

Frugal guy

Drain chief cuts out budget fat

BY RALPH R. ECHEINAW
STAFF WRITER

While Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson wrestles with a \$21 million revenue shortfall, drain commissioner George Kuhn has already pinned his opponent and is currently beating budget savings out of it.

Kuhn realized a long-time dream last June when he began merging the Water and Sewage Operations Division of the Department of Public Works into the Drain Office.

The move transferred 137 employees and a \$5.7 million budget from public works to the drain office and is expected to reduce expenses by hundreds of thousands of dollars as duplicate services are eliminated. For example, each department had inspection, maintenance and Miss Dig units — each doing the same work. Now that the departments are merged, Kuhn is able to get by with far fewer people.

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*George Kuhn
Drain Commissioner*

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Kuhn also benefits from Patterson's early retirement program. The Drain Office, he said, has 62 people eligible for early retirement. At least 16 of those have decided to retire, Kuhn said. Fourteen others are leaning toward it. They have until Nov. 30 to decide.

Between the early retirement savings and the consolidation of departments, Kuhn expects to reduce the Drain Office budget by at least \$1.5 million.

County commission finance committee member Don Jensen, R-Birmingham, said Kuhn has

traditionally done an outstanding job of running an efficient department. Jensen hadn't heard about Kuhn's budget reduction, but said, "I don't doubt that because George Kuhn is that way. He's been very good with the county over the years. He's a fighter."

Since the merger, public works director Dave Ross is left with two divisions, Facilities Engineering and Maintenance & Operations, but still commands one of the county's largest departments.

Kuhn has lobbied for such a merger since he became drain commissioner in 1972, but former county executive Dan Murphy always opposed it. Murphy's replacement, L. Brooks Patterson, liked the idea and said during the campaign last year that he'd like to see it done.



JOHN STORME/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Cut it out: Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn has been socking it to his budget lately, preparing to cut at least \$1.5 million in spending out.



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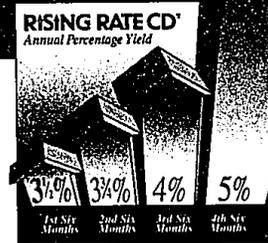
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