

County scales down party for GM

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

When Oakland County marked its 150th birthday, General Motors helped put on the party.

GM's sesquicentennial contributions included an appearance by Miss America and a soap box derby.

In turn, Oakland County intends to pay respects as its largest corporate taxpayer turns 75. But the gift won't be as big as expected.

Instead of an \$5,000 celebration, the controversial package is now expected to cost \$1,000. And it will come out of the county executive's budget instead of the commission's.

"WE'VE DECIDED it will be entirely a people's celebration, that anyone can take part in," said Joan Newby, the county's director of community and minority affairs.

"We think it's a bit more responsible."

The birthday party controversy started two weeks ago when the commission finance committee approved a 7-4 executive plan to spend \$8,000 on GM 75th anniversary activities. Starting Friday, events will take place around the county to mark the 150th birth of General Motors.

The proposal included a celebration run, GM speaker at the Economic De-



BUILDING ON 75 YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

velopment Corporation's annual meeting, a new car display at the county complex, a downtown Pontiac sidewalk sale and a celebrity softball game.

THERE WERE two big cost items — a Pontiac mayor's luncheon and a reception for management, labor and politicians. The \$8,000 birthday party would have come out of the county's 1983 contingency account.

Presented to the board Thursday, the resolution was intended as a way for the Oakland County Board of Commissioners and the county executive to "join in the observance of GM's 75th anniversary and to give proper recognition to their leadership role in the promotion of high tech industry in this area as part of the economic development program of Oakland County and, also, to show our appreciation for the industry's 75 years of providing employment to our citizens."

"WE WANTED to express the grat-

itude of the city and county for what GM has been and will be to us," said Deputy County Executive Patrick M. Nowak, who said the car company annually pays \$29 million in Oakland County property taxes.

"We've been able to do a lot of things in Oakland County because an industry the size of General Motors made that possible. They're good corporate neighbors."

AFTER PRESENTING the proposal to the Oakland County Board of Commissioners Thursday, finance chairman Commissioner G. William Caddell, R-Walled Lake, asked that it be referred back to the county executive and paid for out of his budget.

But Commissioner Dennis Aaron, D-Oak Park, objected to the proposal being "lucked into someone's back pocket."

He said he received many complaints from constituents upset about spending taxpayers' money for the birthday. He cited calls from a woman who works at Crowley-Milner Co., also celebrating its 75th birthday. And a woman who paid taxes for 63 years and "wanted to know if she's entitled to a Twinkie."

"LET'S STAND UP and represent the people who elected us to be here today," Aaron said firmly.

"We should tell the county executive we don't approve of spending taxpayers' money for birthday cake, ball-games or other frivolity when there are so many other needs."

Commissioner James Doyon, D-Madison Heights, went door to door in his district and polled 2,000 residents on the issue. He said he found no support for the expenditure, which he called "tomfoolery."

"LAST WINTER, THE people of Pontiac — named after a GM division — had serious hunger problems, and I didn't see Oakland County reach out hands to them," Doyon said.

"There are people in my district surviving on less than \$8,000 a year." Saying that the proposal was put together in a hurry, Commissioner Alexander Perinoff, D-Southfield, asked that it be referred to a committee to see if it is possible to "do honor to a great corporation and a taxpayer without spending \$8,000. Maybe we could offer just services."

WITH A 17-6 vote, the commissioners sent the proposal back to the county executive's office, where it was trimmed. The Oakland County celebration will start Thursday, Sept. 15, with a birthday party and vehicle presentation in the service center.

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