

Shopper

Buyer gets nod as Hills top employee

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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As the city's No. 1 buyer, Kelly Monico hasn't figured out just how to fit a fire truck, police mobile command unit and 6,000 tons of road salt into her shopping cart.

But she's acquired a discriminating eye for goods and services.

Her skill as senior buyer and splendid attitude have registered with her colleagues: Monico has been named the city of Farmington Hills Employee of the Year.

Monico, who has worked as the city's senior buyer for 21 1/2 years, will be honored with other employees at the start of the Hills city council meeting Monday night. Colleagues nominate candidates for the top employee honor, which is then approved by a committee.

Monico will gratefully accept the award. She just won't accept shoddy service.

"Personally as a shopper, I'm very picky," said Monico, who worked as a retail buyer before joining the public sector. "Wherever we go, I expect the service to be excellent, which isn't always what my husband expects."

Sometimes to her husband Gary's surprise, she'll stand up and walk out of a restaurant if the silverware is blotchy or the service is slow.

"I'm not shy," she said. "Anybody around here will tell you that."

Taxpayers benefit from such fussiness. Monico strives to get the best equipment at a bar-

gain price.

Monico works closely with the various department heads. She gets them to come up with the specifications on equipment they need and then sends those requirements to suppliers to bid on.

Sometimes the lowest bid is not the best one, Monico said. The equipment has to make the grade first. A recent \$60,000 fire engine included requirements for a Detroit Diesel engine, freight line suspension and a "hale" pump.

"A lot of times she is not the one making the decision, but she is the one making sure all the players are involved and everyone is focused on what needs to be done," said Mike Lasley, Hills Central Services director.

Her effervesence helps draw other city employees together.

Recently, she started a book club for city employees that has grown to 26 members. The Wayne State University graduate majored in English and remains an avid reader, consuming up to two books a week.

Her reading time is squeezed in between work and family, which includes her husband and 4-year-old son Tony. The Monicos live in Farmington.

The book group includes 25 women and one man, Hills fire Lt. Michael Garr. So far, members have picked "Education of the Little Tree," "The Notebook" and "Divine Secrets of Ya Ya Sisterhood" to read. Garr is still waiting his turn to select a title, Monico said.

"We're always looking for



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL DECKER

Best Buy: Kelly Monico, senior buyer for Farmington Hills, searches for the best prices for everything, from paper clips to fire trucks.

another man," Monico said in reference to the number of "chic books" they've read so far.

Monico has done a lot to break down barriers between city departments, Lasley said. Her outgoing demeanor and fierce attention to detail is a

far cry from the woman who first sat before him during a job interview.

"I'd thought she'd be a little timid," Lasley said. "But on the contrary, she's a very bubbly person."

When Monico worked as a buyer for a high-end retailer in

Iowa, she never imagined the day she'd be purchasing fire trucks, road salt or even taxi-dummy services, which are used to stuff animals as part of Special Services naturalist exhibits.

"I'm just grateful to have a small part in community ser-

vice," Monico said. "I'm amazed at the work these people do — the police, fire and DFW. I'm glad I'm able to get them the equipment to do their job."

MILITARY NEWS

Arm: Pvt. Thomas C. Yakes has graduated from the light-wheeled vehicle mechanic course at Fort Jackson, Columbia, S.C.

During the course, the student was trained to perform maintenance and assist in the repair of automotive vehicle systems,

assemblies, and associated equipment.

Yakes is the son of Thomas E. and Donna L. Yakes of 21671

Whittington, Farmington Hills.

He is a 1998 graduate of Harrison High School, Farmington Hills.

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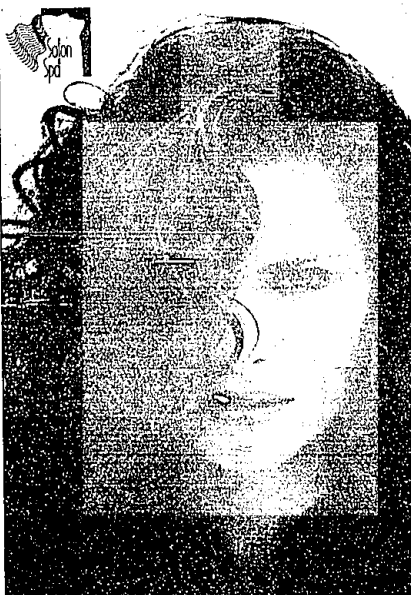
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Two men sought in robbery

As a Farmington Hills night clerk recently found out, cigarettes can also lead to armed robbery.

Hills police are looking for two men who held up the Shell station on Northwestern and Middlebelt early morning Jan. 6. The pair made off with \$250 and three packs of Newports.

Around 1 a.m., the night clerk was salting the pavement outside the station when he noticed a car on the east side of the building. He saw a man go inside the station and go behind the counter.

As the man reached to grab three packs of cigarettes from above, the clerk grabbed him the shoulder. The man stuck his hand inside his coat pocket to indicate he had a gun and ordered the clerk to empty the cash register.

A second man wearing a black nylon mask came inside the station and held an ice scraper over his head in a threatening manner towards the clerk, who complied with the robbers' request.

After the bandits got the money, they ordered the 27-year-old male clerk out into the service bay while they escaped. They drove off southeast on Northwestern in a late model Ford Probe or Taurus, police reports said.

One robber is described as a medium built black male in his mid-20s. He was wearing blue jeans and a mid-thigh length green coat. The other is believed to be a black man, 6-feet to 6-2 in height. He was wearing a blue coat with a hood as well as a nylon mask.

Anyone with information is asked to phone Farmington Hills police at (248) 473-9695.