

New police tools: 3 file boxes and a book

By MIKE SCANLON

On a gunmetal gray filing cabinet in the Livonia detective bureau, right next to the office coffee pot, sit three small file boxes and a book.

In a disarmingly modest way, they represent the beginning of what suburban police departments have always lacked — a central information source. In three months, the boxes have yielded more than 20 arrests for upwards of 30 armed robberies in Livonia, Garden City, Redford Township, Farmington, Farmington Hills and Dearborn Heights, said Detective Sgt. Fred Benson.

"I'm acting as a starting point. When the investigators have no place to go, no leads, they call me and say 'Freddie, what have you got?'" What Benson has in the three boxes are the names and ways of robbers, gunmen and parolees in half a dozen out-county suburbs. "From these different police departments I get photos and I get copies of all reports involving robberies, armed and unarmed, and I get all copies of felonious assault (reports) involving firearms," said Benson. Felonious assault — the use of a weapon to harm or threaten to harm another — frequently involves arguments between people known to each other. On the surface, such cases don't seem to have much in common with robberies. But Benson has a reason for dropping them in his new robbery file. "Here's what I'm after — the people out there with access to weapons who will use those weapons. Because the theory is — if the opportunity is there, these are potential stick-up men."

Also fed into the file are arrests for carrying concealed weapons, and reports from state corrections officials on parolees living or working in the area.

THIS PROCEDURE may seem routine, but it isn't. Suburban departments in western Wayne County haven't had a formal system for communicating with each other on a regular, planned basis. As a result, police in one city may be unaware that the motorist they just stopped for a burned-out tailight matches the description of an armed robber in some other town.

Robbers often develop patterns which make it easy for police to connect one armed robbery with some other robbery — once a system has been established so they can find out about the other robbery. "Some people just rob pizza places," said Benson. "Some people just rob gas stations. Criminals are like everybody else — they stick with what they've been a success at. They're creatures of habit."

In addition to helping catch criminals, the file boxes have also helped Benson. In recent weeks, they have made him look like a very smart detective.

Because of the file, for example, Benson was able to draw a connection between a man arrested for an armed robbery in Farmington last Tuesday, and a man sought for another robbery by Livonia police.

Benson interrogated the suspect, who admitted the Livonia robbery.

Benson figures the suspect will never face charges on the Livonia robbery, mainly because he's already charged in Farmington, Westland and Dearborn Heights.

But the file on the Livonia robbery is now "cleared." Police usually consider 35 percent to be a respectable clearance rate, but Benson estimates his rate lately has approached 80 percent.

Of 30 recent Livonia robberies, he figures only about a half-dozen remain unclear.

THIS MAKES BENSON look good, but he emphasizes "This isn't just a one-way street. Everybody benefits from it."

For example, Benson helped Garden City police in their investigation of an October stick-up of a savings and loan association. The Garden City investigators

tion resulted in the arrests of two men who admitted to eight other armed robberies.

Benson got started in robberies over lunch. Ten days into an investigation, Benson found out his lunch partner, another Livonia detective, had investigated a robbery with the same earmarks only a few months before. "I could have started where he left off," Benson decided. "I went down to the Detroit Police Department and I worked down there for one week with their robbery detail. That was an experience," he recalled. "You think there's crime out here? One week in Detroit is a year in the suburbs."

BACK IN LIVONIA, Benson discovered "the lack of communication between the area police departments in the investigation of the armed robberies."

"It seemed like each department was acting individually. Whether they could help somebody else, it wasn't important to them."

That led to the three file boxes and the book.

1980 census will provide jobs for seniors

The U.S. Census Bureau will provide 500 extra income jobs for Farmington area senior citizens and other Oakland County residents.

Jobs related to the 1980 census are from two to six weeks and many can be extended beyond that. They pay from \$3.55 to \$4 an hour, plus a mileage allowance.

The temporary positions, funded and administered by the federal government, involve both office and field work in Oakland County.

Clerks responsible for processing census questionnaires work from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Monday through Friday in the U.S. Census office in Birmingham.

Enumerators spend about 30 to 40 hours a week canvassing and interviewing people in Oakland County communities. They work out of their own homes and usually are assigned to their own neighborhoods.

Almost all enumerators must work some evenings and Saturdays in order to contact persons who are not home during the day.

These extra income positions are open to all citizens with at least a high school diploma or its equivalent.

Interested senior citizens can give name, address and telephone number

to the staff at the Gathering Place, Mercy Center, 28500 E. 11 Mile Road, The Gathering Place is open from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Names and addresses can be submitted also by calling the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation office at 474-6115.

The U.S. Census Bureau will contact interested parties directly for interviews and testing which will be held at a Farmington Hills location. Sample multiple choice test questions are available at the Gathering Place.

"This is a unique opportunity for citizens to earn extra money and at the same time provide a necessary and important service to their country," said Cynthia Lehr, census bureau employment clerk.

Farmington Hills City Councilman Donn Wolf set up the special arrangements at the Gathering Place. He also offered to visit churches in the Farmington area to explain the project.

"Of course anyone can contact the census bureau directly but I think the arrangements we have made may help," Wolf said.

"I want to do everything I can to facilitate the application and hiring procedures for our senior citizens."

Agendas posted

FARMINGTON HILLS CITY COUNCIL
7:30 p.m. Monday, Feb. 11

- Presentation of photograph of Miss Farmington of 1979, Vicki Whinnery, and Mayor Earl Oppenheimer by Jerry and Michele Jakacki of Focal Point Studio of Photography.

Attorney's Report

- Consideration of settlement of consent judgment Farmington Hills vs. Dinverno.
- Consideration of settlement of Blomberg vs. Farmington Hills.
- Consideration of executive session to discuss pending litigation in particular McMullen versus Farmington Hills.

Unfinished Business

- Consideration of final preliminary plat approval and final plat approval for Farmington Freeway Industrial Park South in Section 30 with deposits for \$24,302.84 and completion date of 5-31-80.
- Consideration of final preliminary plat approval for Applebrook Subdivision in Section 7 with escrow set at \$45,187.92 and completion date of 11-1-82.

- Consideration of award of bids for three sewer projects: SAD Greening and Eastfield Sewer to Roy D. Sora, Inc., \$136,173; SAD Old Homestead Sewer to Mago Construction Co., \$704,792.50; SAD Randall-River Glen Sewer to C.D. Cole Construction Co., \$138,669.10.

- Consideration of establishing special assessment district for water improvement on Cora Street and setting date for necessary hearing. Resolutions 1 and 2.

- Consideration of request from the Honey Tree for Class C liquor license.
- Consideration of amending procedures relative to 1980 road oiling program.

- Consideration of retaining architect for conceptual studies of senior citizen housing at Freedom and Drake roads.

- Appointments to boards and commissions.

City Manager's Report

- Recommends participation with the Oakland County Road Commission for the Orchard Lake-13 Mile storm drain construction.

- Recommends for adoption of traffic control order for installation and operation of a traffic signal at Harrison High School driveway and 12 Mile Road.

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