

Statistics zero in on traffic problems

By Edward R. Mueller
special writer

Each year, generally at the time of major holiday weekends, the National Safety Council provides an estimate of the number of traffic fatalities predicted for the nation's highways.

These estimates vary depending on the time period involved (three- or four-day weekends) and perhaps with the holiday itself, with the greatest influx of travel anticipated at Thanksgiving and Labor Day.

While these estimates, large as they are, may attract attention, it's likely the great majority of people give them little heed because they involve "someone else" — not anyone close to home. Many people resent the efforts of state police and others to monitor traffic speeds or driving under the influence of alcohol because these activities infringe on "personal liberties."

Whereas statistics on traffic accidents are maintained nationwide, these become more meaningful when they are applied to local communities.

THE POLICE department for example, has a real concern for the well-being of persons traveling within the confines of Farmington Hills.

As required by state law, each and every accident is written up in detail. Copies of this information are forwarded to the Michigan Department of State Police Traffic Services Division at Lansing. At Traffic Services, the reported information is programmed into a multitude of categories made available on computer printouts to the local communities.

Data is assembled for Farmington Hills, but also for Farmington and, of course, on a larger scale for Oakland County.

What purposes do these compilations serve? Perhaps first and foremost, the data provide a complete summation of where the accidents occurred, at what time of day, pertinent weather and light conditions, and contributory circumstances, such as a violation of traffic ordinances or driving under the influence.

EVEN THOUGH the mandatory seat-belt law was passed only this past year, records on seat-belt usage have been accumulated routinely for many years in the past.

Because of the time delay in categorizing all of the traffic report information, results for 1985 are not yet available. Thus, essentially all of the information to follow pertains to the calendar year 1984.

Nevertheless, in terms of fatalities, 1985 proved to be a poor year for Farmington Hills. After a steady decline over the period 1980-1984, it turned to four, a marked increase over 1985 back to 10. Needless to

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say, this has concerned all Farmington Hills Police personnel. Explanations are being sought so that proper remedial steps might be taken. Possibly no single factor will stand out. However, the key ingredient — the licensed driver — remains an enigma. How do you reach him/her?

It was pointed out by Sgt. Martin Blodose, of the Farmington Hills Police Traffic Section, that statistics for any one year do not necessarily predict what is going to happen in subsequent years.

Changes in traffic patterns follow, for example, road improvements — such as Orchard Lake Road — or the construction of a new mall, notably Twelve Oaks in Novi.

Further, traffic density is a function not only of community growth but also reflects the influx of out-of-city persons who populate the new office complexes springing up all over.

IT MAY not be difficult for those traveling within the areas of Farmington Hills to identify that intersection where, in 1984, the greatest number of accidents occurred. If you guessed the corner of 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road, you were right. (Only time will tell whether this dubious honor was retained in 1985.)

In addition to the state compilation, the Traffic Improvement Association (TIA), a non-profit organization headquartered in Bloomfield Hills, follows traffic statistics not only for Farmington Hills but throughout southeastern Michigan.

TIA data for 1984 showed the following high-density accident locations within Farmington Hills:

- 1. Orchard Lake and 12 Mile, 77 accidents, 18 injuries.
- 2. Orchard Lake and 14 Mile, 60 accidents, 20 injuries.
- 3. Orchard Lake and 13 Mile, 54 accidents, 18 injuries.
- 4. Middlebelt and 12 Mile, 42 accidents, 18 injuries.
- 5. Farmington and Eight Mile, 42 accidents, 18 injuries.
- 6. Halsted and Grand River, 28 accidents, 8 injuries.
- 7. Middlebelt and Northwestern, 28 accidents, 11 injuries.
- 8. Middlebelt and Grand River, 26 accidents, 7 injuries.

- 9. Orchard Lake and 10 Mile, 25 accidents, 6 injuries.
- 10. Farmington and 12 Mile, 21 accidents, 9 injuries.
- 11. Farmington and Nine Mile, 21 accidents, 4 accidents.
- 12. 13 Mile and Northwestern, 21 accidents, 10 injuries.

