

Secretary to make retirement an adventure

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government and wondered aloud why she was hired. "Business is very political. But it's a different kind of politics," Balmforth said. "Here, I had to learn politics. There was no one to teach me."

BUT ANYONE who knows Balmforth also knows she's got a handle on city hall, her job and the nuances of city politics. Humor is her well-known tool. She has that touch of humor that acknowledges reality and puts it in its place.

"She has such a keen sense of humor," said Judy Laidlaw, executive secretary in the city manager's office who works with Balmforth. When Balmforth retires, Laidlaw will fill her job.

"If anyone who knows her will fill her one-liners . . . we're going to miss her," Laidlaw said. Balmforth knows her own ways. "Humor says a lot. The only legacy my Irish father had to leave me was

his sense of humor and it has served me well."

Her ability to size up a situation and to know just where she stands — especially as a woman — in the middle of it also has served her well.

"I've had to learn to change as the attitude toward working has changed and women's place in the work force has changed. If you don't change with it, you're going to be unhappy."

At Balmforth's, "I go back before copy machines." And she goes back to the days when earning \$75 a month was not bad, especially for a woman. "I think things are coming a little easier for women in the work world today. I don't think they realize how easy it is now."

BALMFORTH HAS worked most of her life. She moved into city government after a short, subliminal from working in the business world. After her Farmington Hills interview, her late husband Alfred told

Barbara Balmforth has worked with three city managers, 17 mayors and what mathematically works out to 102 city council members in her 17 years at the city administration building at 11 Mile and Orchard Lake roads.

her to take the job. "Now I look up there and say, 'Alfred, are you watching?' He told me to take the government job — people don't work hard."

After 17 years at city hall, Balmforth will tell you that's simply not true. "I don't think people realize how hard people work here and how complex the city is. They really are careful about guarding how much money is spent."

People's attitudes have changed

though. She recalls the days when residents would call and say "you're crooks, you're thieves." That's not so much the case anymore. "Government is more professional now. More professional people are getting into government. I think there is more respect for government services. It pays better and it's more secure."

There's no doubt that Balmforth's knowledge and memory of the city and events at city hall with all its

personalities, would be a good history lesson, if not a great movie. She's watched the city grow from its infancy and recalls well some of the struggles.

"Barbara probably knows as much about this city as anyone," city manager William Costick said. "She's been a real asset."

In fact, there's talk that someone better get her phone number. She's better than most — knows exactly where things are filed, how to find them and how things are to be done.

"SHE'S BEEN here 17 years. Our office won't be the same without her," Laidlaw said. "You don't work at a place this long and go away unmixed."

Balmforth's job means change. Every year a new mayor comes in and every year things are a little different, depending on the crisis of the moment and the personalities.

"It's always been fun. Each city manager has been different. Bill (Costick) by far has been the most

professional. He is bright and very capable. I see how hard he tries to be fair."

Deciding to retire wasn't an easy one for Balmforth. "I'm alone. I felt that I'm not as sharp and it's more stressful to maintain a level of efficiency, which I probably don't have to."

But Balmforth said that's her generation speaking. "I've been saying that when I'm gone, there aren't anymore. I'm a different generation of work ethic," Balmforth said.

She plans to stay in the area, visit family and as a member of Nomads, expects to do a lot of traveling. And she finds it's a perfect time to do all the things she's wanted to do.

"There's so much to learn about. Someone said to me that if you walk into a library, you'll see all the books you'll never have time in your life to read. It makes me realize I don't have that many good years left. My retirement — it's going to be another adventure."

Ex-station chief dies

A longtime firefighter for Farmington Hills, who retired as the chief of Fire Station No. 3, died Jan. 22 of a heart attack.

Robert Noel Brown, 56, who was born in Farmington and lived most recently in Brighton, was taken to McPherson Hospital in Howell where he died at 10:30 a.m.

