

Hills officer honored for saving boy

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Farmington Hills police officer Mike Lafave surprised himself during an incident at a restaurant.

Lafave, named VFW police officer of the year in Farmington Hills, applied the Heimlich maneuver to a 13-year-old boy with food lodged in his trachea. The quick thinking and action resulted in the award for the officer and perhaps continued life for the youngster.

"Your training takes over," Lafave said of the situation.

Lafave, who is a training officer with the department, was with his wife Janet at the Bob Evans restaurant at I-96 and Middlebelt having a meal April 2, 1994.

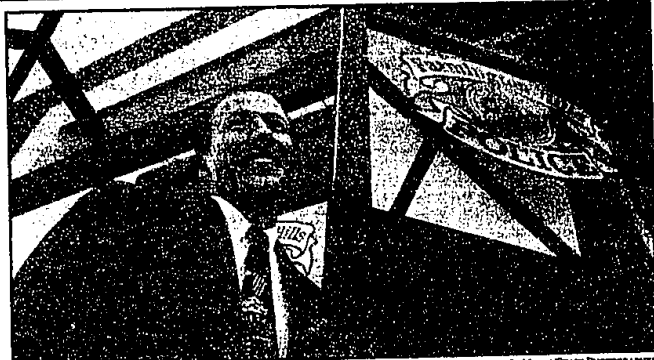
"I was looking at the mother (of the victim)," he said. "I couldn't see his face, but I could see that something was wrong because of the way she was looking."

Lafave, 32, noticed that the boy was choking after the mother and boy began walking toward him.

"Other people seemed to just get out of the way and there I was," he said.

After applying the maneuver — which involves placing a closed fist below the rib cage to force air from the lungs upward — Lafave was pleased to see the boy make an immediate recovery. After everyone settled down, he returned to his meal.

"It's like it was surreal," he said. "I sat down and looked at my wife as if to say, 'So that's



Award winner: "Other people just seemed to get out of the way and there I was," says officer Mike Lafave.

what that is like." It didn't seem real."

Lafave, a Madonna University graduate in criminal justice, has been with the department since 1996. He served with the Pontiac police for three years before that.

On most days, Lafave's job is not quite that exciting. As a training officer, he schedules all types of training for Hills officers. On the day the Observer spoke with Lafave, an Israeli expert on reading people's expressions and body

language was training some Hills officers.

"Mostly it's education, keeping officers updated on legal developments," he said, adding that he scheduled training in the use of pepper gas.

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Officers are also trained firefighters. Departments from around the tri-county area were included in the city's comparables.

Farmington officers' pay is above the average on the city's list, Lauffoff said.

The city has maintained it could not afford to pay what the officers were asking. Property assessment caps have limited revenue growth to 3 percent in 1994 and 1.5 percent this year, Lauffoff said.

Police officers have granted concessions in the past because of similar dire financial predictions, Madigan said. Some non-economic issues were put aside in this agreement, he added.

"The officers' retirement multiplier (used to multiply by years of service) is increased from 2 to 2.25 percent until the earliest age of Social Security benefits. Then it drops back to 2 percent.

In exchange, union members agreed to pay 2.08 percent of their salaries toward retirement starting July 1.

Both sides agreed arbitration proceedings were needed to get things settled.

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But personnel is not the answer to the police department's problems, Dwyer said. Technology is needed to make the department more efficient.

Response time for Part I crimes has increased from four to seven minutes in some instances.

"However, our response time for crime in progress is very good," Dwyer said. "We're talking about 'cold crimes' like when you come home and find that your house has been burglarized."

It takes five officers to patrol each district 24 hours a day. "If we were to get five officers that would only be enough to add one officer for each district," Dwyer said.

Dwyer estimated that detectives spend 41 hours on simple fraud cases, 69 hours on criminal sexual conduct cases, 67 hours on child abuse cases and 23 hours on domestic violence cases.

"That has gone up dramatically since the O.J. Simpson case," Dwyer said. "We arrest one person every other day for domestic violence."

Dwyer also wants to computerize and do optical disk imaging storage. He wants to put two school liaison officers on a foot beat for community policing this summer, patrolling shopping centers and Heritage Park. This will help them to get to know the community better, he said.

Automatic pistol registration has also been discussed.

"This year Farmington Hills joins three other Oakland County cities in "telewarranting" — obtaining warrants by fax.

Also piloting the program are Ferndale, the Oakland County Sheriff's substation and Auburn Hills, in the next 30 days.

Redford police, for example, have already been using this method.

Dwyer said that St. Clair Shores is also using a tele-arresting method through video which eliminates transportation of prisoners, saves time and increases safety.

Farmington Hills would also like to re-institute motor carrier enforcement. Trial efforts in Redford have shown revenues to be as high as \$500,000 for a 12-month period.

Additional equipment for evidence technicians that will better process finger-printing, increased use of cadets, cooperation with other agencies in building an outdoor firing range and defensive driving track on a consortium concept and start an accreditation process, are also on Dwyer's wish list.

"Technology is very important, because it makes law enforcement efficient," Dwyer said.

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Farmington Observer

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One year (12 issues in U.S.)	\$36.00
Three months (3 issues in Michigan)	\$12.00
Per copy, 50¢	
One year (12 issues in U.S.)	\$48.00

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