The total accident population of 432 represents only 22 percent of the total 1,973 accidents accounted for in 1984. Overall, 795 (40.3 percent) of accidents occurred at intersections (within 250 feet) of the balance elsewhere. Two of the four fatalities in 1984 did occur at an intersection, one involving a head-on tangle.

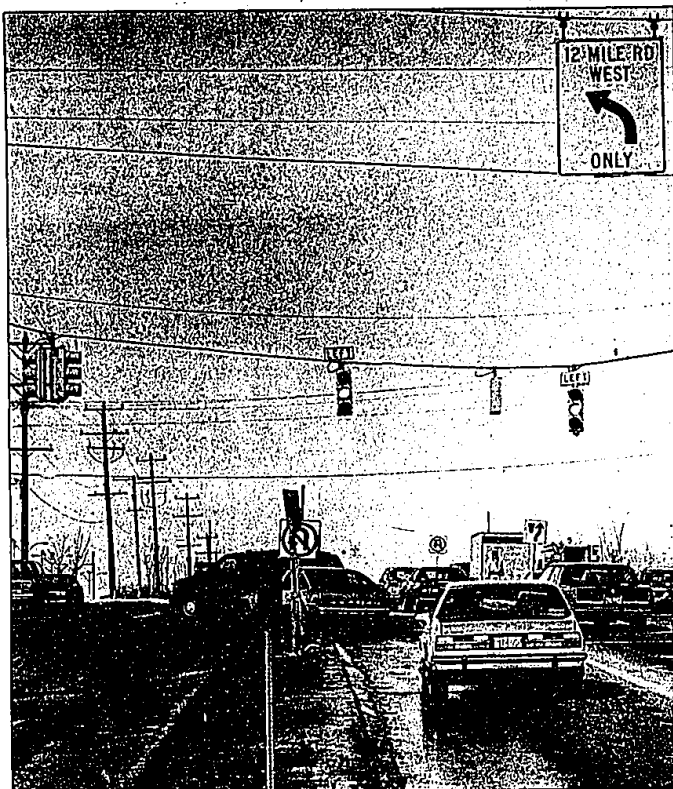
OTHER OBSERVATIONS that became evident from a consideration of all the 1984 statistics:

- 1. In the 1,973 accidents, 3,457 persons were involved, 1,118 (20.5 percent) of whom were injured, four fatalities.
- 2. No fatalities occurred on that stretch of I-696 traversing Farmington Hills but 246 accidents (12.5 percent) did take place where 71 involved single-car off-the-road incidents.
- 3. A total of 196 vehicles were involved in off-the-road accidents with fixed objects where, for example, "a tree moved in front of the vehicle."
- 4. The major number of accidents (1,297, 65.7 percent) occurred on dry pavement; wet pavement accounted for 25 percent and snow and ice another nine percent.
- 5. Most accidents (1,287; 65.2 percent) occurred during daylight hours, 29 percent after dark and six percent at dawn or twilight. The "crash-hours" of 3-6 p.m. accounted for 25.5 percent of the total, followed by the periods noon to 3 p.m. and 6-9 p.m. (both about 18.5 percent).
- 6. Whereas drinking drivers (so identified as DWI) were involved in only 10.5 percent of the total number of accidents, drinking was a factor in two of the four fatalities.

WHAT WERE the contributing factors to the overall totals? Numbered among those most prominently identified were (in order of decreasing frequency): a. Followed too close; unable to stop (one fatality), b. failed to yield right-of-way; disregarded traffic control (one fatality), c. drove left of center/improper overtaking/lane usage (two fatalities), d. excessive speed, and e. improper turn signal/no signal.

With respect to item (a), it is interesting to note that, starting with 1986 production cars, the federal government has mandated the incorporation of the center, high visibility "accident avoidance stop light." This new safety feature was intended to reduce the number of tail-end collisions, provided the driver behind is attentive.

