

18TH DISTRICT COUNTY COMMISSION RACE

Moffitt stands on experience, budget decisions

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

Oakland County Commissioner David Moffitt finds himself in an unusual position.

The 18th District commissioner backed personnel and budget cuts that he thought would make even the most cost-conscious public servant envious.

Instead, the Farmington Hills attorney finds himself labeled a "tax-and-spend Republican" by his Democratic opponent David Fernquist.

The 10-year commissioner, who succeeded his mother, Lillian, after a 12-year stint, says he welcomes that charge and thinks a campaign from a worthy opponent is a good way to get the issues before the voters.

He'll say he'll stand on his experience and ability to make

tough budget decisions.

"The consumer price index has risen about 3 percent and the SEV (state equalized valuation) has risen only 1.5 percent," he said. "Through buyouts and cuts, we've cut 250 positions and the people we're going to hire will come in with less costly benefits."

Those measures and others have resulted in an excess of about \$7 million for the county. But that money is not just "extra" money that could be returned to taxpayers, said Moffitt, 41.

One million of that will go to fund a new circuit judgeship, which includes the staff and office space to support the badly needed position, he said. Most of the rest of the money will go to replenish the county's fund balance, which had been at

about \$15 million or 5 percent.

Because of the increased fund balance, the county has been able to improve its bond rating and re-finance the bonds at a better interest rate, saving the county about \$5 million, he said.

And that good rating will be needed in the coming years, Moffitt said. The prospect of an addition to the jail, and an increased work load for the county clerk's office because of the implementation of the "Motor Voter Law" that will ease voter registration but require an additional set of records, will keep budget pressures on the commission.

County voters have made it clear that public safety is a priority. For that reason, the county is adding sheriff's deputies, prosecutors and support people

while cutting back on the county's car fleet by 90 cars and turning over the sheriff's department civil division to private agencies.

The civil division serves summonses and other legal documents that do not require a uniformed officer, Moffitt said.

With all the cutting, it's still important to attract good people to the county, he said.

"It's a delicate balance," he said. "We want to attract the best people, but we don't want to compete with the private sector."

As to the charge by Fernquist that he traveled to Hawaii for a National Association of Counties meeting in 1991, Moffitt said he did so because the meeting dealt with environmental issues, including the prospect of an incinerator at the

time. Since then, Moffitt said he has passed on paid trips to California, Las Vegas and Salt Lake City.

"The trouble is, these trips are planned by people who are not going to be that accountable for going to these places," he said. "I thought the Hawaii trip was important because it concerned environmental issues important to the county at the time."

Despite the tough budgetary times, Moffitt said the county's prosperity will continue.

"We're the economic engine for the state," he said. "We have a larger economy than 13 states."

And with a strong economy and a mix of industry and a solid residential base, Oakland County should continue to prosper.



David Moffitt

Fernquist: County needs fiscal responsibility

BY BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITER

David Fernquist admits his decision to run for the 18th Oakland County Commission seat came at an unusual time as he was in his wife Sheri Katzman's hospital room soon after the birth of their son Daniel this summer.

Fernquist, a Farmington Hills Democrat who has never run for office, would have to take on incumbent David Moffitt, who has not been seriously challenged since his first primary win in 1984. But good friend Mark Stuckloff, who is married to 15th State Senate candidate Vicki Barnett, prevailed on Fernquist, 30.

As he's campaigned, the stockbroker said he's picked up support and found that the job is one he'd love to take on.

"I think it makes sense. I hear it is that county government is not that accessible to people, that it's not that well-covered in the media," he said.

That, among other things, is something he would change. But getting commission meetings televised and getting the issues before voters are only the beginning.

Fernquist said that, because of Republican control of the body for more than 20 years, it remains partisan and, at times, ineffective. In fact, the Democrat who calls himself a fiscal conservative and a social moderate, said when it comes to county government, the "tax and spend Republicans" are wasting county resources.

Fernquist said that although at least 40 percent of the county's voters are Democrats, few are appointed to boards and commissions by the county.

At the same time, the county has endorsed a "sprawl to the stars" philosophy of uncontrolled growth, while roads and services lag and taxes continue to rise.

The county commission voted Oct. 13 to keep the county's tax rate at 4.48 mills - the highest

allowable under the Headlee Tax Amendment - while the county has a surplus and plenty of areas where cuts could be made, he said.

Fernquist said the county's road commission should be put under direct control of the commission, as it is in Wayne County. That would improve accountability.

The fleet the county uses for its executives and department heads is costly and unnecessary. Those officials could use their own cars and be reimbursed for mileage, he said. In addition, officials could car pool for longer trips, he added.

Commissioners have also been willing to spend on travel while telling voters that the budget is tight, Fernquist said, adding that his opponent had traveled to Maui, Hawaii, for a National Association of Counties meeting in 1991, at taxpayer expense.

"If I travel, I go on my own

back," he said, adding that commissioner salaries of \$22,565 are too high.

In the meantime, he said, the county ranks as the highest in per-capita tax dollars going to Lansing, while being the 79th out of 83 counties in per-capita dollars coming back to the county from the state.

"I think it shows that they are ineffective at bipartisan lobbying at the state level," he said.

Fernquist also sees inefficiencies in the county's mental health program and said that the 1990 solid waste plan, which was not implemented, itself was a waste, costing taxpayers \$15 million with nothing to show.

He said Kent County's mental health system is more efficient, and is one Oakland County should look at.

