

Fires' causes revealed

Officers investigate blazes

By LYNN ORR

A cigarette started the blaze early last week that claimed the lives of two men.

Mark T. Schumacher, 26, of 21545 Randall, Farmington Hills, and Michael J. Bakatselos, 23, of Detroit, both died of smoke inhalation in a fire in Schumacher's home early Sunday morning, according to Fire Chief John Van De Voort.

"It took only four minutes to respond to the call at 5:51 a.m. because the men were still cleaning their equipment from another run on a grass fire," Van De Voort explained.

He said that fire was shooting from the roof when firefighters arrived. They immediately searched the building and found the bodies.

A cigarette was responsible for the blaze, Van De Voort said.

Damage to the property and its contents was estimated at \$24,000.

THREE OTHER fires caused about \$400,000 damage during a five-day period last week in Farmington Hills.

Controlling a few grass fires also kept Farmington firefighters occupied as they tried to discover causes for the blazes.

Hills firefighters were called to a blaze Sunday at 33821 Colfax, when a wall in Thomas Morrison's home caught on fire while Morrison was soldering pipe connections, according to George Hume, district chief of Station No. 1.

No one was injured but property damage was estimated at \$5,000, Hume said.

LAST WEEK'S most financially devastating fire was at a 30-unit apartment building under construction at the Muirwood Apartment complex on Drake, north of Grand River.

Both Hills and City of Farmington firefighters rushed to the April 13

scene at 1:45 p.m. to control the blaze ignited when a construction company truck was started.

"One truck started up over straw (laid down to cover the concrete and keep it from freezing)," Van De Voort said. "The exhaust system caught the straw on fire, the straw caught the vehicle on fire and ruptured the hydraulic fluid line, which sprayed all over, including the building."

"The building was just framed, without windows, and all wood showing. When you have a 30 knot wind, you're lucky you can keep it under control," Van De Voort added.

The last of 42 buildings in the complex to be completed, the unit was destroyed in 15-30 minutes, according to witnesses.

Damage is estimated at \$250,000, says Van De Voort, although a spokesman for Beztak Building Co. of Southfield, owners of the building, estimated the cost of the completed building at \$465,000.

A Farmington Hills firefighters was treated for smoke inhalation.

WHILE FARMINGTON firefighters were controlling the blaze at the west end of the city, Southfield firefighters were called to a residential blaze at 21832 Jacksonville at the east end of town.

Extensive damage there amounting to \$20,000 to the building and \$9,000 to the contents were the results of the fire. The cause is undetermined at this time, Van De Voort said.

West Bloomfield firefighters responded to a grass fire in the northern portion of Farmington Hills at approximately the same time.

"Our mutual aid system is paying its dividends," Van De Voort added.

Fire system studied

(Continued from page 1A)

hose repair item were both purchased with savings made within the department.

Approximately \$100,000 of the yearly budget is put into salaries, including \$1,500 stipend for each of four district chiefs and \$750 stipend each for four assistant chiefs.

Compared to the average plus fringes for a full-time firefighter, around \$20,000 annually, the \$100,000

salary budget for 80 paid volunteers is slight.

But the lack of teamwork is the price you pay instead of dollars, he added.

"When you get 17 people coming from 17 different directions, you don't have an organized team," Van De Voort said. "Once they consolidate at the scene, they can start working together. But timing is important."

"The biggest problem I see is managing the daylight hours, but hopefully we can do something about that."

Boat safety class starts

A boat safety course will be offered through the Novi Community Education Department by the Oakland County Sheriff's Department. Marine Division Classes will meet May 9, 10 and 11 from 7 to 9 p.m. in Novi High School's Room 1.

The course is free. To register, persons may either call the department at 348-1200, or mail name, age, ad-

dress and phone number to: Novi Community Education, Boat Safety, 25575 Taft, Novi, 48160.

The course is designed to inform 12-16 year-olds about the state's watercraft laws and regulations. Participants will learn about equipment, rules, aids to navigation, safe small boat handling, general water safety and first aid.



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