He grew up in Southfield, just four blocks from the Farmington Township border. He started with the Hills Fire Department in 1958 as a volunteer, eventually leading Station No. 3, and also worked for 36 years for Ford Motor Co. After his retirement in 1977, he moved to Brighton. "He always loved fishing, so he moved right onto a lake," said his son, Robert William Brown.

Funeral services were held Friday, Jan. 25 at the St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Brighton, with interment following at Oakland Hills Cemetery in Novi. He is survived by his wife Kay Brown; his mother Anna R. Brown; sons Robert William Brown and Noel Jackson Brown and daughter Debra Ann Golins; brothers William Brown, Lt. Jack Brown; sisters Janet Chaffin and Laura Lee Longhurst; and eight grandchildren.

obituaries

MARIE E. MAYS

Mrs. Mays, 69, of Southfield, formerly of Farmington, died Jan. 22 in Bedford Villa Nursing Home, Southfield.

Born in Detroit, Mrs. Mays was a retail sales consultant for Hudsons. She was a former member of VFW Auxiliary.

Survivors include her son Robert; daughter, Denise McCarthy; six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 25 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Leonard Partensky officiating. Burial was in Oakland Hills Cemetery, Novi.

Memorials may be made to the Michigan Cancer Society.

WILLIAM EDWARD BRAUN

Mr. Braun, 56, of Farmington died Jan. 22 in St. Mary Hospital, Livonia. Born in Highland Park, Mr. Braun was a photographer for the Detroit Edison Co.

Survivors include his wife, Patricia Ann; sons, Craig and Eric; daughters, Arlene Klaaren and Suzanne Braun; mother, Adelbide Braun; brother, Richard; four grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 26 at the Thayer-Rock Funeral Home, Farmington, with the Rev. Thomas Scherger of the Spirit of Christ Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Novi, officiating. Burial was in Evergreen Cemetery, Detroit.

Memorials may be made to Rosalyn Bryant Memorial Fund for Children, 19410 Middlebelt Road, Livonia 48152.

ROBERT NOEL BROWN

Mr. Brown, 56, of Brighton, formerly of Farmington Hills, died Jan. 22.

Born in Farmington Township, Mr. Brown was with the Farmington Hills Fire Department first as a volunteer in 1958 and retiring as chief of Station 3 in 1977. He also retired from Ford Motor Company after 36 years.

Survivors include his wife, Kay; sons, Robert and Noel; daughter, Debra Ann Golins; brothers, William and Jack Brown; sisters, Janet Chaffin and Laura Lee Longhurst; eight grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 25 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Brighton. Burial

was in Oakland Hills Cemetery, Novi.

JOHN R. WILSON, SR.

Mr. Wilson, 76, of Farmington Hills died Jan. 23 in Providence Hospital, Southfield.

Born in Detroit, Mr. Wilson was a maintenance engineer for the Farmington Public Schools. Prior to Farmington Schools, he was with the maintenance department at Ethyl Corp.

Survivors include his wife, Allie; sons, John R. Jr., and Stephen; daughters, Carol Ann Brahm and Edythe Parry; two brothers and two sisters; nine grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

Services were Jan. 26 at the McCabe Funeral Home, Farmington Hills, with the Rev. David Caudle officiating. Burial was in Oakland Hills Cemetery, Novi.

FRANCIS E. SHERIDAN

Mr. Sheridan, 85, of Farmington Hills died Jan. 24 in Henry Ford Hospital, Detroit.

Born in Detroit, Mr. Sheridan was a retired divisional account manager for Michigan Bell. He was a member of St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church, Monaghan Knights of Columbus and Telephone Pioneers.

Survivors include his wife, Lola; sons, Francis A., Richard, Thomas and Philip; daughters, Kathleen Weber, Jean Scanlan and Mary Hunsberger; two sisters; 30 grandchildren and 10 great-grandchildren. Mass was celebrated Jan. 26 in St. Clare of Assisi Catholic Church, Bural was in Holy Sepulchre Cemetery, Southfield.

Memorials may be made to the L.H.M. Retirement Fund. Arrangements were made by the O'Brien Chapel/Ted C. Sullivan Funeral Home, Novi.

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