In the almost all accident reports,



Orchard Lake and 12 Mile was one of the highest-accident intersections in Farmington Hills in 1985.

the availability and use of occupant restraints (largely seat belts) were documented. In 1984, reports showed 1,661 belts used versus 3,084 not used — a ratio of 1 to 1.86. In a recent Farmington Observer article, Capt. Kenneth Casperson, commanding officer of the

Traffic Services Division, stressed the statewide reduction in both traffic deaths and serious injuries with increased use of seat belts.

Sgt. Blodose has stressed the safety-consciousness of all traffic-related personnel within the Farmington Hills Police Department, but the bottom line for any improvement in overall accident prevention still rests with the individual drivers.

It is up to each individual to observe the cautions needed to avoid becoming a traffic statistic.

obituaries

GLADYS R. PARIS

Mrs. Paris, 79, of Holiday, Fla., died Jan. 21.

Born in Sault Ste. Marie, Mich., Mrs. Paris was a retired school teacher.

Survivors include her sister, Mildred Kemmer, and three nieces.

Services were Jan. 27 at Grand Lawn Chapel with the Rev. James Tuttle of Clarenceville Methodist Church officiating. Burial was in Grand Lawn Cemetery, Detroit.

Arrangements were made by the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington.

MARGUERITE M. HOOD

Mrs. Hood, 90, of Southfield died Jan. 22 in Providence Hospital, Southfield.

Mrs. Hood was a homemaker.

Survivors include her daughters, Pat Dee, Marion Evans and Jane Gugel; sister, Josephine Geist; 11 grandchildren, 26 great-grandchildren and two great-great-grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 24 at the Heene-Sundquist Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Arthur Spafford of Farmington First United Methodist Church officiating. Burial was in Oak Grove Cemetery, Hillsdale, Mich.

FRANK B. TARTER

Mr. Tarter, 77, of Farmington Hills died Jan. 24 in St. Mary Hospital, Livonia.

Born in Oklahoma, Mr. Tarter was an automotive engineer with Ford Motor Co. before retiring after 40 years. He worked for 12 years for Dunage Engineering Co. of Brighton.

Survivors include his daughter, Billie Croll; three brothers and one sister; three grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Services were Jan. 27 at the McCabe Funeral Home, Farmington Hills, with Dr. William R. Ritter officiating. Burial was in Oakland Hills Cemetery, Novi.

DNA A. HILL

Mrs. Hill, 81, of Farmington Hills died Jan. 25 in St. Mary Hospital, Livonia.

Born in Wolverine, Mich., Mrs. Hill was self employed.

Surviving is her brother, Toivo Gustafson.

Services were Jan. 28 in Bethlehem Lutheran Church with the Rev. Jonathan Bomgren officiating. Burial was in Evergreen Cemetery, Detroit. Memorials may be made to Bethlehem Lutheran Church.

Arrangements were made by the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington.

FRANK L. NEWELL

Mr. Newell, 79, of Farmington died Jan. 25 in Botsford Hospital, Farmington Hills.

Born in Ingersoll, Canada, Mr. Newell worked for Ford Motor Co. before retiring.

Survivors include his wife, Sarah (Sally); brother, Carman.

Services were Jan. 29 in First United Methodist Church of Farmington with the Rev. Arthur Spafford officiating. Memorials may be made to the Michigan Heart Association.

Arrangements were made by the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington.

CHARLES W. SMITH

Mr. Smith, 64, of Highland Township, formerly of Farmington, died Jan. 26 in McPherson Hospital, Howell.

Mr. Smith was a machanic. He was a World War II Army veteran.

Survivors include his wife, Phyllis; daughters, Bonnie Mrook and Deborah Jones; son, Charles; brother, Franklin; five grandchildren and three great-grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 30 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, with Dr. James Tuttle of Clarenceville United Methodist Church officiating. Burial was in Glen Eden Cemetery, Livonia.

DALE C. JOHNSON

Mr. Johnson, 66, of Farmington Hills died Jan. 27 in Botsford Hospital, Farmington Hills.

Born in Kansas, Mr. Johnson was an engineer with the Department of Defense for 40 years before retiring.

