

# Violence at work can be prevented

## Telltale signs are key

While there's a tendency to laugh off the threat of someone "going postal" at the workplace, it's a nervous chuckle.

"It's a sad state of affairs when we have to be here and have a seminar on workplace violence," said Marilyn Knight, a social worker who addressed the topic for 60 or so business people Tuesday.

Farmington Hills police sponsored the seminar as part of its crime prevention series at the William Costick Center. West Bloomfield Township police and the state's Department of Consumer and Industry Services co-sponsored the seminar.

Knight is director of Southfield-based Center for Workplace Violence Prevention.

Workplace violence and "going postal" only recently crept into everyday business lexicon. That's mainly because of highly-publicized incidents such as the Ford Wixom Plant shooting and the Dearborn and Royal Oak post office tragedies.

Part of the problem is society's glorifying violent acts, Knight said. To prove her point, she asked the audience how many members knew Amy Fisher without disclosing she was woman who shot the wife of Joey Buttafuoco. Many raised their hands.

Then Knight inquired how many people could tell her who was the teacher of the year or the last American to win the Nobel Peace Prize. There was silence.

In 85 percent cases of workplace violence, there were clear and loud warnings, Knight said.

"Contrary to what is portrayed in the media, people do not just snap," Knight said. "People don't just wake up and say, 'Nothing is going on in my life. I think I'll pick up a 9-millimeter gun and pop off a few people.' That just doesn't happen."

Fear, frustration and hopelessness fuel such behavior. Those reveal themselves in a variety of ways: anger, threats and physical confrontation.

The key is to identify the signs, get as much information and act accordingly.

Knight related the case of Larry, a factory worker who is a loner, the source of teasing by colleagues and is openly hostile to a female coworker who received a promotion ahead of him.

After breaking the audience into six groups, members assess whether Larry is a lit wick ready to explode. Many agree he is, especially after more details are

## How to manage verbal outbursts

- Try to remain calm and do not overreact.
- Recognize that person is upset at the problem and you are the symbol of that problem.
- Letting someone ventilate often avoids physical violence.
- Express concern after ventilation and ask how you can help.
- Do not get defensive.
- Do not overreact.
- Avoid power plays or threats.
- Avoid arguing.
- Avoid rushing a solution.
- Be patient, calm and attentive.

-Center for Workplace Violence Prevention

revealed about his life.

He was abused as a child, read books entitled "Men Who Love to Kill Women" and boasted about his gun collection. Knight asked how they'd view Larry's tendency toward violence after hearing that.

"Call 911," a man in the audience said.

But the most chilling revelation is when audience members learn Larry is real.

In 1993, Larry Jason walked into the Dearborn post office with a .38 caliber revolver and seriously wounding another before turning the gun on himself.

His rage centered on the woman, whom he shot twice in the head and once in the back. She survived.

In a videotaped interview, the victim told how she and other employees were fearful of Jason. She even wrote a letter to postal authorities, who deemed the employee wasn't a threat.

If there are warning signs, employers need to act if only for their own protection.

"If you know and don't do anything, you may be liable," said Knight, who noted the Wall Street Journal termed workplace violence as the "litigation issue of the '90s." She later showed a slide with a bird neck deep in sand.

"Remember when you stick your head in the sand, notice what's sticking up there unprotected."

It's important for employers to have a comprehensive action plan and stick to it, Knight said. That doesn't necessarily mean immediate dismissal, either.

"You no longer have control of a person who is no longer your employee," she said.

A firing might be the catalyst for an unstable person to act out on threats. By then, it's too late.

The message of early intervention wasn't lost on many human resources and security personnel who attended the seminar.

"Hearing some of the phrases that (Knight) was using are some of the things that I've heard before ... like 'Oh, that's just Larry. That's just the way he acts,'" said Jennifer Lewkowski, a human resources worker for Target department stores.

"Well, maybe he shouldn't act that way."

Thomas E. O'Hara, chairman and co-founder of the National Association of Investors Corporation (NAIC), will receive the 1998 William Tyndale College Lifetime Achievement Award.

O'Hara will be recognized at the Farmington Hills-based annual scholarship banquet, Saturday, May 2, at the Westin Hotel in Detroit.

In announcing the award, Tyndale president Dr. James C. McHann said: "We are honored to give this award to such a distinguished and accomplished individual."

