Hot seat He fields complaints on county roads

By Kalhy Parrish

When he drives to work, Michael Richardson knows exactly what kind of

day to expect.

If roads are bad, he'll be swamped with calls. If not, things could be a bit

with calls. If not, things could be a bit 'quieter.

But there's never a slow day this time of the year for the man who handles Oakland County road complaints.

"People use the roads every day," explained Richardson, who directs Oakland County Road Commission's Department of Citizen Services.

"When something affects you daily, you complain when there's a problem."

SET UP IN 1973 after one of the county's worst spring breakups, the De-partment of Citizen Services handled 5,736 complaints in 1974.

Last year 12,794 calls came in about rough road conditions, traffic signals, drainage problems and construction.

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But with 9,462 complaints by the end
of March, this year will probably top
the 1982 record of 14,990 calls. One big
reason was the January ice storm
which took its toll on the roads.

"This year will probably beat that easy. We're on our way," sald Richard-son, who received 400 calls Feb. 3 alone.

"We just haven't had any slack time at all."



Michael Richardson

THE FOUR-PERSON office handles complaints about the county's 2,800 miles of roads. Most gripes are about the 1,100 miles of gravel roads, mainly located in the north and west.

Along with complaints, the Department of Cilizen Services administers a calcium chloride program from late May through September. Applied four times yearly to 414 miles of gravel roads, the dust control agent raises \$608,000 for the county.

The office also keeps all the complaint records for use in claims and lawsuits.

"People here are aware of llability problems," said Richardson, adding that improper road design is a popular claim today.

there are some callers who "want your job."

His solution is to listen to the complaint and try to defuse it, if possible.

WITH OAKLAND County
Commission since 1968 when he was an engineering student, Richardson was in the traffic department before he and another employee started the Office of Public Assistance.

In 1979 it was expanded to four people and became the Department of Citizen Services.

"We were just getting more complaints," said Richardson, whose calls vary with the seasons. Thava after bad winter storms lead to epring breakups and potholes. Then the drainage complaints start rolling in.

Because complaints are centralized, records are able to be kept on problems and roads which are particularly troblessme.

Resided liput led the Road Commiss.

Resident input led the Road Commis-

Resident input led the food Commis-sion to change from cold patches on potholes to a material called Sylvax, which sticks better. Future plans include using a central-ized computer system to keep better histories and retrieve information fast-er.

WHILE SITTING in one of the hot-test seats in the county, Richardson takes pride in never having hung up the phone on a caller. "The majority treat us real well," sald the Waterford resident, admitting

sing your praises. It's nice to hear."

HE AND CO-WORKER Fred Rudd act as lialsons between residents and the six Road Commission garages throughout the county.

Whenever possible, they do field reviews to check out a site. "It gives you a better perspective than just sitting here," said Richardson, who is based in Waterford.

Also answering phone calls are Deborah Mathews and Karen McDonald. Complaint Coordinater Fred Rudd admits it's tough to tell someone stuck in the snow in a subdivision that main roads must be plowed lirst.

"To them, their problem is the most important ose," he explained.
"If people, just knew the whole scope and magnitude of Oakland County. There are as a wind lot of people and an awful lot of concerns."



volunteers

The Ookland County Volunteer Bureau (OCV3) has a current file of volunteer opportunities for more than 200 agencies. Non-profit organisations needing assistance may list with the bureau. For more information about volunteer openings, call the bureau at 642-7272.

SUMMER GUIDE — Bloomfield Hills-area museum needs volunteer guides for summer and begond. Should be at least 16 years old, reliable and enthusiastic. Will guide, do demonstrations and assist with exhibits and programs. Also needed is an outdoor facilities worker for trail maintenance, habitat improvement, etc. Phone 842-7272.

TYPIST — Excellent typist is needed to vol-unteer for correspondence and funding work for Pontiac area food collection program. Times flexible. Phone 642-7272.

TELEVISION VOLUNTEER — Network TV program dealing with consumer problems needs many individuals experienced in consumer assistance or research projects. Callege graduate preferred. Should type, be patient and articulate 642-7272.

ENVIRONMENTAL AIDE - Rochester area ENVIRONMENTAL AIDE — Rochester area recreation and environmental program needs volunteers for various positions: graphics coordinator, host/hostess, assistant naturalist, runmage sale coordinator, community info director, volunteer coordinator, festival assistant and gardener. Positions for all ages and talents. Phone 642-7272 for more information.

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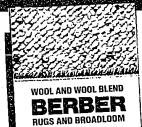


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