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Fire chief feels heat of councilman's ire

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

Disciplinary action taken against three Farmington Hills firefighters resulted in a verbal confrontation between Councilman Earl Oppertauser and Acting Fire Chief Tom Johnson at this week's legislative session.

Oppertauser was angered after learning that the volunteers were disciplined for appearing before City Council during budget hearings earlier this year.

"I was abhorred to hear these men are on probation because of their appearance," Oppertauser told Johnson. "How do you square the part-timers' discipline when (Richard) Marinucci hasn't been?" Oppertauser queried. Marinucci is a full-time firefighter leading a drive to establish a city-run

emergency medical service. In previous weeks, he has appeared before the council. He also has circulated petitions in the community to have the EMS question placed on the ballot. The controversy comes on the heels of a battle between the fire department and City Council over placing the question on the ballot.

Recently, council rejected the 4,000 petition signatures to put the question before taxpayers. Firefighters countered by taking their case to circuit court to force an election.

PRESENTLY, THE CITY is serviced by AmCare, a private EMS service.

Johnson defended the disciplinary action, saying Marinucci followed department procedure by seeking permission to speak before council, while the volunteers didn't.

'I feel my position was undermined by the paid callbacks who don't represent the full department. We had three speak for the fire department who don't represent the full department.'

— Acting Fire Chief Tom Johnson

Under the present operation, the city has a combination of full-time firefighters and paid callback volunteers. The system is mandated by the city charter.

"I feel my position was undermined by the paid callbacks who don't represent the full department," said Johnson.

"We had three speak for the fire department who don't represent the full department."

Oppertauser, said Johnson, was get-

ting only "one side of the story" about the disciplinary actions.

"They said they were here as private citizens," said Oppertauser.

"I heard the tapes (of the budget meeting) and am aware of the opposite," shot back Johnson.

He emphasized that the board of chiefs spoke for the fire department, which also made the decision to discipline the three volunteers.

The board is composed of both full-time and volunteer personnel.

Over the years, there has been con-

lict between the fulltime and volunteer personnel, admitted Johnson. But that situation has changed and only a few volunteer dissidents are left.

Monday's meeting brought out a combination of volunteers and full-timers in a show of unity for both the proposed EMS service and Johnson, who has been acting chief since former Chief John Van de Voort retired earlier this year.

THROUGH THE YEARS, Oppertauser has been a staunch supporter of the paid volunteer system. It was Van de Voort who stepped in to consolidate the fire department and who hand-picked Johnson as his successor.

During township days, each of the four fire stations acted as separate departments. Van de Voort put an end to that and centralized operations.

Some of the volunteers, according to other firefighters, are fighting the

changes and are opposed to a city-run EMS.

In recent weeks, some councilmembers have expressed fears that the move for a full-time EMS was a step toward abolition of the volunteer system.

Fire department officials have denied that.

The debate was spurred by the introduction of a resolution by Councilman Donn Wolf reaffirming the council's stand on the fire department's role. Oppertauser lashed out at the full-time members, saying he hoped Wolf's resolution would aid in garnering "better participation from fulltimers."

The veteran legislator noted that many of the volunteers had "just as much or more experience as the fulltime."

"As far as this council is concerned,

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Hills reverses stand on system for storm sirens

By STEVE BARNABY
Farmington editor

Farmington Hills residents will have a tornado siren warning system after all.

The city's legislative body, in a 6-1 vote, approved a motion at this week's council session to spend the \$65,000 expenditure for installation of nine sirens throughout the city.

Voting against the expenditure was Councilman Joe Alkateeb.

In June the council had rejected the identical proposal in a 4-3 split. But news from the city's finance office that surplus money had been found in this year's budget changed three of the councilmembers' votes.

Those switching sides were councilmen Jack Burwell, William Lange and Donn Wolf.

Under the program, the city will pay for purchase and installation of the system. The county will maintain it.

The siren system is similar to those already installed in West Bloomfield and Southfield. The city of Farmington is in the process of installing its own outdoor siren system.

Alkateeb disagreed with the majority, proposing instead to put the question of a siren system on the November ballot for voter approval. But he was thwarted in that move when Councilman Earl Oppertauser moved that the council make the decision, instead.

"AN ADVISORY QUESTION such as this is cluttering the ballot," Oppertauser said about the Alkateeb proposal.

In past weeks, a petition drive by Farmington Hills resident Michael Cohen had been rejected by the council.

At one point Cohen had threatened a recall of council if it didn't respond. A civil defense volunteer, Cohen since that time has been working with some of the council members in an attempt to reach a compromise.

Although the majority was against him, Alkateeb insisted the question should be put on the ballot. He cited campaign promises by Lange during last year's election when he vowed to listen to the will of the voters.

