

Top cop

Detroit spirit powered retiring Hills asst. chief

There's no truth to the rumor 1-696 was built to provide easier access for Detroit police officers to find new jobs in Farmington Hills. Guys like Richard Murphy only made it seem that way.

The Farmington Hills assistant police chief, who is retiring this week after 32 years in law enforcement, is one of several transplanted Detroit officers who sought tranquil suburban life from the gritty urban grind.

After a few weeks of serenity, Murphy yearned for stress and nearly returned to his old beat.

"When I first came out here you were chasing loose horses and if someone's water pump broke, you'd try to help them," said Murphy, 57, who joined the Farmington Hills department in 1970. "It was completely different."

Amid his suburban surroundings, the hard-nosed and street savvy exterior of the big city cop didn't fade; Murphy adapted and, in many areas, excelled.

He rose through the ranks of sergeant, inspector, lieutenant and assistant chief. He's helped crack numerous cases as incidents grew along with the city's population, and he is credited with establishing the department's crime prevention bureau.

Close view of riots

In retrospect, Murphy said, coming to Farmington Hills

"undoubtedly, was the best move I ever made."

His initial reluctance to settle in suburban law enforcement is understandable.

As a patrol officer in the 10th Precinct, he watched the 1967 Detroit riot ignite before him. The Detroit Redford High graduate remembers being surrounded by flames with helicopters swirling overhead and National Guard tanks rumbling down the street.

Rioters threw rocks and, in some cases, shot at firefighters who were trying to put out the flames.

"The best way to describe it is you know how the Christians felt," Murphy said. "We were at Central High and everywhere you looked there were flames. You couldn't believe it was real."

Murphy disputes history, which contends the police raid on a blind pig fueled the civil unrest. Outside agitators played a role, he said.

In weeks leading up to the outbreak, police saw a license plate from California, New York and Illinois in the neighborhood. Spray painted slogans also denoted which businesses were black-owned.

"We knew something was going to happen a month before. We didn't know it was going to be a riot," he said. "The riot just happened to be a spark. It was

organized."

Yet amid the neighborhood implosion, Murphy remembers how women from the predominantly black area came to the 10th Precinct and helped feed beleaguered officers. "There were a lot of contradictions," he said. That Detroit spirit still resonates in the suburban police officer. He went for a drive recently in his old neighborhood in the Brightmoor area. "My house was gone," he said. "It was sort of like you lost your childhood."

Big on determination

Murphy went from childhood to the Army and then to the Detroit police.

At first, he was a quarter-inch too short to become a Detroit officer. He even resorted going to chiropractor in an attempt to stretch his 5-foot 9 1/2-inch frame.

After scoring well on the entrance exam, he received a commissioner's waiver to attend the police academy.

"The night I graduated from the academy, I met the commissioner," Murphy said. "I was a foot taller than he was."

Such irony isn't lost on the street cop, who saw his share of homicides, rapes and other violent crimes. That experience served him well in Farmington Hills.



Longtime partners: Farmington Hills Assistant Police Chief Richard Murphy has worked closely with Sgt. Tim Swanson, in background, for 24 of his 28½ years in the city's police department.

"heavy discussions." But the chief added, "He's a person I could depend on for advice."

Murphy's counsel didn't always have to be solicited, either.

"He's Irish; I'm Irish. We have misdeeds," Murphy said. "He has said, 'OK, I've listened to what you've had to say, but we're going to do it this way.'"

"I'm not a 'yes man.' He's not a guy who wants 'yes men' around."

In weeks leading up to his retirement, Dwyer has popped into Murphy's office in the Detective Bureau to tell him it's not too late to reconsider. The

assistant chief has made up his mind, though.

Murphy and his wife of 10 years, Sherry, who works with the Oakland Intermediate Schools, will move to Bavard County, N.C. He'll be in the Smoky Mountains, which he fell in love with as a 15-year-old visiting them.

His desk is clean and empty boxes sit in the corner awaiting the move. Detectives peer in his office to update him on numerous cases, including a rash of anti-Semitic graffiti.

"You hate to give all this up," he said. "It's bittersweet."

New hockey center to open

Suburban Hockey will host its Grand Opening celebration and Open House from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, June 20, at the new Suburban Training Center in Farmington Hills. The public is welcome and admission is free.

The 70,000-square-foot facility

features two NHL-sized ice surfaces, pro shop, skate sharpening, snack shop and a full-service fitness center.

Registration for full youth hockey leagues and summer instructional programs will also take place at the open house.

Hills land deal cements future housing

A land deal will further ensure a stretch of Orchard Lake between 11 Mile and 12 Mile roads remains a haven for single family residential housing rather than offices, Farmington Hills city officials said.

A developer is buying 9 acres—known as the McMahon property—from the city in order to build a 21-unit condominium development. Windmill Ridge Development Company is paying

\$735,251 for the land, which is east of Orchard Lake and south of Rockshire.

The city acquired the land after a successful court battle against another developer, who wanted to build offices.

Three developers submitted bids for the property, proposing housing options from apartments to multiple family condominiums to be built on the site.

For instance, Bestack offered

\$1.2 million for the property to build a 100-unit apartment complex while Phoenix Land Development bid \$1.15 million to construct a 96-unit attached townhouse condominium.

Other builders were eyeing the outcome of the development for other reasons, city officials said.

Property on the west side of Orchard Lake is owned by real estate speculators who are waiting to see what is going to happen with the Orchard Lake front.

"This is the best way to protect residential zoning, not only in the area but up and down Orchard Lake," Mayor Aldo Vagnozzi said.

Nearby, Springbrook subdivision gave up deed restrictions that limited the frontage to single-family residential housing. The city is relying on the zoning ordinance "to make sure that is the future," said John Donohue, city attorney.

"The single-family development of this parcel makes a significant statement as to the viability of single-family residential from 11 Mile all the way to the intersection," Donohue said. "This is a key piece."

However, one nearby resident wasn't looking at zoning maps but envisioning bottlenecks on Orchard Lake.

"The congestion and traffic are horrendous. You're going to add 21 more families with cars coming out of there," said Leonard Kent, who lives on Rockshire. "Come over to my house and try getting out of there at 4 o'clock in the afternoon."

City officials said the development meets all zoning requirements, which allows for 3.1 units per acre under the cluster option. The condominium development has only 2.3 units per acre with 4.1 acres of open space.

The detached condominiums are expected to cost \$200,000 to \$350,000 per unit.

Farmington Observer

(ISSN 1573-8405)
Published every Sunday and Thursday by Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009-0910. Periodical postage paid at Birmingham, MI 48009-0910. Postmaster: Send address changes to Observer & Eccentric, Newspapers 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009-0910. Telephone 644-1102.
SUBSCRIPTION RATES
Circulation Delivery \$47.40
One year (12 issues) \$20.00
One year (12 issues) \$20.00
One year (12 issues) \$20.00
One year (12 issues) \$20.00
One year (12 issues) \$20.00
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