

# Farmington Observer

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## More than sky is falling in Farmington area



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Farmington Hills' Evelyn Davidson isn't about to let the madness and mayhem of Michigan's winter ruin her hairdo while she scrapes snow off her car near Godma's Drugstore in Farmington.

When just about everyone was sure the snow was unable to bring any further woe, the roof fell in at Farmington Hills city hall Friday night. (See photo at right.)

Firefighters and city officials rushed to administrative headquarters around 9:30 p.m. after it was reported the roof over the lobby area had collapsed. That portion of the building was unoccupied at the time.

Although construction personnel were in council chambers working on a remodeling project, no injuries were reported.

The collapsed section was built between 1968 and 1970, said City Clerk Floyd Cairns. Throughout the years, city hall has been constructed piecemeal, with additions being added as the city grew.

"We don't know the actual design load, but we'll have to get up there and check out how much ice and snow there is up there," said Bill Covey, consulting structural engineer who was at the scene to make an initial inspection.

Officials are unsure how much it will cost to repair the roof or how long it will take. But city hall will maintain regular hours.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer



Snow may slow you down . . . but it hardly fazes paperboy Pat Nugent (left) and his bicycling colleague (right).



## Legal battle ends but cops probe harassment charge

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

Criminal sexual conduct charges brought against Farmington Hills Police Sergeant Raymond Cranston by co-worker Gail Kaffer have been dropped.

Ms. Kaffer, a dispatcher, accused Cranston in November of criminal sexual misconduct in the fourth degree, or sexual contact by force or coercion.

The crime is a misdemeanor carrying a maximum \$500 fine and a two-year prison term. It is criminal sexual conduct in the lowest degree as defined by Michigan law.

When an investigation by the Oak-

land County Prosecutor's Office was completed Jan. 29, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Richard Thompson decided against issuing a warrant.

Based on the evidence received, Thompson said he was unable to establish that a crime had been committed.

**THE INTERNAL** investigation initiated in November by Farmington Hills Police Chief John Nichols "still is not closed," however, said Richard Niemisto, Farmington Hills inspector.

(Cranston was suspended with pay by Nichols in November. The police chief said he reinstated Cranston at the end of December because no warrant had been issued by the Prosecutor's Office.)

*"To an extent I believe in the public's right to know, but not when it comes to cases like this. I don't think that's good reporting, and I'm not going to be a part of it."*

— Paul Bibeau  
city attorney

Ms. Kaffer's decision to drop charges resulted from a meeting Wednesday attended by Nichols, City Attorney Paul

Bibeau and Ms. Kaffer's attorney, Jules Olzman.

"We met for about an hour and a half

trying to reach an agreement as to how the situation could be remedied," said Olzman.

The three agreed that Ms. Kaffer should be reimbursed for an unpaid personal leave she took during the investigation, and that work schedules will be arranged so that Cranston and Ms. Kaffer will work different shifts at all times, Olzman said.

**OLSMAN AND** Bibeau were assured by Nichols that guidelines defining prohibited conduct for police department employees have been issued, Olzman said.

The proposals must be approved by City Manager Lawrence Savage before they are carried out, Niemisto said.

"As far as Gail is concerned, the situation has resolved itself in a manner she feels satisfied with in terms of scheduling. But I don't know about discipline within the Department or the police union's jurisdiction," Olzman said.

Niemisto answered "no comment" to questions regarding the possibility of further disciplinary action on the part of the Police Department or union.

Bibeau refused to answer any questions regarding the case.

"To an extent, I believe in the public's right to know, but not when it comes to cases like this," he said. "I don't think that's good reporting, and I'm not going to be a part of it."

**OLSMAN SAID** if he be involved in the sexual harassment case before

the Prosecutor's investigation began, he "would have advised Ms. Kaffer against that route."

In employment-related situations, it's difficult to gain a warrant because it is hard to show criminal intent, he said.

"Usually, you have parties that know each other, and while many times conduct does constitute criminal conduct in terms of the statutes, greater change is brought about by filing civil action," Olzman said.

Criminally, the remedy would be whatever sentence is brought against the offender. There is no restitution made for the victim, he said.

Civilly, compensatory and exemplary damages are awarded. Money talks.

"WHEN A corporation is forced to pay out large sums of money in damages because an employee was sexually harassing somebody, people take a rather dim view of it, wake up and take care of the situation."

Most employers, Olzman said, deny that any man is guilty of sexual harassment and engage in an extensive cover-up.

It is unlikely at this point that Ms. Kaffer will seek further legal action, Olzman said.

"As long as the department has taken steps at this point to effect the remedy and Gail continues to be able to work, it seems in her best interest to let the situation be resolved as it has been."

## During bad times

## Builder honored for best effort

By Craig Flechura  
staff writer

Trying to sell a home in the Detroit area is harder than trying to buy one.

Despite the dismal state of affairs, Robert Brody, builder and developer of Country Ridge homes in Farmington Hills — houses which sell for an average price of \$185,000 — has been named low-volume Builder of the Year in national competition sponsored by the National Association of Home Builders and Builder magazine.

Competition is limited to builders who construct less than 50 homes per year. Brody was cited for the success his firm has had with Country Ridge in an area and a time where housing sales are generally atrocious.

The firm Brody heads — Samuel Brody & Sons of Troy, named after his late father who started the business 60 years ago — has built large homes throughout the Detroit area as well as many apartment complexes.

But at present the company is solely involved in merchandising, marketing and building a potential 102 homes on the 60-acre site south of 14 Mile Road, west of Halsted. Twenty-four houses have been sold since November 1980 and 31 more are committed with deposits.

There are three basic models offered and each has 10 different facades, or elevations, which help to avoid the sameness found in most subdivisions.

"MOST BUILDERS know how to build," Brody says. "Very few understand marketing and merchandising."

As an example, Brody mentions that it's always been traditional for builders to run housing ads highlighting location and price.

"We talked about our interior and exterior decorating and decorating service," Brody said. "We ran a head shot of the architect talking about how we custom-design houses."

Judges, Brody said, were impressed with the firm's success in a depressed market such as Detroit, particularly with high-priced homes and high finance charges.

"In the price range we're involved in, less people are affected by the depression or recession occurring in the marketplace," Brody said.

"By our marketing approach and advertising, we're getting a larger share of that market by being able to get people what they want."

This means one home bought by a man with two working daughters was built with two master bedrooms with attached luxury baths (with separate shower stall and tub) and a bedroom in the middle with a less-luxurious bathroom for the father. Customers can customize their homes at an added price.

All lots built on the perimeter of the property sit on a sloping bank with a

Please turn to Page 5A



Rooms like this have won Robert Brody honors in housing development even though the building industry is in one of the worst slumps in years.

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