

INSIDE CITY HALL • Crime Emerges As Major Political Issue

By Dwight Jarrell

Crime, specifically narcotics and juvenile delinquency, will become the major issue in the local race for mayor.

An exemplary performance by the Police Department's vice squad, sadly understaffed, hugely overworked, has cooled the drug scene locally with an unparalleled record of more than 70 convictions out of 80 cases.

It's been an unrelenting war around the clock for vice cops

who are giving untold hundreds of hours to their jobs.

On one recent week they spent 56 hours in court, alone. The traffic is in cocaine and marijuana and the weed is growing in abundance as more and more teen-agers, here and nationally, turn on with pot. Yet despite efficiency of Livonia's vice squad and the panic among pushers, both incumbent Mayor HARVEY MOELKE and top police brass have been reluctant

to talk. It's anyone's guess why the decision to impose a lid of secrecy up to now. Politics, probably, and what else could it be. But, as a local political seer observed, Mayor Moelke should have taken heed of what Mary Beck did to Detroit Mayor Jerome Cavanagh with the crime on the street issue.

Moelke's opponent in the current campaign, Council President PETER VENTURA, could (and will try) to outdo even

Miss Beck. Vandalism, alone, will afford him no end of political stones. \$20,000 in park playground equipment destroyed last year, including 20 park benches burned; \$29,000 worth of windows broken in Livonia schools; an unprecedented wave of destruction

the City has failed to tear down an old eyesore of a house gutted by fire on her street.

Answer: A few other neighbors asked the same thing along with the question of how a four-family dwelling could be built in a neighborhood zoned for single residences.

The Observer went to Chief Inspector FRANK A. KERBY of Livonia's Bureau of Inspection for the answer. The house, at 3305 Orange, was built before 1922 when the zoning ordinance went into effect which makes its four-family occupancy valid though nonconforming.

In a fire on Sept. 26, 1967, it was damaged in excess of 50 per cent assessed valuation and an application by the owners to rebuild it was denied by the Bureau of Inspection. Kerby's office ordered the building boarded up and secured against trespass on Oct. 3, 1967, and torn down within 90 days.

The owners had complied with the order to board it up by Oct. 18, and on Jan. 9, 1968, they requested an extension of the razing order because of an insurance dispute. The extension was granted to April 3, 1968. In the meantime, an Observer reporter discovered that vandals had broken into the burnt out structure by removing boards and covering the rear door and a window. Kerby has ordered the owners to resecure the property within 48 hours.

Last year, Kerby's office condemned 40 such houses which, he explains, are usually "tired, worn out buildings not fit for human habitation and a menace both to occupants and neighbors." But you don't just arbitrarily tear a house down for truly by law and Constitution a man's home is, indeed, his castle.

It takes a court order and usually about six months to accomplish the fact, and then the case must be proven far beyond a reasonable point. Vacant homes of any type attract vandals, Kerby says. One on Plymouth Rd., west of Farmington, standing vacant while its owner awaited renters or buyers, was broken into and set afire twice.

It now has been condemned and boarded up. The boarded windows and doors are designed to protect neighborhood children from an "attractive nuisance" and to keep out undesirable persons. Biggest problems are teen-agers breaking in and such places are broken into so often, and so many orders reissued to owners to

resecure them, that eventually the owners tear them down out of desperation. The Bureau of Inspection under Kerby enforces various building codes and ordinances and last year made over 40,000 personal inspections.

Downtown Livonia...or, more precisely, Five Mile and Farmington Rd., where visitors such as Councilman EDWARD MILLIGAN see a downtown arising in the future...today is a wide spot in the road. But even that is progress for it is the 24-foot wide, half-mile long boulevard on Farmington that ends at Five Mile and was, just recently completed.

Though it is squeezed into a 120-foot right-of-way, and ends abruptly at the Five Mile and Farmington intersection occupied by three gas stations and a hamburger stand, the councilman sees it as a step in the creation of a community image for Livonia. And too many people today, he thinks, consider Livonia a suburban bedroom because it lacks totally any feeling of a city or of the community pride and spirit



FRANK KERBY

during Halloween; all-time sums of vandalism complaints at Christmas time, a saddening commentary of the times. Even the Christmas tree lights shined from in front of City Hall.

There's trouble ahead for Livonia's current housing boom...a building trades strike expected to pull the roof in May. Last year, 254 new homes were built here and industrial and commercial construction amounted to \$28.5 million.

This year, to date, the boom includes 300 new homes, 70 per cent of them in the \$30,000 class range. In the coming strike, carpenters will seek a \$9.25 hourly wage stretched out in three \$1.50 hourly increases in the next two years.

Livonia's fire department answers an average of 50 calls a year to rescue kids locked in bathrooms. That's more calls than the department had in fire alarms in the first year of its existence. That year they had 38 alarms. In comparison, the department made 1,755 runs last year, 901 of them on fires, (Total estimated loss: \$381,000, -- 257 on rescuator calls, and 320 involving emergency rescue work and first aid. There were 87 false alarms in 1967, the latter category always showing a marked tendency to increase immediately following safety lectures to school children.

The price of a \$7,000 plumper then has risen to \$20,000 now, and there have been numerous other changes over the years except for Fire Chief CALVIN ROBERTS. He's been on the job as chief ever since the doors to Livonia's first fire house opened in November, 1941. Roberts got the job in a most roundabout manner.

The first piece of equipment was purchased by a group of citizens who suddenly remembered they had no place to store it.

He was operating a service station and they asked if he could park the truck there. In order for him to move the truck out of his garage during the working day, he had to join the volunteer department because of insurance regulations. Then they elected him chief because he was always handy to the fire engine. Later, in 1947, the City's first fire house was a garage he built at his home at 11680 Merriman and rented to the City for \$25. He's never been far away from a fire engine since.

Any number of people claim they breathe a lot easier when they get back home to Livonia after a trip to Detroit. Fact is, air pollution here is as low as 12 tons (a high of 20 tons) of dust per square mile per month. Compare this to some down-river communities, including South Dearborn, where the atmosphere carries as high as 120 tons every 30 days of the year. Livonia, Plymouth and Northville have the cleanest air in all of Wayne County.

For lulls in conversation: Livonia has the largest storm drains in Michigan, some measuring 15 feet six inches in diameter and weighing 29 tons.

Question: A lady on Orange-lawn telephoned to inquire why

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The Things We Say

By RUBY SHANNON

"Gossip" means to chatter or to talk idly, usually about the affairs of others. A person who indulges in this idle talk is also called a gossip.

Used as a verb or a noun, "gossip" does not have a good connotation.



In the days when it was customary for the royalty in Old England to have godparents for their children, the persons so designated were called God-sibbers (sibbe meaning related).

In his play, "Two Gentlemen of Verona," Shakespeare had one of the players say:

"Tis not a maid, for she hath had gossips sponsors for her child; yet 'tis a maid, for she & her master's servant and serves for wages."

Godparents were usually chosen from distant relatives. Since they did not see the other relatives except at rare intervals, there was usually much small talk and exchange of news at a christening.

This led to the general impression that god-sibbers were idle chatters. In time, their name was adopted for anyone engaged in idle talk.

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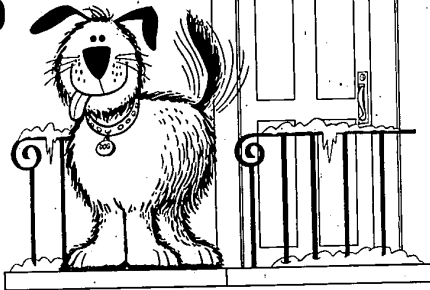
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