he wears a pager for the newsroom on one side and a beeper for the fire station on the other.

He's been a paid, on-call firefighter for 10 years; an EMT since 1987.

"When the tornado siren goes off, I leave my family," Trafelet said. "I leave Claire and the two dogs. I tend to remember the families, I help. I truly close my eyes and remember the bad ones (accidents). The fun

part is seeing people up and around again."

CAPT. DAVE Ewart, also a paid, on-call firefighter who routinely works with Trafelet, credits Trafelet's ability to extract information from people on the scene. "He calms people down and gets people to talk. That's probably his news background coming out," Ewart said.

As chairman of the planning commission, Trafelet concerns himself with things like controlled growth. It was his idea to post zoning change signs on hand up for rezoning as a way to let residents know of proposed changes.

"It used to be more fun, more interesting," Trafelet said. "I can remember Richard Lampi (community development coordinator) saying during the recession, 'We have 2,200 vacant lots in Farmington Hills. What are we going to do?'"

"Now we don't have enough vacant lots."

As planning commission chairman, Trafelet tries to help residents understand why the status quo isn't always the best idea.

"He's a good friend," said Ed Gardner, city planner. "He's very ambitious, dedicated and loyal to the city. He seems to know everything about what goes on in the city. He spends time following up on things."

As they say in the news business, "If the press didn't tell us, who would?"

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

MOCK TERRORIST

The children's program coordinator for the Send International Missionary Internship, 56200 Freedom, told police a field exercise involving a mock terrorist was organized for children going abroad.

Farmington Hills officer Don Fradette said Pat Mortenson told him the exercise was designed to familiarize the children with terrorist acts. The mock terrorist who took part in the exercise actually was a campus employee.

At 11 a.m. Tuesday, police responded to a report that a man wearing dark Army clothing and bearing an automatic weapon was seen marching a group of kids from the playground into the woods.

First on the scene, Fradette saw a man wearing camouflage fatigues and holding a rifle walking away from a small group of children.

With his service revolver drawn, Fradette ordered the man to drop the rifle. After the third command, the man complied. The rifle contained several blank rounds.

Fradette also removed a hunting knife from the man's belt.

WOUNDS SELF

A 25-year-old man awaiting a larceny charge used a small piece of metal to slit his arm while lodged in the Farmington Hills Jail Tuesday. The man later escaped from custody from a Pontiac jail facility.

A cellblock check at 2:15 p.m. turned up nothing unusual.

But when an officer responded to a request for help 25 minutes later, he found a 2-inch-long cut on the man's right arm, above the wrist. A small piece of bloody metal was found in the man's left hand. The man said he didn't want to live anymore.

Evidently, the Farmington Hills man had spoken to a friend by phone shortly before because the command desk received a call from an unidentified person stating he thought the prisoner had just slit his wrist.

Medics treated the prisoner at the jail before two officers drove him to Botsford General Hospital, Farmington Hills, for further treatment.

The man later was moved to Clinton Valley Center in Pontiac for observation but he escaped custody that night. There's a felony warrant for his arrest.

Police aren't sure where the man got the piece of metal. "We thoroughly searched him when we brought him in," Lt. Richard Murphy said.

The man told police he got it from a cellblock telephone, but that couldn't be substantiated, Murphy said.

ESCAPES INJURY

A screwdriver that shattered a windshield of a moving car in Farmington Hills struck the driver in the chest but didn't hurt him Wednesday, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

When a car pulled in front of his car eastbound on 13 Mile near Orchard Lake Road at 8 a.m., a 24-year-old Northville man swerved around it.

The other driver followed the Northville man to Middlebelt. There, the Northville man pulled into the left-turn lane and the other driver continued in the through lane.

When the light turned red, the other driver threw a screwdriver that shattered the windshield of the Northville man's car and struck him in the chest. Damage to the car was estimated at \$250.

FELONY CHARGES

Three 17-year-old Detroit men faces felony charges in connection with the break-ins of two cars at Kendallwood Apartments on 12 Mile Aug. 1.

Arraigned Wednesday before District Judge Fred Harris of Farmington, Stacy Brim, Marty Joe Rodriguez and Richard Paul Hodgson each

pleaded innocent to two felony counts of breaking and entering of an automobile.

Harris set cash or surety bond at \$2,000 pending a preliminary exam in 47th District Court. The defendants face up to five years in prison if convicted.

The three were arrested after surveillance officers watched as the occupants of a van cruising the Kendallwood lot looked into vehicles with flashlights. At 3 a.m. officers heard glass break and saw two men run back to their van carrying items. The van was stopped at the exit to the complex and items believed stolen from vehicles parked at Kendallwood were found inside. Lt. Gordon Ross said.

SCHOOL VANDALISM

Tools and a VCR valued at \$650 were reported stolen from Larkshire Elementary School, 23800 Tuck, Aug. 2-3.

The vandals left damage, cigarette butts and beer cans in their wake. No dollar estimate of the vandalism was available, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

GAZEBO DAMAGE

Six stained glass windows were broken in the gazebo at St. Alexander's Catholic Church, 27835 Shawwassee, Aug. 2-3. No dollar estimate of the damage was available, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

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