

# She seeks help to unlock doors for deaf



Most hearing-impaired persons can't read lips, and they rely on sign language to communicate. Here Kathy Welch (left), Bill Welch and Julia Duda (background) learn the alphabet in a sign language course

sponsored by the Troy Community Education Department. Sign language courses are offered through most local community education departments.

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
staff writer

In the hearing world, deaf people are locked out. Only a fraction of the hearing impaired can read lips. Most deaf people can't speak, so they're helpless when they injure themselves — unable to call an ambulance, a police station or a fire department.

"There are 600,000 hearing-impaired persons in Michigan and 175,000 in Oakland and Livingston counties. Only about 25,000 use sign language," said Mary Wells, director of the Oakland-Livingston Community Services to Deaf Persons (OLCSD). "There's no doubt about it — we need signers who have basic interpretive training."

EVEN IF deaf people have special telephones in their homes, most emergency centers they call aren't equipped with a phone to receive their calls, Ms. Wells said.

While interpreters can't always assist them in emergency situations, they can help the deaf make doctors appointments, do their banking and communicate in auto repair shops. OLCSD is searching for interpret-

ers willing to learn sign language. To get the training started, Ms. Wells developed a pilot program with a \$38,000 federally funded grant.

"We're looking for United Way funds and hoping for an extension on the grant after its June 30 expiration date," she added. Anyone interested in becoming an interpreter can call her at 334-0333.

OLCSD WILL also provide courses in sign language for hearing and deaf people alike. Presently, five people have signed up as interpreters.

"The only answer to help deaf persons is to develop communicators with sign language skills," Ms. Wells explained. "Lip reading and note writing aren't sufficient."

"Only 50 percent of words spoken actually look like they sound on the lips. And only 25 percent understand lip reading, while the rest just guess at it."

Ms. Wells has taken to the stump to educate people about what deafness is and how to help the hearing impaired. She has talked to court administrators, clubs, county commissioners and labor unions, stressing the importance of having interpreters on hand.

## 'No comment' on Spreen arrest

By Suzie Rollins Singer  
staff writer

Michigan assistant attorney general refuses to discuss a request for an arrest warrant charging Oakland County Sheriff Johannes F. Spreen with assault.

On Dec. 21, Oakland County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson asked Assistant Attorney General John Wilson to investigate the warrant request.

"I have nothing to say about the case at all. I can't tell you anything," Wilson said when asked if the request were being investigated.

A spokesperson in Patterson's office said she hasn't received any reports from Wilson's office.

THE ARREST warrant inquiry stems from a complaint filed against the sheriff by Sgt. Keith Overby, who works for a county safety division under the county executive. Overby charged Spreen detained him against his will in the lobby of the county jail at 4:30 p.m. Dec. 20.

Overby was assigned to the front desk at the jail, signing

**'I have nothing to say about the case at all. I can't tell you anything.'**  
— assistant attorney general John Wilson



Sheriff Spreen: He may be charged with assault.

visitors in and out. In a report, Overby said he wanted Spreen arrested for "simple assault" because he "unlawfully grabbed me by the arm and detained me without reason."

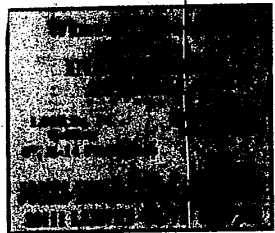
SPREEN MAILED his own three-page report to the media, which stated that the sheriff was angry because the security desk was unmanned.

Spreen's report, actually authored by Deputy Marc Cooper, said Spreen asked Overby his name, then requested his special deputy card and his permit to carry a concealed weapon. Cooper said Overby was sarcastic and "exhibited a high level of emotion" when asked for the identification.

Overby contended that Spreen had no right to detain him in the jailhouse lobby.

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