"Tom O'Hara is a man after whom we and our students can pattern our lives; he exemplifies the ideal of the Christian gentleman."

O'Hara founded the National Association of Investors Corporation in 1951 to help organize investment clubs throughout the country.

NAIC, based in Madison Heights, has nearly 36,000 member clubs and more than a half-million individual members throughout the United States.

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# City stubs out cigar store's seating



Mary Bush

A cigar-store owner's plan for outside seating went up in smoke Monday night when the Farmington City Council unanimously rejected his request for a variance on a city ordinance.

The request by Tom Petros, owner of Cigar Emporium in the Downtown Farmington Center, was denied because his business

has no inside seating.

Council members cited Zoning Code Section 35-161, which permits outdoor seating in the city's central business district only when it is also part of an establishment's primary business.

Thus, Petros' neighbors, Starbucks Coffee and Dugwood Deli, are permitted outside seating.

Council members also expressed concern about increased sidewalk congestion and said granting such a variance also would "open up a can of worms" by prompting similar

requests from other nonrestaurant businesses.

Mayor Mary Bush assured Petros that, "We value you in the community. You offer a unique business in the downtown area. Don't take this personally."

"We've heard good comments" about the store and "we're sure you'll continue to do well," she said.

Petros had proposed up to four round tables and eight chairs on the sidewalk outside his store for cigar smokers. The seating most likely would have

been removed if the smoking engendered complaints.

Nevertheless, Petros took the rejection good-naturally. "No hard feelings, no harm done," he told a reporter Tuesday morning.

He said he still plans to expand by leasing additional space next door at 33181 Grand River for beer and wine sales.

"It will not be a party store," he said. It will carry mostly imported beers and fine wines.

Pending receipt of a state liquor license, it should be open by June, he said.

# 6 candidates file for 2 seats on Clarenceville board

The Clarenceville School District has fielded a field of six candidates for two seats this June, one a four-year term and the other a two-year term. All are residents of Livonia.

Candidates have until 4 p.m. today to withdraw from the race. The Clarenceville district serves students in Livonia, Redford Township and Farmington Hills.

Incumbent Gary Garrison of St. Francis Street faces two challengers for his four-year seat in the June 8 school board election.

Garrison's challengers are John Shaw of Porshing and Brian Silvernail of Fremont.

Also in Clarenceville, two candidates have filed for the two years remaining on the seat vacated by Gary Gasser, who resigned in March. Scouring off in that race are Bryan Bentley of Brentwood and Crystal Waack of Angling.

The Clarenceville race widened with Gasser's resignation and with incumbent Linda Brandemihl's announcement that she would not seek another

term after serving 12 years on the board.

Gasser's resignation created the opening for a two-year term, as he had two years remaining on his four-year term.

Clarenceville trustees appointed Matria Neal, a former school board challenger, to Gasser's seat until after the school election. Neal did not file petitions to run.

Seeking to serve out the rest of Gasser's term are Bentley, an independent distributor for Lit-

tle Debbie Snack Cakes, and Waack, manager of American House retirement facility in Farmington Hills and a licensed nursing home administrator.

Challenging Garrison for a four-year term are Shaw, a teacher in Walled Lakes Schools, and Silvernail, a technician with Phillips Service Industry.

Brandemihl previously has said she announced her decision ahead of the April 6 filing date so residents would know there would be one less incumbent in this year's school board race.

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## Tyndale College to recognize investor with lifetime award

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He was a public director of the

New York Stock Exchange (1973-75) and the first chairman of the Exchange's Individual Investors Advisory Committee (1987-89). Internationally, he was one of the founders of the World Federation of Investors. He served as chairman of that organization and is now an advisor.

O'Hara is also past president and director of the Financial Analysts Society of Detroit and past director of the National Investor Relations Institute, Detroit Chapter.

He has been recognized with the "Distinguished Service Award in Investment Education," the 1987 "Distinguished Alumni Award," Wayne State University School of Business Administration; and the 1987 "Rosalman Award," National Investor Relations Institute.

O'Hara holds a bachelor's degree in business administration from Wayne State University. He and his wife, Eleanor, live in Bloomfield Hills.

William Tyndale College in Farmington Hills is an accredited, non-denominational four-year Christian liberal arts college offering 20 Associate and Bachelor degree programs, including an accelerated degree program.