

Absentee

Balloting has already started

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

Farmington Hills no longer automatically sends absentee voter applications to everyone 60 or older, but the absentee vote has remained a key factor in elections.

In the 1982 gubernatorial election, 5,012 of 23,588 Farmington Hills voters, or 21 percent, cast absentee ballots. In the 1984 city council election, 3,126 of 6,312 voters, or 50 percent, voted absentee.

In the successful September bond issue election for road improvements, 1,001 of 1,768 voters, or 57 percent, voted absentee. In the successful August millage election for parks development, 949 of 1,188 voters, or 80 percent, voted absentee.

Until this year, the city automatically sent absentee voter applications to everyone 60 or older. "Part of the reason for this new policy was the fact that many residents who automatically received the ballot did not care to vote by absentee ballot; therefore, the council did not feel this automatic mailing policy should continue at the taxpayer's expense," City Clerk JoAn Reynolds said.

Some votes are lost by not sending absentee voter applications to everyone 60 or older, but a very small percentage, Reynolds said.

"If you examined all of the facts and figures, you'd see that in the past four years, there has been a steady trend upward in the use of absentee voter ballots," she said. "You'd see them becoming more and more popular."

NEARLY 3,000 Farmington Hills voters have requested absentee ballots for the Tuesday, Nov. 4, general election. The city has 42,812 registered voters. "By the way requests are coming in, it appears the number of absentee voters will hold true to form," Reynolds said.

The options are so generous to vote absentee, few voters lie just to avoid having to go to the polls on Election Day, in Reynolds' opinion.

"The rules aren't that strict. It's pretty hard not to qualify for a ballot if you have a legitimate reason. I think most voters are pretty good about not abusing the privilege," she said.

To vote absentee, voters can request an official application by call-

Clerk plans Saturday hours

Farmington City Clerk Josephine Bushey will have special Saturday hours of 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 1, to accommodate last-minute requests for absentee voter applications.

Absentee ballots are due by 8 p.m. Election Day, Tuesday, Nov. 4.

In emergency cases, voters can

ing or writing their city clerk. They also can send a letter identifying the election they want to vote absentee, the reason why they are requesting an absentee ballot and an address where the ballot should be sent. Signatures are compared with those in the clerk's master voter card file.

Requests to vote absentee are approved if applicants meet at least one of the following six criteria:

- Being at least 60 years of age or older.
- Being absent from the community during poll hours.
- Having a religious reason for not voting on Election Day.
- Having a physical disability that keeps you from going to the polls.
- Being an election inspector in a precinct different from where you vote.
- Being in jail awaiting arraignment or trial.

WHEN ABSENTEE voter ballot applications were mailed to everyone 60 or older, the greatest percentage of absentee voters met the first criterion.

Now, the number of people meeting the first and second criteria is about equal. "In reality, a lot of people going out of town also are over 60. So they can mark either box. That's their choice," Reynolds said.

Reynolds readily agrees that the convenience of voting absentee is a big lure. "And I'm happy to perform the duty," she said.

Still, the increase in absentee ballots has meant increased work for the clerk's office. "Usually, we hire two part-time gals to come in as needed. This year, that's going to end being several times," Reynolds said.

Computers have eliminated some

vote absentee from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Nov. 3, in the clerk's office.

The criteria for qualifying for an absentee voter ballot are listed in the accompanying Farmington Hills story.

Farmington City Hall is at 23600 Liberty.

paperwork. But ballot logging, envelope stuffing and other processing requirements are still done manually.

The deadline to apply to vote by mail for this year's General Election is 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 1. The clerk's office will have special hours that day of 8 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Ballots must be returned to the clerk's office by 8 p.m. Election Day. In emergency cases, voters can vote absentee in the clerk's office from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday, Nov. 3. Farmington Hills City Hall is at 31555 11 Mile.

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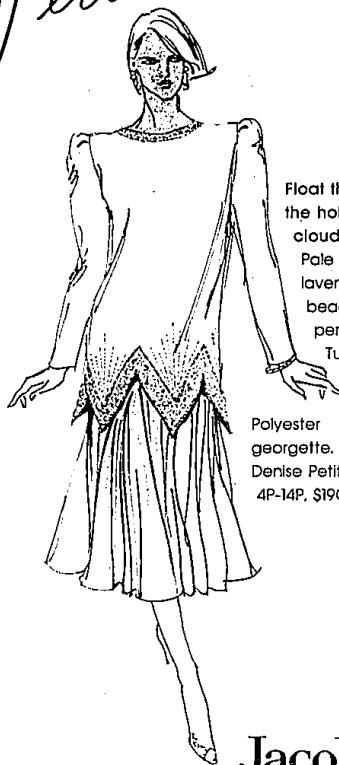
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