

# City's Officer of the Year wears many hats

Honoree is school liaison, detective, local activist

By Casey Hans  
Staff writer

**I**N HIS DAY-TO-DAY life as a Farmington public safety officer, Dan Potter keeps his finger on the pulse of the community.

From his work as the liaison officer at Farmington High School, to his work on various community boards and groups, to the cases he has investigated as a detective during the last 2 1/2 years, the 17-year police veteran's well-rounded background recently earned him distinction as the city's 1990 Officer of the Year.

Farmington's public safety department handles both police and fire operations for the city of 10,000 residents.

A native of northwest Detroit, Potter started his career with the Detroit Police Department in 1974, coming to Farmington 12 years ago. He lives in the Warner Farms subdivision with his wife Brenda, an elementary school teacher in Detroit, and their daughter Jessica, who attends Flanders Elementary. When not at home, Potter can be found camping or backpacking or spending time at a second home on a small lake near Gaylord.

But Farmington has become home, for both life and career.

"I like it much more (in Farmington), because I like the personal contact," he said about the smaller department and smaller city. "It sounds hokey, I know, but I think you tend to become a little more rounded as a police officer."

**PUBLIC SAFETY** director Frank Lauboff lauded Potter for the "professionalism and positive attitude" he brings to his job. "He has presented both himself and his department in a caring and concerned manner that reflects the depth of his concern for other people," Lauboff said at a March 14 awards ceremony honoring the 40-year-old Potter and others for their public safety efforts.

Lauboff said Potter's newest assignment — spending time each week working with students, staff and parents at Farmington High School — was one that earned him high consideration in the peer-selection process. Potter said the liaison duties grew from nothing last fall to part of his job that he "really enjoys."

Because of time and budget constraints, he is only able to spend four



Officer Dan Potter (center) talks with Farmington High students Violet Stanaj (left), Jayne Lee and assistant principal Jerry Allison as part of the police/school liaison program. Potter was recently chosen the public safety department's Officer of the Year for 1990.

hours each Thursday at the school. "I wish it could be more," he said. "I've talked to teachers who have had problems, teachers who have friends with problems, and certainly talk with students."

"It's just a really good bunch of people to work with."

Potter said he is invited regularly to go into the classroom to talk

about a variety of things. Most recently, he talked with biology students about lifesaving techniques.

**THE REST** of his week is spent working in the department's detective bureau, where he coordinates half the load of investigating cases. He processes warrant information through the Oakland County prosecu-

tor's office and spends time on cases in the local 47th District Court and the Oakland County courts.

Despite all the paperwork, people always come first in his job. That's one of two things that drew Potter to police work.

"One, I've always enjoyed helping people, and two, I wanted a job with security," he said. "It's certainly not

the kind of job that's going to disappear."

In addition to his daily duties, Potter represents the department on the Farmington Area Advisory County Board and also works with Farmington Families in Action — both active community groups devoted to fighting drug abuse and helping young people.

## Individuals thanked for their public safety efforts

Seven individuals were given a collective thank-you March 14 for their public safety efforts on behalf of the residents of Farmington during 1990.

A Farmington public safety dispatcher was recognized for her part in helping arrest a murder suspect, an officer received plaudits for saving a life at a local nursing home, two citizens were lauded — one for helping at the scene of an accident and another for helping catch a larceny suspect — and a commander was given a citation for his assistance in arresting a bank robber.

Also announced were the department's Officer of the Year for 1990, Dan Potter, and Reserve Officer of the Year, Jim Dale.

The awards were given during the 1991 Farmington Department of Public Safety Awards Ceremony at city hall. The ceremony was dedicated to Brent Daniels, who is the son of Farmington Officer Tom Daniels and is serving in Saudi Arabia.

**PUBLIC SAFETY** award winners included:

- Christopher Coleman, who received a civilian citation for his help at the scene of a downtown traffic accident on Oct. 16, 1990. Arriving at the scene, Coleman aided the unconscious driver of a car by moving the seat belt off of her neck, allowing her breathing to become more regular. Trained in CPR and first aid, he then climbed into

the back seat and helped to stabilize the woman's condition to prevent further injury.

- Carl Helwig, who received a civilian citation for following a larceny suspect from a downtown Farmington store Jan. 28, 1990, and reporting his observations to a store owner. Helwig first noticed a man leaving the Radio Shack store in the downtown center carrying what appeared to be a video recorder, and saw the car drive erratically out of the parking lot. He followed the car, observed the suspects, then returned to the store and reported the information to the Radio Shack manager. The suspects were arrested and the crime solved.

- Dispatcher Patricia Sullivan, who received a departmental commendation for her part in aiding Detroit police in arresting a suspect in a Dearborn robbery and murder case last February. Sullivan received a message over the Law Enforcement Information Network asking for help locating a known suspect in the case. Acting on a hunch, she checked local arrest records, found a Detroit address for that person and relayed it to Detroit police, who made the arrest.