"(His vow) seems to be going out the window. I wanted a public hearing and few people showed up. Many people think they (the sirens) are a nuisance," he told his council colleagues.

"We owe it to the people to put it on the ballot," he said.

Alkateeb remarked over the coincidence of finding the needed budget funds the day the question was to be considered.

But Mayor Joann Soronen denied the funds had been "found" just to finance the tornado system.

Lange defended his switch, saying that previous presentations on the tornado system didn't rely sufficient information for him to make a decision.

Since that time, Cohen has made a presentation on the tornado system to council.



A break from the action

After two hours of play, 3-year-old Jonathan Reed has just one thing on his mind — a nap. To see what other toddlers do while mothers bowl, turn to Page 3A. (Photo by Dwight Cendrowski)

Students' reactions mixed on 9th grade high schoolers

By MARY GNIEWEK

Change of class looks like mass exodus from a rock concert at Farmington's three public high schools this fall, reminiscent of the baby boom generation that hit the hallowed halls in the mid-1960s to early 1970s.

With half of each student body new to the schools because of the addition of

ninth grade, blue jean and T-shirt clad youths walking in a dozen different directions between classes say things are crowded but not unmanageable.

"You put your books in front of you and plow right through," says Aileen Cleary, a junior at Farmington High.

The district's push for better utilization of space may have resulted in longer cafeteria lines, doubling up in

lockers and crowded halls, but students don't seem to mind.

"It hasn't affected us much because most seniors leave (school) early in the day," said Nancy Hughes, a senior at North Farmington High.

Another senior, Kathi Daelemans, thinks ninth-graders are too young to be subjected to a high school atmosphere.

"Peer pressure is greater here. Problems like drugs are greater here than at the junior highs," she said. "They're more easily influenced."

Senior Doug Lindsay doesn't think it's natural to see ninth-graders in high school.

IT ALL DEPENDS on perspective.

(Continued on Page 10A)

Vandals go on spree

Vandals smashing windows and driving over lawns went on a weekend rampage in Farmington with five victims reporting incidents to police.

Two Farmington residents on Oakland and Maple reported broken windshields on cars parked in front of their homes Sunday. In both cases, the windows were smashed on the drivers side, shattering the entire windshield.

Another victim requested extra police patrol at his Maple residence Saturday afternoon.

Incidents in a dark colored pickup truck struck a vehicle parked in front of his home and knocked off an outside mirror valued at \$30.

A Heatherton street resident reported a carload of people drove across her front lawn at 11 p.m. Friday, causing \$100 in damage. Neighbors saw a car raised in the rear, leave the scene.

A similar incident occurred Saturday night in front of a house on Moore. Damage was also reported at \$100.



Aileen Cleary (left) and Diane Page, juniors at Farmington High, get their shared locker in shape. (Staff photo by Randy Borst)

C'ville avoids cutbacks

Voters approve school tax hike

Voters in the Clarenceville School District voted 375 to 262 to approve a one-year, 1-mill tax hike which will boost district coffers \$113,000.

Only 637 of the district's 5,000 registered voters cast ballots in Monday's special election. The district, which includes slightly more than 2,000 students, covers parts of Livonia, Farmington Hills and Redford Township.

It was the district's second try for millage. Forecasting a \$100,000 budget deficit earlier this year, trustees in June gave voters the option of approving more money for school operations or face program cuts. School officials say the district's money troubles are due largely to a projected \$600,000 cutback in state aid.

This was the second try for the 1-mill request. The proposal failed to carry in June because of a 173-173 tie vote.

The district projects spending for the 1980-81 school year of \$5.1 million, or \$22.54 per pupil. Total spending is down from last year's \$5.4 million but the district lost an estimated 165 students and per pupil spending is estimated over last year's \$2,220. Staff cutbacks have already reduced the district's work force from 228 to 197.

"IT LOOKS like we'll be able to improve our physical education and elementary programs and bring in another kindergarten teacher," said Superintendent David McDowell.

Preliminary enrollment figures indicate 58 more students than school officials originally predicted. The district had projected losing some 150 students. The increase is primarily in the kindergarten and elementary grades, said McDowell.

The superintendent attributed Monday's victory to "the wonderful people who have supported this school district over the years."

"They came out to support the district and now it's incumbent on the schools to deliver," added McDowell. Clarenceville voters have established a solid track record of approving millages. In its history, the district has only turned down one other millage proposal and that too was later approved on another ballot.

"The people in the district have usually seen the need when the board asked for it," said one board member.

The district will levy 42.6 mills, including 37.755 mills for actual school operation. Another 4.75 mills is used for debt retirement.

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Back-to-school days means closet cleaning time for Linda Byrd. "I clean, organize, advertise and sell. The response is always phenomenal."

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644-1070