

They helped nurture a fledgling Southfield

By Dan Bodene
staff writer

MAYOR DONALD FRACASSI

Mayor Donald Fracassi's office is barely large enough for the weekly meetings he holds with his staff. No one seems to mind the lack of space, though; meetings are always held on time, business as usual.

It's almost a metaphor for Southfield's growth over the past 25 years. It wasn't all beer and skittles in the early days, but the jobs got done. And done well — look around Southfield now.

"In the prime growth period, the city didn't have the depth in its departments to look into all the questions," said Fracassi. "Yet we kept up with the pace."

Fracassi speaks with authority when he says "we" in terms of a city growing up. He can correlate municipal expansion with that of his own business. In fact, the city of Southfield and Fracassi's business both got started about the same time.

Fracassi moved to Southfield Township with his parents in 1947 and opened Don's Town and Country Market 10 years later.

Fracassi applied for permits for his

business at the original city hall on Berg Road. Years later, he received approvals for expansion at the rented building and assessor's office on Telegraph, when city departments were getting too large for the Berg Road hall. And he received still other permits at the modern city hall on Evergreen.

Fracassi got involved first-hand with city operations in 1967, when he joined the city council. As president of the council in 1973, he was appointed mayor to fill the vacancy created when then-mayor Norman Feder was elected to a district judgeship.

Fracassi has been mayor of Southfield ever since; he's only the fourth in the city's history.

"IT'S BEEN LIKE A DREAM to play such a role in the city I grew up in. My wife and I have raised six kids here, so not only can I help provide services, I can grade them, too."

As a resident-businessman-administrator, Fracassi is in a good position to evaluate Southfield's growth. He frequently mentions, with obvious pride, the forces that have made the city's phenomenal growth possible.

"Early councils, administrators and mayors had kind of a sense that South-



Mayor Donald Fracassi has held the mayoral post longer than anyone else in the history of the city.

field was a different kind of community. They had innovative, unique ideas. We had good staffs, too. The amount of time and dedication they gave was remarkable. I called them the 'whiz kids.'"

While Southfield's government has always been unique — it's one of the few where the mayor can veto issues, but can't vote with the council — that's only half the story, Fracassi said.

"It's a partnership. Local government had to have the citizens behind it. Southfield is also a tribute to the imagination of the people who live here."

JUDGE NORMAN FEDER

4th District Judge Norman Feder has been an administrator since before Southfield's inception.

As a newly arrived (from Detroit) attorney in 1955, he administered the law. As a member of the Zoning Board of Appeals beginning in 1963, he helped administer city codes. As councilman and mayor, he administered the city's operation. And as municipal and district court judge, he has administered justice.

Consequently, Feder has dealt closely with people. He's seen how municipal growth affects residents. Southfield, he said, was a special case from the beginning.

"Right from the outset, there has been a varied ethnic mix in Southfield. For the most part, there have never been any serious problems in the racial, ethnic or religious area, which made the community unique."

A unique population spawned a unique government, he said.

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