- Commander John Coyle, who received a departmental citation for stopping a suspect fleeing the scene of a Farmington Hills bank robbery in October of 1990. While on

patrol, Coyle heard a description of the car involved, saw the car on eastbound Grand River and gave chase. He eventually stopped them at Eight Mile and Middlebelt and radioed the direction of another fleeing suspect, who was also captured.

- Officer Duane Cowger, who received a life-saving certificate for saving a resident of the Oak Hill Care Center from choking on May 14, 1990. Cowger responded to an emergency call at the facility to find the victim being given oxygen but deteriorating. He moved behind the victim and administered the Heimlich maneuver, immediately dislodging food that had totally blocked the resident's air passage.

## Hills to open its coffers for half of inspector's pay

By Joanne Maliszowski  
Staff writer

Olde Town resident George Roberts just doesn't believe federal Community Development Block Grant money should be used to pay for a code enforcement inspector specifically in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in southeastern Farmington Hills.

It took more than a year, but Roberts got half his wish Monday when a majority of the city council agreed with him in a compromise.

Instead of using \$42,000 from the federal money to pay for the officer, only \$21,000 will be used and the rest will come from the city's general fund.

"If that [southeast Farmington Hills, including Olde Town] is a deteriorating neighborhood, why have assessments on my property gone up every year?" Roberts said. "I fail to make the connection here. His property tax assessments have increased 250 percent since 1974, he said.

Last year, for the first time, city officials paid for a code enforcement inspector — specifically for southeast Farmington Hills — with block grant money. They argued it was permissible under federal regulations because the officer would be detailed to the income-eligible areas of the city.

But Roberts quoted former Easton City Council member Erna Henderson. "It gets hairy when you're spending federal funds on something you should have done all along."

**THE MAJORITY** of the city council agreed and struck the compromise. "The area covered by this program is not a distressed area. It's an area of the way up. You see the rejuvenation of an area," said Mayor Aldo Vagnazzi, who suggested the compromise.

Like Vagnazzi, councilwoman Nancy Bates said the code enforcement officer should be a "community-at-large expense."

Councilman Ben Marks questioned the use of block grant money for a code enforcement inspector. "I am not convinced... that the money is

## Block grant funds slated for sidewalks, drainage

Of the \$334,000 Farmington Hills is expected to receive in federal Community Development Block Grant money in 1991-92, \$70,000 will be spent on capital improvements in the city's southeast sections of low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.

The following projects will be financed with the money on a priority basis. For example, if the first project doesn't proceed, the second listed project takes priority.

- Drainage improvements in the Salisbury, Ambeth, Barkirk area in section 35. Estimated cost \$60,000.

being well spent," councilman Ben Marks said. "That (CDBG money) was not supposed to go into personnel, vehicles. It was supposed to go into housing rehabilitation. That's where I want it to go."

And that's where it will go. The \$21,000 will be given to the city's housing rehabilitation program. And that suits Roberts just fine. He, too, says that's where more of the money belongs.

The city is expected to receive \$334,000 in block grant money, a 12 percent increase over last year's total of \$296,000. City administrators wanted to divide the money by giving the housing rehabilitation program \$170,000 plus another \$60,000, which is income from loan repayments. With the \$21,000 the program will have a total \$251,000 for the coming year.

The housing rehabilitation program allows income-eligible residents to receive a low-interest loan or grant to make necessary improvements on their houses.

**THE REST** of the block grant money will be divided \$70,000 for capital improvements in low- and moderate-income areas and \$52,000 for administration.

The idea for a code enforcement inspector specifically for southeast Farmington Hills came out of a meeting last year between the Olde

- Sidewalk improvements on the south side of Grand River in sections 35 and 36. Estimated cost \$10,000.

- Drainage improvements on Edminton in section 33. Estimated cost \$60,000.

- Drainage improvements on Randall in section 35. Estimated cost \$60,000.

- Drainage improvements on Fenik in section 33. Estimated cost \$60,000.

Any money left over or any additional federal money that becomes available will be given to the housing rehabilitation program, also financed with block grant money.

Town Meadowbrook Heights Homeowners Association and City Council Homeowners complained that their area of the city is plagued with blight, such as junk cars and large trucks.

Many residents last year said they felt the inspector should be financed with local tax dollars. Because many residents felt something had to be done to enforce code violations, they agreed to have a code enforcement officer for one year to see if things improved.

In seven months, from August 1990 through February 1991, the officer performed 1,393 inspections, with a concentration on junk and commercial vehicles and trash and garbage. The inspector also achieved 80 percent compliance on violation notices.

Three councilmen, Jonathan Grant, Larry Lichtman and Terry Sever, urged continued support of the code enforcement officer with block grant money.

"I think there is a great need to spend dollars on a rehabilitation in that area. I also think it's important to have code enforcement officer for this specific area," Lichtman said. "I'm not sure the community-at-large should pay for the need in a particular area."

Grant and Sever said they felt the block grant money was well-spent and offering concentrated help to the southeastern portion of the city.

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