

On the shore, Wally Kurzeja (left) and Larry Henderson hold on to safety lines attached to firefighter Bob Ellis and Lt. Tom Shurtleff. The two firefighters on the ice could be pulled to safety with the lines if trouble developed.

FLANDY BORST/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

They look back

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"We loved the house, but we wanted to live in Farmington," said Ellis, who was raised here. "It was easier to move the house to the area that we wanted to live in instead of starting to build a new one from scratch."

"In a way, we're in the middle of all the buildings here in the heart of the city, but we also feel that we're alone in the country because of the setting we're in."

In 1947, after working several jobs, Virchow decided to open his own business — thus Ridings Lawn Mower Service was born.

The lawn mower repair service "was the best thing we've ever done," Virchow said.

From the start, the business has thrived.

"From the moment we started, it just took off," said Virchow, who personally handles the repairs. "Originally, we just started with repairing and selling push mowers, but when electric mowers were introduced, we became even busier."

"We've been very lucky in this business," said Ettie, responsible for the bookkeeping. "The best part of all is that we really love what we're doing."

THE COUPLE, who seem to do everything together, said they have no plans to retire. "I think I'd go nuts if I retired from the business now," Virchow said. "I like keeping busy and the business has become a very important part of our lives."

Like a lot of love stories, the Ridings were introduced at a party back in the '40s and they've been happily married ever since. They have one son and a daughter, who also live in the area.

During their free time, they enjoy visiting their home in Florida. Virchow collects old radios, while Ettie is an avid collector of antique potato mashers.

Firefighters test ice rescue skills

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

A sun-splashed winter's afternoon provided the perfect backdrop for ice rescue training. And the Farmington Hills Fire Department's Special Emergency Response Team (SERT) took full advantage of the opportunity.

Taking turns suiting up in their new cold-water exposure gear, the six SERT members honed their developing ice rescue skills on a pond frozen 8-12 inches thick Jan. 3.

"We concentrated on what it feels to be buoyant in ice-cold water," said Lt. Tom Shurtleff, department training officer. "We also concentrated on how to approach a victim

in icy waters and pull the person to safety without getting yourself in trouble."

The \$700 ice rescue suits are "buoyant and insulated enough to keep you alive for 24 hours in subzero water," Shurtleff said. They're similar to the U.S. Coast Guard's winter gear.

SERT first tried out the suits in water last month in the pool at Oakland Community College's Orchard Ridge Campus.

THE 90 minutes of training on Jan. 3 was SERT's first ice exercise. For most team members, the exercise was the first time they were submerged in icy water.

"You lose heat having to crawl on

your belly and because of splashing, but they keep you fairly warm and prevent rapid hypothermia," said team member Wally Kurzeja.

The suits let rescuers get close to ice accident victims. "You never want to come in contact with victims," Kurzeja said. "You want to get close enough to throw a life line and pull them out."

The rescuer controls the suit's buoyancy level by releasing air out the hood.

Another ice rescue exercise will be held in March when the ice thaws some. Early and later winter, when ice is thinnest, are the likeliest times for ice rescues, Shurtleff said.

The increase in small bodies of water in Farmington Hills, particu-

larly ponds in new subdivisions, prompted purchase of the ice rescue suits last year.

"Fortunately," Shurtleff said, "there has never been need for an ice rescue in Farmington Hills. But with the number of ponds increasing, we never want to put firefighters in an ice rescue without proper training and equipment."

Residents are urged to stay off frozen ponds. "Besides warm temperatures, weak spots may be present due to factors that may not be readily evident by just looking at a body of water," said Deputy Fire Chief Peter Baldwin.

SERT DOESN'T intend to use the suits in pool and open-water rescues. "But you can use one instead of a lifejacket and accomplish the same thing," Shurtleff said.

Started in 1987, SERT provides special responses to special emergencies. "It's designed to handle incidents that require special training or special equipment, like hazardous materials or a special rescue," Baldwin said.

