Election *from page A1*

It's not easy.

"We have a hard time getting workers, just like Farmington," said Kathy Dornan, clerk for the city of Farmington Hills. "With the way of the world now, both mom and dad are working. It's hard to get the stay-at-home mom."

Finding reliable workers is one thing. Keeping them active is another. With senior citizens doing the bulk of the precinct work, issues such as illnesses, surgeries and even "snow bird" vacations dwindle the ranks. And then, there are families.

This year, for the first time since 1990, Mary Jo Tinham, 70, won't work elections for the city of Farmington.

"I'm taking care of my grandchildren," said Tinham, a retired teacher in Farmington Public Schools.

Tinham said she'll miss the work, even though it can be frustrating. "It's a satisfying job. You feel you're doing something worthwhile. But it's aggravating at times."

She recalled insensitive comments made by voters during one particularly slow election day.

"A few people came in and said, 'What a plush job. Do you get paid for sitting down all day?'" said Tinham. " ... That (inactivity) hangs over your head, too."

What those people didn't see was the frantic pace at the end of the election. After the polls close, trained precinct workers must make sure everything is wrapped up in proper fashion before vote tallies can be certified and sent on to the county.

"There are so many checks and counter-checks that have to be correct," Tinham explained. "It does get hairy at that point."

And that is the scene when cities have an adequate number of workers. No one wants to consider the alternative.

Dornan said there are 30 precincts in Farmington Hills, requiring 200 people for a typical city council election. For a presidential election, 350 workers would be needed to do the job. In Farmington's six precincts, Cantrell said 35 to 45 workers are needed "depending on the size of the election."

So far, enough people have volunteered to work past elections in both cities, there is a built-in problem. Some senior citizen volunteers tire quicker than younger ones and, perhaps, can't do as many physical tasks such as lifting tubs of ballots.

It means voters could deal with tired, perhaps surly precinct workers who toil without a respite from 6 a.m. until late at night. That makes for a long, difficult day for people of any age, let alone the elderly. The daily stipend of $80-$105 isn't much for the trouble, but Dornan said, "it's a nice way to make a little extra spending money."

Acerbating matters is the fact that – like Tinham – more veteran precinct workers are either retiring or becoming increasingly less active. And, others on the list can't always be counted upon. Both clerks said the goal is to get more folks on rosters than are needed.

"Some of those individuals who have worked so many years are talking about hanging up their hats in the near future," Cantrell said. "So we want to bring in new workers while they still have the opportunity" to learn from the veterans.

Among those vets is Eleanor Peterson, who is entering her 35th year as a precinct worker in the city of Farmington. She chairs Precinct 5, based out of Longacre Elementary School.

"I feel like I'm supporting my country," Peterson said. "This is my way of doing it. I'm very proud of the election process, and I want to keep it good and honest."

Cantrell and Dornan said the optimum situation would be for younger professionals to join the ranks. But that would require that their employers give them the necessary time off.

"It's really important," Dornan said. "Election workers should be like jury duty. It seems we should be able to call on people, 'You've been selected to work in the November election.'"

Concurring was Cantrell. "I have to think there are employers out there who are civic-minded enough that they'd grant time off to someone to work as an election inspector."

And, from Peterson, "I would hope people would feel it's not just a paid job. It's our civic duty. It's really a labor of love."

Another option is recruiting high school government class students, thanks to recent state legislation. "But they would have to work in the precinct when people over (age) 18 were working," Dornan emphasized.

Whether the workers are younger or older, employed or not, Tinham agreed that "Generally, it would help to have more people."

Hodges *from page A1*

going on. It was the most integrated process I've ever seen in my life," Hodges said. "Both blacks and whites were stealing."

During the unrest, Hodges came up with the idea of a corporation adopting a school. Such partnerships are commonplace today.

He convinced Michigan Bell and school officials at Northern High to join in a partnership. The purpose wasn't to pour dollars into the troubled school, but provide job training and technical assistance to the predominately African-American student body.

Students prospered – being able to look beyond the expectations of working in a factory (at best) or having no job at all – while teachers became energized.

Partnerships proliferated

Bell took on 18 partnerships with schools. Other companies followed. Chrysler adopted Northwestern High, while Proctor & Gamble formed a partnership with an entire Cincinnati suburb.

As metro director for Plans for Progress program, Hodges helped procure an unprecedented 12,705 summer jobs for Detroit teens. He also served as general counsel to New Detroit. In the midst of his urban affair efforts, Hodges never entertained political aspirations. He ran for school board – and lost – in the former Nankin Township where he lived for 10 years before it was incorporated as the city of Westland.

He and his wife Beatrice have lived in Farmington Hills since 1994, residing the previous 30 years in northwest Detroit near Sinai Hospital.

From city to suburbs, Hodges remains involved. He immediately joined the Farmington/ Farmington Hills Multicultural/ Multiracial Community Council, where he is on the steering committee.

"I find it an amazing organization for this reason: The cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills, by virtue of having this council, are way out ahead of other communities in the country," Hodges said.

Race remains at the forefront of debates, especially affirmative action.

Hodges supports affirmative action and helped administer a form of it as executive director of the Michigan Fair Employment Practices Commission from 1956-63. Hodges earned his juris doctorate degree from Wayne State University and is a member of the Michigan State Bar.

Things were different then. For instance, no blacks worked for a well-known cab company at the time.

When the company ordered to hire minorities, Hodges said Detroit police stopped numerous taxi cabs, thinking they were stolen because blacks were behind the wheel.

He lets out a slight laugh.

"It's humorous now and perhaps even humorous then, but it gives you a flavor of the way things were," he said.

Affirmative on hiring

The term affirmative action has become bastardized through the years, he said. When the term was coined in the early 1960s, Hodges said it meant that companies ought to be doing more to hire blacks and other minorities.

"Part of affirmative action is to reach out and encourage people to come in (and apply for jobs)," Hodges said. "Now affirmative action is not this: It is not giving blacks preference over other people. It is not hiring quotas.

"When it was discussed originally many years ago, it meant having targets and goals to shoot for."

In terms of goals and targets, Hodges is merely content to enjoy his senior years. He's taking classical guitar classes at Schoolcraft College. He is tangling with the computer and he used to be involved in Tai Chi, which was curtailed when he came down with pneumonia in October.

"I still think I think young," he said.

Hodges is most proud of his nearly 25-year affiliation with Botsford Hospital, which he calls "the family."

During his stay at the hospital, Hodges said he was given first-class treatment. He doesn't believe that's because he is chairman of the hospital board, either.

A dietitian – who is also black – doted on him as she did all her patients, he said. Hodges could tell she was puzzled, though.

"She couldn't see a black man as the head of the hospital," he said and added later, "It gives you the flavor of the changes that have been made."