Sheriffs credit Nichols for ably handling scandal

BY PAT MURPHY STAFF WRITER

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STAFF WATER

His counterparts in Wayne and
Genesee counties — as well as his
predecessor in Oakland — had
words of understanding for Oakland Sheriff John F. Nichols,
whose department has been
wracked by allegations of corruption and misconduct.

They liked the way he handled
what has been termed the "worst
political corruption in Oakland
County history."

Wayne County Sheriff Robert
A. Fleano and Genesee County
Sheriff Joe Wilson were asked
about problems within the Oakland department last week in separate phone interviews.

Also contacted was Johannes
Spreen who, like Nichols, was
also elected to three terms as
Oakland County's top cop.
Fleano, Wilson and Spreen are
Democrats. Nichols is a Republicon.

Democratis, futures as a con-cion.

Ficano, Wilson and Spreen said they have no first-hand knowl-edge of the inner workings of the Oakland's sheriff department. Furthermore, each said he will not attempt to judge the defend-ants.

But each said he followed de-velonments as reported in the me-

velopments as reported in the me-dia because of professional inter-

Imperfect systems
"No system is perfect," said Ficano, referring to allegations of corruption that lead to the arrests of three command officers and three deputies within Oakland County work release program and the Rochester Hills substation—both supervised by Nichols.
Also arrested ordire this month were the mayor of Rochester Hills, her aide and three former inmates at the work release program.

gram.
Ficano, whose department has similar programs in which inmates can work during the day during their joil sentences, said

Work release time

Work release time
Much of the alteged corruption
within Oakland's work release
program facuses on deputies albowing innates more time away
from jail or their jobs — or consideration for reduced sentences
— in exchange for favors, according to Prosecutor Richard
Thompson.
Inmate Joseph Bergin, who was
also a loan officer at the First Security Savings Bank in Bloomfield Hills, is charged with bribery
for allegefilly trying to arrange a no

field Hills, is charged with bribery for allegedly trying to arrange a no fee, no cost mortgage for sheriff's Sgt. James Coutu, who is charged with nine felonies.

Deputy Arthur Kinney is charged with misconduct in office for allegedly allowing then work release inmate Greg Matriuk to install flooring at his home at dis-counted rates. At the time Motriuk, who is not charged, worked at Rochester Floors and Interiors.

worked at these alleged incidents are part of a pattern of "corruption and favoritism" with-

any bureaueracy could be subject to corruption.

Work programs emount to "day parole" programs under which intended not wear the traditional prison uniforms and come and go secording to individual schedules, he said. Deputies get to know the immates, and there can be the temptation to exchange favors.

"It helppens," Ficano said, "The key is checks and balances within his department lead to the firing of two civilian employees in his work release programs, Ficano said. But otherwise they have been scandal-free, he said. "We watch them, and we audit them."

Wayne County has a traditional work release program in which nonviolent immates who do not have jobs can work on public projects, such as cleaning Hinse Park Drive.

Work release time

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"When I have to be the first the control of the control

former Oakland Sheriff Spreen also credits Nichols with han-dling the alleged corruption ap-propriately. But Spreen was criti-cal of Nichols for not exercising

proprietely. But Spreen was critical of Nichols for not exercising more control.

"You've got to wonder if he (Nichols) was asleep at the switch, or if he is simply too old to be a good manager," said Spreen, who was reached at his retirement home in Marine City.

Although they have much in common, Spreen said he and Nichols aren't close friends. Each served as police commissioner in Detroit before moving to Oaknet County. At one time Spreen had Nichols as an undersheriff before Nichols became police chief in Farmington Hills.

Spreen scoffed at Prosecutor Thompson's characterization of alleged wrongdoing within Nichols' department as the 'worst olitical corruption in Oakland County history,
"There's a lot worse political corruption than that," Spreen said.

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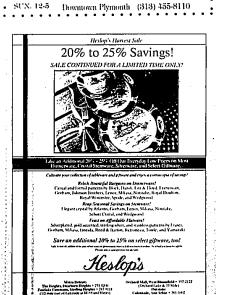
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