

Since taking the reins as Farmington Hills' chief law enforcement officer, John Nichols has used a variety of tactics to meet the challenges of his job. Sometimes serious, the veteran police officer also maintains a sense of humor as well as bent toward reflection. (Staff photos by Harry Mauthe)

Crew cut cop converses on state of law and order

By MARY GNIEWEK

How do priorities differ from large city to quiet suburban police force?

In a career highlighted by four years as Detroit police commissioner and an unsuccessful bid for mayor against Coleman Young, John Nichols has slipped comfortably into the role of police chief in Farmington Hills.

The 60-year-old chief is in his second year at the helm of local law enforcement. Before coming to Farmington Hills, he was Oakland County undersheriff for three years.

Nichols, identifiable by the crewcut that is his trademark, insists his desire for public office has waned. Before he took over in October 1977, the suburban department had three police chiefs in less than a year.

This week, Nichols talked about his law enforcement career that has spanned nearly four decades.

There are two major philosophies in law enforcement: proactive and reactive. In large cities, police react to crime. In small communities, there is more opportunity for preventive work.

We can devote time to services not available in other communities. For example, we had a call from a man who was vacationing in northern Michigan not long ago. He instructed us to break into his home and shut off a heater.

What are the biggest crime problems in Farmington Hills?

It mirrors similar communities. Breaking and entering are down, but they are still higher than we'd like. There is a lot of malicious destruction



Teamwork is one of the factors in successful law enforcement work, Nichols has found throughout the years. Here, he discusses a situation with Inspector Richard Niemisto. (Staff photo)

Miss America says

Pat on the back helps

By NANCY DINGELDEY

Her comments were shared equally with parents, students and educators alike. All carried the same message: "Because you have lost, you are not a loser. Because you have failed, you are not a failure."

Former Miss America, proclaimed Outstanding Woman Speaker in America, former member of the President's Education Advisory Council and television personality Marilyn Van DerBur grabbed the attention of her adult audience and carried it with her through a 90-minute program. She repeated the procedure with both high school and junior high students.

She spoke on motivation to an auditorium packed with people attending the Southwest Oakland Educational Forum last week sponsored by the Walled Lake, West Bloomfield and Farmington School Districts. Her message was clear and concise: "What is success? What is failure?"

Ticking off examples in rapid succession, the warm, humorous, deadly serious personality questioned success and failure. She pointed out the most important point in motivating students was "to positively enforce rather than to negatively nag."

She suggested educators help their students become humane along with their teachings of reading, writing and mathematics. "Motivation is the most important goal of any teacher," she claimed. "It is the most important thing other than love. Motivation teaches confidence and pride."

Using a string of examples that read as prospective failures, Ms. Van DerBur drove through her topic with entertaining speed.

"He holds the world's record for strike-outs, number them 1330 — more than anyone else. A failure? The same person, Henry Aaron also holds the record for hitting the most home runs. A success!"

"Do we remember the successes or failures of a person? Don't ever compare the two. In each lifetime are a list of successes and failures. We must learn to teach, to motivate the child, the student, to accept the failure but go on to success."

Other examples quoted: He failed three times to pass an entrance exam for a military academy. He became successful in the eyes of the world at 65. He was Winston Churchill.

Her mother was instructed to remove her from dramatic school in her teenage years. They said she would never become an actress. She met failure consistently but yet she tried. Her television program was claimed number one and remained in that spot for five years. She has been proclaimed the most outstanding comedienne. And it all began when she was 40. Lucille Ball.

Flip Wilson, Bobby Kennedy, John Kennedy and Abraham Lincoln all met with failures and yet they are remembered as successes, she continued.

Pointers offered by the woman who has shared her ideas and motivational techniques with over 250 schools and community groups include parents allowing their children to share their disappointments. "Never delete or omit failures and disappointments. They are a part of life."

She added that students tend to think of themselves in negative terms. "They think and then believe only a 'winner' can succeed."

