

Always ready for action

The workday begins early and ends late for DPW workers in both Farmington and Farmington Hills as they always must be ready for an emergency, whether it be a heavy snow fall or storm damage.

Staff photos
by Harry Mauthe

DPW stays on alert to combat emergencies

By HOWARD BONTAL

John J. Burke, chief mechanic in the Department of Public Works for the City of Farmington, is one of the city's most experienced city workers in the street maintenance department.

Now, that he is in charge of keeping about 100 city-owned road equipment working during the winter, he is a busy man.

He likes to work in the city, and he likes the DPW, but when he thinks they have to do their job.

Joe Shaw, head of Farmington Hills DPW, could have told him that.

He has to explain to disgruntled residents why, after Monday snowfall, the residential street hasn't been plowed.

Plowing every street in the city is a task for the department.

Then, the drivers have to drive with a lot of caution, and they have to be careful.

The DPW in the two cities are a little bit different, even in a technical sense.

They are the least technical of the city departments, but without them, the city would not be able to operate.

Besides maintaining clear roads in the winter with funds from the state and local tax, the departments maintain all city vehicles, make sure all streets have signs, and perform some rubbish removal.

The Farmington department has the added responsibility of maintaining parks, cemeteries, trees and city parking lots, as well as operating the city's water and sewer system.

They recently completed a project to install water meters and reading devices in every home in Farmington.

DPW EMPLOYEES seem to like their jobs despite being on call 24 hours per day.

Walt Karlak of the Hills DPW staff gets satisfaction doing something like plowing the roads and seeing the job finished.

He feels a particular responsibility to keep the roads clear for police and firemen.

I would care if a guy went to work in it, but I would care if a rescue wagon couldn't get a guy with a heart at-

tack, because the roads were snowed over," Karlak said.

The Farmington Hills DPW has 27 miles of roads to maintain of which 20 are major thoroughfares.

We've had cars out all night, and some of their exhalers are on their throats," said Tom Tric, Karlak's co-worker the Tuesday after this Monday's snowfall.

Last winter they helped spread 2,200 tons of salt on Farmington Hills' roads. They went through 100 tons last winter.

David Klotz, a heavy equipment operator for the Farmington Hills department, likes everything about his job except the drivers he clears the streets for.

Even he wants to pass you. We're out there to make it safer for you," he said. He prefers driving his "underbody" plow, which is a vehicle steering wheel, no gears and eight buttons all night when the roads are free of motorists.

Surprisingly, there is no fear on their part in the DPW.

JIM BURKE, for instance, designed and built the control console in use in all Farmington police cars. Where there were 27 wires running all over the car, there are

only seven now. The consolidation saves time in repairs and switching equipment from one car to another, Burke said.

The panel includes an electromagnetic shotgun mount which prevents theft. To open the lock the user must flick six different switches in the proper sequence. If the sequence isn't correct the car won't open.

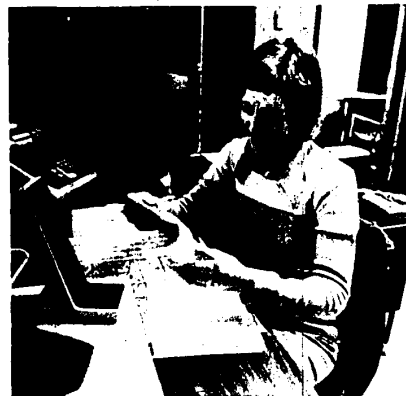
It's almost designed," said Burke. I think it's a challenge to make sure that everything is going the way it's supposed to. Perhaps the biggest thing is I get a chance to build things. When I finished the console I could have had as many as 20 more to build for different cities in the area.

Being busy with other vehicle maintenance projects has kept Burke from making any more, he said. When he gets the time he hopes to patent the console.

Most people don't know where the Farmington and Farmington Hills Departments of Public Works are located, but if the departments do a good job there's no reason why they should.

The light-hearted, joking atmosphere of their offices would make it difficult for most outsiders to realize that the departments are engaged in serious business.

But Joe Shaw and David Jones, the head of the Farmington DPW, think enough of their jobs to subscribe to at least five magazines to help improve their work. American City and County, Modern Construction and Building, Solid Waste Management, Water and Waste Engineering, and Waste Age.



Donna Klotz, receptionist at the City of Farmington Hills DPW, provides a friendly greeting to persons doing business with the department.



Dale Begay and Tom Tric check out an underbody road scraper after a day on the roads.



David Jones, Farmington DPW head, calls Helen Currie his "gal Friday" because she does everything from relaying orders to on the job workmen, to ordering maintenance materials.



Jim Burke tests the police console he designed and hand-built for the Farmington Police Department. Unless the operator knows the proper sequence in which to push some of those buttons, the lock will not release the shotgun.



DAVE JONES



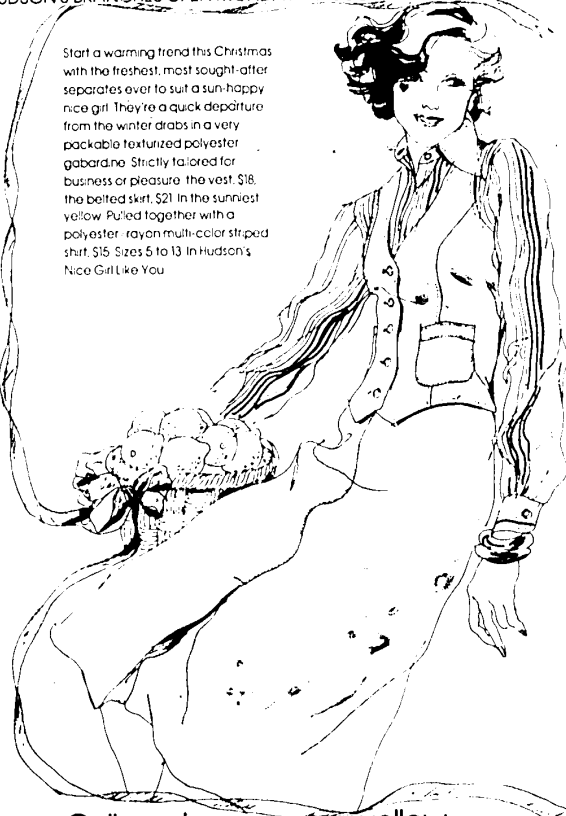
JOE SHAW



The Farmington DPW keeps a supply of road signs ready in the garage for all occasions.

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