## City continues to visit homes; victims meet with attorneys

BY LARRY O'CONNOR

Flood victims involved in a lawsuit against the city of Farm-ington Hills plan to meet with attorneys while city workers con-tinue to visit homes to determine

a cause for the sewer backups.
So far, 120 residents have contacted the city and asked to be included on the list for inspec-

tions.

City Manager Steve Brock dismissed reports by one of the plaintiffs in the suit that residents are not cooperating with inspectors.

inspectors.

"A lot of people are not letting the people from the city in their homes," said Lincolnshire resi-

dent Joanne Jones, who's a plaintiff. They're saying, 'Nope, wo're beyond having you look at our gates or our gutters.' Attorneys and 60 people who want to take part in the lawsit will meet 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 1, at the Best Western Hotel on 12 Mile and Orchard Lake. The meeting is open to the public, Jones said.
The number of people involved.

Jones said ber of people involved in the auit could well to 160, she said. The auit could well to 160, she said. The suit is before Coulty Circuit Court Judge Jessica Cooper. A hearing data has not been set along the said to the said

real and personal property los

due to flooding Aug. 6 and 9...
In a response filed Wednesday,
the city atterney said the residente' complaints citing negligence and "unconstitutional taking of property" through the back
up of raw sowerage are unfound.

up of raw sowerage are unfounded.

In answering the charges, the city centends it did not centrel or own the sewage that turned up in residents' basements. It terms the flooding as "the act of God."

When citing governmental immunity, the court document refers to the "city of St. Claimounter and the distreament and the discrepancy "a type."

The city attorney also questions whether the suit qualifies as class action litigation, which means all victims have commen dumages and the cause of all flooding was similar.

"What happened on one particular street was completely different on the other," said Tim Ferrand, an attorney representing the six operators where the suit from

ent on the other, said Tim Ferrand, an attorney representing the city.

What separates this suit from similar ones brought in Westland where residents were awarded damages is the amount of rainfall involved, Ferrand said. On Aug. 6, 4.5 inches of rainfall windved, Ferrand rain fell within a five-hour span.

On Still Valley in Olde Franklin Town subdivision, city workers found that tree roots blocked the sewer system there. The city paid an outside firm \$6,439 to clean the roots from the system. The significant flooding was the first ever in the neighborhood.

At the Hills city council meetings opt. 14, officials asked residents who had flooding Aug. 8 and 9 to contact the Public Services Department (248-473-5521).

Inspectora are only making general—net specific—recent

9521).
Inspectors are only making general – not specific – recommendations about ways to curb flooding, the city manager said.
"We're still very much on a fact-finding mission," Brock said.



Moss: Joyce and Ronald Sterling are still working to salvage items precious to them that were stored in their basement when their basement when floods hit in June 1996 and May 1997. The Franklin Knolls couple have joined a class action lawsuit against Oakland County. They contend the county overflowed the sewers.

## Flood hardships aren't forgotten

BY LARRY O'CONNOR

By Larry O'CONNOR
GYAT WATER

Basements flood and recode,
but a Fermington Hills family
has found the ensuing hardships don't drain so easily.

Sewerage backups wrecked
heirlooms and destroyed a
vital circle of the past in
the Starlings' Franklin Knolls
home. Joyce and Ronald Sterling are still trying to salvage
items from separate floods in
June 1995 and Monal 1997.

"We still have not recovered
from this," Joyce Sterling said
more than a year later.

With the first flood, the
Sterlings heard water running. They went to the basement and found sawage spewing from a toile. Less than a
year later, the gush returned.

They iwere still sifting
through the damage of the
first flood when the second
one hit. 'A salvage company
had boxed most of the family's
belongings and placed them
on the basement floor from the
initial backup.

"We lest a lot more the secoud time," said Joyce, who is a
retired Farmington Public
Schools elementary teacher,
Among the belongings were
clothes, photes and childhood
itoms like their son's drum.

The Sterlings had also been
aving their daughter's
belongings, which they intended to give to their grand-

girls mother Tamera Behiry and her son Brenton were killed in a plane crash during a flight from Canton's Mette-tal Airport in 1992. Joyce Sterling recalled try-ing to save a pair of her daughter's ski boots by clean-ing them in a pail of bleach

water.
"One boot came out fine,"
she said. "On the other one,
the plastic disintegrated and
we had to throw the boots

the plastic disintegrated and we had to throw the boots out.
One own on the bettem contained several family photos, some dating back generations. Water destroyed most of these, too.
In the bassment, the curled photos lock like potnte chips sitting on top of a chair and on the floor. Others have blothes and stains on them.
Sterling holds onto to them with the faint hope the photos can be restored.
The told you can take them some place and restore them, but it's very costly, 'she said.
The Sterlings have joined other families in a class action lawsuit against Onkland County, 'They contain the county overflowed sewer lines. A neighbor also experienced flooding. Both houses had basement toilets.
During the first flood, a county employee told her husband that four pumps were putting excess water into the

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system.
"We didn't get the man's name, unfortunately," Joyce

name, unfortunately," Joyce said.
With a Shop Vac and a pump, the Sterlings managed to keep ahead of the first food. However, the second one hit at 3 a.m. - two hours before the cupie was to leave on a long-awaited vacation with their daughter and sonin-law to San Francisco and Vancouver. Joyce went while her husband stayed behind. "It sure did upset our plans," she said. "You can imagine a vacation wondering what you've got when you get home."
While showing parts of her

what you've got when you get home. While showing parts of her basement, she pointed the wooden palettes and plastic containers where belongings are stored now. She also uses rubber gloves to clean and wears plastic bags on her shoes when walking into an area where remants of sewerage may exist.

She continues to painstakingly restore items that insurance money or a settlement could never replace.

"People will say, That was a year ago and you still haven't moved everything back yet?" she said. "People don't understand why it takes so long to recover from something like this."

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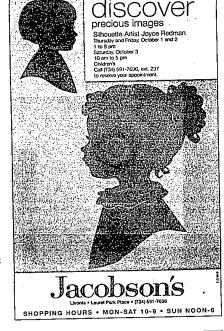
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