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ROCHESTER HILLS***"Ask Your Neighbors About Us"***FINANCING
AVAILABLE****Daily 10-8
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STAFF WRITER

The architect behind Oakland County Sheriff's proposed aviation unit flew helicopters in Vietnam and has almost 20 years of flying experience with the Michigan National Guard.

Coordinated efforts between a helicopter in the sky and police units on the ground will save lives and money, according to Sgt. Kerry Krupsky who was an army chief warrant officer prior to joining the sheriff's department in 1975.

As the department's only certified helicopter pilot, Krupsky is gathering the data needed by commissioners as they review the proposal from Sheriff John F. Nichols for an aviation unit.

"We have other deputies who are certified pilots," Krupsky said, "and it will be relatively easy to train (and certify) them for helicopters."

Krupsky, a 1967 graduate of North Farmington High School, was also part of the county's aviation unit in the late 1970s, before it was disbanded because of excessive costs and questionable performance.

"We had army surplus helicopters," he said. "But they were



STAFF PHOTO BY PAT MURPHY

Pilot: Sgt. Kerry Krupsky, who has more than 20 years of flying experience is researching the helicopter unit.

down much of the time because we couldn't get the parts."

That experience — and feedback from other police departments — has convinced Krupsky that any number of civilian aircraft would be more suitable for county usage in terms of reliability and cost efficiency.

Krupsky envisions routine helicopter patrols in addition to the aircraft being on-call as needed.

"An aviation unit is never cheap," Krupsky said. But how can officials measure public safety in terms of dollars, he asked.

Helicopters have demonstrated value in routine police matters like crowd control, the search for lost or missing persons and apprehending fleeing felons.

Krupsky cites the recent incident in Dearborn involving a prisoner who stole a police car. During the subsequent high-speed chase, a 24-year-old housewife, an innocent bystander, was killed.

"With a helicopter, police could have discontinued the chase at ground level and let the helicopter follow the suspect," said Krupsky. "When he stopped, the helicopter could call in the ground units. There would be no need for a high speed chase."

Helicopters equipped with a "flir" (forward looking infrared) unit enable the operator to detect the presence of a human body in total darkness, Krupsky noted, making it invaluable for rescue operations.

Flir can also detect heat escaping through a broken window, he said, making it possible for the helicopter operator to help detect burglaries or forced entries.

Chopper from page A7

D-Huntington Woods, said commissioners appear to be split on the aviation unit. "Some think it's a 'pie in the sky' proposal," she said. "But others think we should give the sheriff whatever he needs for effective law enforcement."

"Bob Selfort (public safety director of Oak Park) thinks a helicopter would be a big help for law enforcement agencies," said Jacobs, chair of the Democratic caucus on the board of commissioners.

Other area police agencies have also gone on record in favor of Oakland's getting a helicopter to support local police depart-

ments.

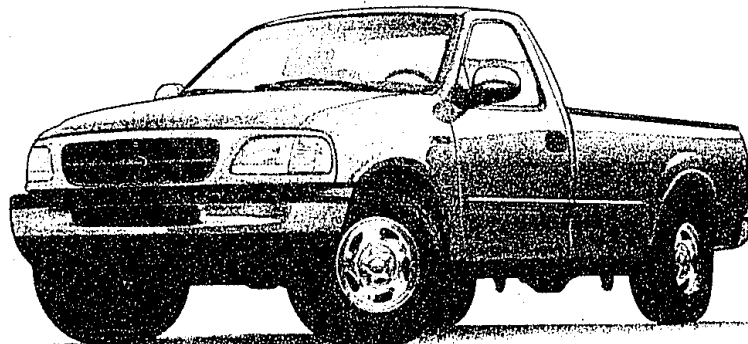
Martin J. Bledsoe, assistant chief of police in Farmington Hills, said a helicopter could eliminate dangerous, high-speed chases. But the helicopter would have to be readily accessible and efforts with officers on the ground would have to be coordinated.

Farmington Hills police have occasional chases, Bledsoe said, and a helicopter would enable squad cars to back-off high speed pursuit as the sheriff's unit took over in the sky. "It would reduce danger to residents and reduce our liability," he said. "But I'm just speaking for our depart-

ment."

Lt. Matthew Hogan, commander of the state police post in Brighton, said other police agencies — like his — would find a county helicopter helpful for other reasons. "Some departments might find helicopters invaluable for transporting prisoners or locating missing or lost persons," he said.

In the 1970s, Oakland had three Army-surplus helicopters under then-Sheriff Johannes Spreen. Aviation operations were discontinued, however, because of the difficulty — and cost — of maintenance.

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