To everyone she suggested the development of a personal goal, one with a workable realistic plan — one that allows the person to accomplish something of pride — to themselves.

"A student," she said, "has to come to the conclusion that he himself has to try. He has to learn how long to try, how hard to try and then when to quit."

"Those that succeed rarely ever quit."

Attitudes, habits and family relationships can be changed. "You must decide what your life will be like," she said. "Do you want to let the world pass you by — or do you want to achieve something in your life?"

of property — lawn jobs, mailbox smashers.

Domestic violence is not much of a problem here. It is reasonable to suppose there is family stress, but this is an upper middle class community. Maybe husbands and wives restrain themselves better. To report such crime would be embarrassing.

Crime fighting has become more sophisticated since you began your career as a police cadet in 1942, but has it become more effective?

Today's police are better equipped, both with technology and education. But more effective? That can't be supported by statistics.

The old syndrome of crime and punishment has been denigrated. We are working out from underneath a drug culture. Family and other social institutions are breaking down.

Before, if someone committed a crime, punishment was sure to follow. Today, somebody commits a crime and the odds are two to one they won't get caught. If they're caught, the odds are still two to one they won't be convicted. If they are convicted, the odds are five to one they won't get to prison.

We are all to blame — the court system, the prisons, the police.

Is there a solution to the overcrowded court dockets?

Bring in visiting judges. Courts must be reasonable, not arbitrary. They can't act so swift that they scoop up the innocent with the guilty. It is a slow system. It takes time to select a jury and prepare a case. Oakland County has far less backlog than other areas.

What about prisoner rehabilitation?

If there is a chance for rehabilitation, it should be addressed at the first incarceration — at the county jail where youngsters are charged with misdemeanors. The longer they are exposed to prison, the less chance there is for change.

The life of an ex-con is tough. Whether he'll change depends on the individual and the chance he's given when he gets out. Someone from a stable background has a better chance.

Oakland County is doing experimental rehabilitation now. It involves post release care through social agencies. I'm not convinced desocialization is always attainable. Some people are social misfits, some are criminal psychopaths.

Do you favor capital punishment?

It's a hell of a deterrent for repeat crime. I think it would have an effect on premeditated acts, but not on

crimes of passion. Yes, I favor it for certain crimes.

Do you think police work will change much in the next ten years or so?

No, I've watched the pendulum swing both ways. There is cyclic change every so often. We go to decentralization, but there are disadvantages to having several little departments. Unequal distribution of enforcement can sometimes be fatal.

We get rid of hardline uniforms, but then police officers are not properly identified. So it's back to the uniform.

My own philosophy is that as long as some individual has to stand between

society and a person only looking out for his own interests, he is not going to be popular or well-liked. How he will fare depends on the person he is dealing with. Sometimes violence is necessary.

When I was young, it was a world of absolute rights and wrongs. The rigors of urban police work today are far greater. Today's young police officers are the products of campus unrest, of disillusionment. They have a different attitude — they are more tolerant, more accepting.

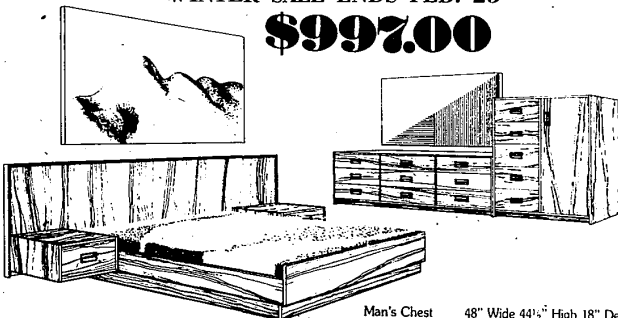
NICHOLS AND his wife, Jane, a former policewoman and teacher, live on Cass Lake. A graduate of Wayne State University, Nichols teaches criminal justice courses at Mercy College.



Although never one to rest on his laurels, Nichols does find a bit of enjoyment in the memorabilia he has collected during his career. (Staff photo)

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