Fernquist said 28 percent of the staff at the sheriff's department had been cut even though crime is the biggest concern for county residents. At the same

time, the county jail has a recidivism rate of 70 percent.

"There is little in the way of job training or rehabilitation," he said. "So these people wind up back in jail."

Fernquist said the county prosecutor's office should push for tougher sentences for violent criminals, and training and other programs for non-violent offenders to make room at the jail for the "three strikes and you're out" repeat criminals.

Fernquist said the 18th District, which includes northern Farmington Hills, does not get its fair resources for its court, the 47th District. At the same time, Farmington Hills taxpayers help foot the bill for the county sheriff's department even though it has its own police department. Some other communities in the county rely almost totally on the Sheriff's department, he said.

"We've got to start getting our fair share," he said.



David Fernquist

Drinking drivers under 21 to face sobering new law

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

Drivers who are under 21 and drinking will get no break under a new state law.

Farmington Public Safety Department will drive that point home, supplying Farmington High with posters and pamphlets to explain the state's "Zip, Zero, Zilch" campaign.

Anyone under 21 who has a blood alcohol level over .02 will result in a license suspension and four points on their driving record. The new statute goes into effect Tuesday, Nov. 1.

Farmington area police officials think it makes sense. A blood-alcohol content of .10 percent is considered above the legal limit to drive. That standard applies to those under 21, too.

"As it stands now, our officers can stop someone under 21 at 2:30 in the morning and that person can have a blood-alcohol level of .06," said Farmington

Public Safety Deputy Director Mike Wiggins.

"The officer can say, 'You're OK to drive home,' which is contrary to other laws which prohibits people under 21 from buying, possessing or drinking alcohol. . . . It just doesn't follow."

There are fewer drunken driving offenses since stiffer laws have been passed. Young people need to be educated, though.

A person under 21 is nearly twice as likely to die in an alcohol-related crash as someone older, according to statistics from the Secretary of State.

While they only represent 11.3 percent of the driving population, those ages 16-20 accounted for 14 percent of crashes involving alcohol.

One alcoholic drink can put a teen near or over the .02 mark, police said. Blood alcohol levels factor in body weight and time of consumption.

"For a relatively small, 100-

pound woman, one drink would put her over .02," said Sgt. Ray Cranston, who is Farmington Hills police traffic supervisor.

Wine taken during Communion or eating food cooked in brandy could push the .02 level. The body discharges .015 percent alcohol an hour, though.

Police also take two tests: one at the scene and one at the station. The test done later is the one admitted for evidence.

"The whole thing is they should not have a .02 level," Cranston said, "especially if you think about the .015 percent that leaves the body per hour."

The new law also calls for a two-point civil infraction to be assessed when a driver refuses a preliminary breath test.

Minors with no prior alcohol convictions will have their license suspended 30 to 90 days, up to 45 days of community service; and up to a \$250 fine if they violate the new law.

Goodfellows need helping hand to give needy a helping hand

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
STAFF WRITER

More than a handful of shopping days are ahead before Christmas. The Farmington Goodfellows are already thinking of those who will likely need a helping hand.

The group held its kickoff luncheon for this year's drive Wednesday at the Masonic Temple Plaza.

Farmington Goodfellows raised \$35,000 last year. The amount exceeded expectations.

For safety reasons, the group abandoned its annual post Thanksgiving street newspaper sale. Contributions were generated through a mail campaign instead.

A Livonia paper seller was seriously injured, prompting the

change in strategy.

"It seems we kind of started from scratch, and we didn't know how it would turn out," said Goodfellows spokesman Jim Stevens.

Some 275 families received help last year through the Goodfellows and Adopt-a-Family. Also, 171 seniors were served by the program, which was started by the Farmington Exchange Club.

A similar mailing will go out to 38,000 Farmington area residents this year around Thanksgiving. Another 2,800-piece mailing will go to businesses.

All will be asked to contribute money to the program, which has helped Farmington area families for 60 years.

"The thing I like about it (mailing) is it gets information out about the Goodfellows to those people didn't know much about us before," Stevens said. "It has worked out well."

The Goodfellows are looking for volunteers to help its drive.

Farmington Hills firefighter Bob Repley is volunteer coordinator. Those interested can call the Farmington/Farmington Hills Chamber of Commerce office, 474-3440.

The group is also looking for a place to store clothes and food. A 10 to 15,000 square foot area is needed.

"At this point, we don't have any building to work out of," said Goodfellows spokesman Dick Tupper.

SAKS

LAST WEEK! A SAKS EXCLUSIVE 7-PIECE GIFT FROM LANCÔME, PARIS

"Parisian Perspectives," yours* with any Lancôme purchase of 17.50 or more:

Rénégie Yeux Anti-Wrinkle and Firming Eye Creme; Dual Finish Versatile Powder Makeup (Matte Buff); Rouge Absolu Hydrating Long Lasting Lip Colour (full size); Blush Subtil Delicate Powder Blush (Cedar Rose); Définitions High Definition Mascara (Black); and Bi-Facil Double-Action Eye Makeup Remover.

*all tucked in a chic black patent cosmetics case. Cosmetic Collections.

*WHILE SUPPLIES LAST.

DEFINING STYLE
SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

The Somerset Collection, Big Beaver at Coolidge, Troy. 843-9000. Weekdays 10 to 6; Saturday 10 to 6; Sunday 12 to 6. Fairlane Town Center, Dearborn. 238-3070. Weekdays 10 to 6; Saturday 10 to 7; Sunday 12 to 6.