Survivors include his wife, Phyllis; sons, Barry, Douglas, Gary Shippell and Duane Shippell; daughters, Lisa Johnson, Sheila Page and Madeline Johns; nine sisters and five brothers; 11 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

Services were Jan. 30 at the First Presbyterian Church of Farmington, with the Rev. Glen Ramsey officiating. Burial was in Oakland Hills Cemetery, Novi.

Arrangements were made by the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington.

FRANK CARL SMITH

Mr. Smith, 80, of Farmington Hills died Jan. 27 in Botsford Hospital, Farmington Hills.

Born in Weldman, Mich., Mr. Smith taught in Redford High School for 43 years. He was a member of Detroit Schoolmans Chorus, Masons-Scottish Rite, Elks Club, Michigan Association of Retired School Personnel, and a

retired member of Redford High faculty. Mr. Smith was also a member of Farmington Hills Beautification Commission, Executive Committee of Botsford Inn's Sesquicentennial and a volunteer at the Farmington Community Center. He designed the Beautiful Farmington Hills sign opposite Botsford Inn for the Bicentennial in 1976.

Survivors include his wife, Beatrice; son, Frank; brother, George; two grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 30 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, with Dr. William Ritter of Nardin Park United Methodist Church officiating.

Memorials may be made to Nardin Park United Methodist Church, 29887 W. 11 Mile, Farmington Hills 48018.

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police and fire calls received during the past week:

HOUSE FIRE

About \$500 in structural damage was caused when a homeowner accidentally ignited insulation material with a torch he was using to thaw water pipes Jan. 25.

Drewie Hurley was thawing the pipes in the crawl space of his home at 20914 Renaissance when the fire broke out shortly past noon. Lt. Peter Baldwin of the Farmington Hills Fire Department said.

Hurley was treated at the scene for smoke inhalation, Baldwin said.

JUVENILE DETAINED

A Farmington High School student was detained for alleged possession with intent to deliver marijuana Jan. 29, according to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report.

The 14-year-old was seen passing a bag with 5.2 grams of alleged marijuana to another student by an assistant principal. Public safety officers confiscated and tested the substance, which proved to be marijuana, according to the report.

An Oakland County Probate Court Juvenile Division petition will be filed, alleging violation of the controlled substance act, officers said.

THEFTS REPORTED

Several thefts were reported to local police agencies. Some of them follow:

Five snowblowers valued between \$100 and \$200 were reported stolen from garages between Jan. 15 and 29. Garages on Springfield, Heatherton, Heatherbrook Court, Shawassee and Inkster were looted.

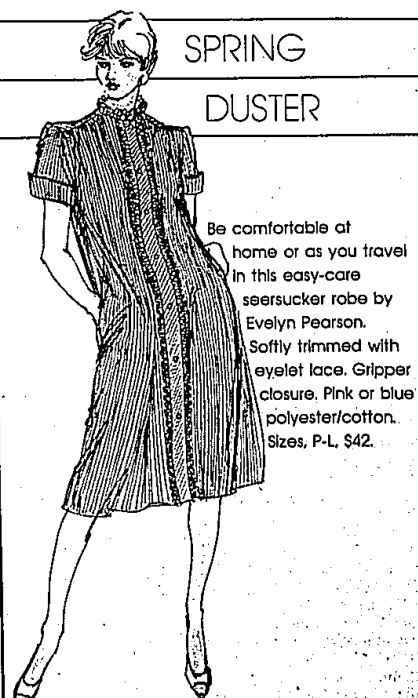
A tank of nitrous oxide valued at \$175 was reported stolen from Kemron, 32740 Northwestern, Jan. 29-29.

A 1983 Cadillac Eldorado valued at \$12,000 was reported stolen from the rear parking lot of Polytech, 32065 Grand River, Jan. 30.

A tool chest and a chainsaw valued at \$500 were reported stolen from a storage shed on South Gateway Drive Jan. 23-29.

A VCR and jewelry valued at \$3,125 was reported stolen from a house on Omenwood Jan. 30.

A handgun valued at \$300 was reported stolen from a house on Omenwood Jan. 30.



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