SERT responds to such hazardous incidents as chemical emergencies, gasoline storage tank leaks, fungicide spills and construction cave-ins as well as cold-water rescues.



After the training exercise was over, firefighter Bob Ellis pushed the ice back into the hole so it would freeze over more quickly, reducing the danger of someone falling into the hole.

Interim judge seeks election

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"I'm not going to run against him. He has a good chance to win," said Wayne County assistant prosecutor Marty Krohner, a Farmington Hills resident. Krohner was one of the attorneys who sought Blanchard's appointment to the Farmington bench last April.

"WITH BIPARTISAN support, it's more difficult to beat him. There is no point spending a lot of money on someone you can't beat. I would need a pretty big war chest," Krohner said.

Former Republican Oakland County commissioner Jack McDonald of Farmington Hills, who has previously expressed interest in the Farmington bench, is listed as one of Harris' supporters on campaign literature.

"I've known Fred for a long time. I think he's doing a decent job. If it were someone else (running), I probably would have thrown my hat in the ring," McDonald said.

Already last November, Harris was gaining support in the legal community. Though state law prohibits soliciting financial support until February, the former Oakland County road commissioner sought political support and endorsements from some well-known attorneys, including former Oakland County prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson and former 47th District Judge Hland. Jeffrey Leib, former West Bloomfield Township trustee and a 1988 unsuccessful candidate for Patterson's county prosecutor seat, also is a supporter.

"What I was looking for was the support of my peers who are respected not only in this community but the

entire legal profession," said Harris, a more than 20-year Farmington Hills resident.

Harris' legal career has spanned more than 25 years, including a stint as Wayne County prosecutor from 1963-64. He then went into private practice, specializing in labor and domestic law, as well as work in negligence, administrative law and workers' compensation.

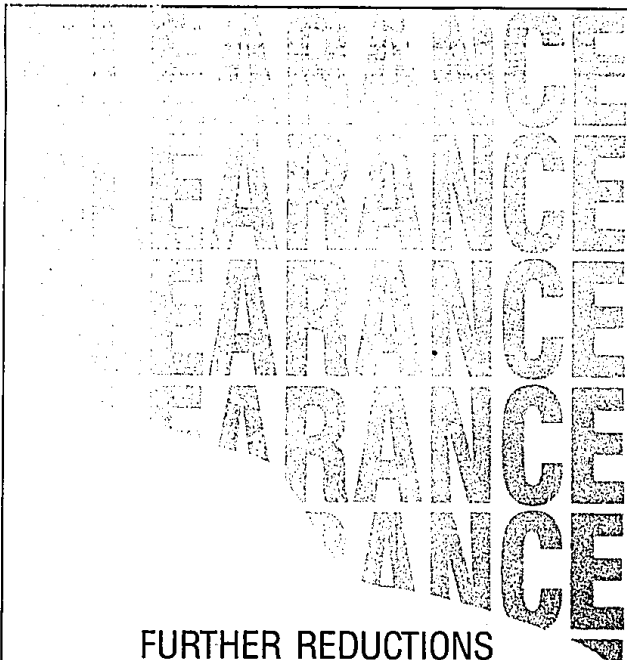
HARRIS SAID he believes he has a pretty good chance of being elected. "I think I'm doing as a judge what the community wants me to do as a judge. I'm working in a fashion that the community, the litigant, lawyers and police expect me to work."

Harris said he intends to continue making the courtroom efficient for clients and attorneys. "As an attorney, the one thing I abhorred most was being ignored to the extent that lawyers languish while the judge had no consideration for their time. The last thing a client needs is to spend money. The important thing to do is get the attorneys in and out of the court."

Confronted with an electorate that often pays little attention to judicial races and issues, Harris said he'll rely on the news media, word-of-mouth and passing literature between friends for success at the polls.

"How do you go out and tell people you're a good judge? You can't," Harris said.

If he was a voter trying to learn about a particular judicial candidate, Harris said he would ask attorneys and court staff: "What do you think of that guy?" And he would ask: "Does he know the law? And does he listen to the clients and attorneys in court?"



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