

# The Farmington Observer

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# The Farmington Observer

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## Ready to serve



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESKE

Welcome: Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss swears in Frank Barthel Jr., the newest member of the department, during a ceremony last week at Farmington City Hall.

## New officer sworn in

Frank Barthel Jr. is the newest member of the Farmington Public Safety Department, and very well may be among the youngest on the force.

Barthel is 23 years old and a graduate of Cadillac High School who later attended Grand Valley State University. He graduated with a baccalaureate degree in criminal justice and successfully completed their police academy.

On Friday, Nov. 5, Barthel graduated from the Oakland

## FARMINGTON PUBLIC SAFETY

Fire Academy at Oakland Community College. He ranked first in practical skills and second overall academically.

On Monday, Barthel began working with seasoned Farmington Public Safety Officers in a 12-week field training program.

## CORNUCOPIA BALL

Several local businesses and area celebrities are lending their support to the Farmington Hills/Farmington Community Foundation as they prepare for the Fifth Annual Cornucopia Ball, scheduled for tomorrow, Friday, Nov. 12 at Glen Oaks Country Club in Farmington Hills.

The event is a black-tie optional dinner dance and special live and silent auction to benefit the

foundation. Proceeds will help support local family organizations and programs, such as Farmington Families in Action, Farmington Farmington Hills Multicultural Community Council and after-school activity centers.

For more information on the Cornucopia Ball, contact Suzanne Lichtman, executive director, at 855-5542.

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## Hills, firefighters agree to 3-year pact

BY LARRY O'CONNOR  
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Farmington Hills and its firefighters union skirted arbitration, agreeing to a three-year contract through July 2000.

The International Association of Fire Fighters Local 2659, representing 38 Hills employees, worked under a contract extension during 18 months of negotiations.

With talks deadlocked, firefighters and city officials went to a pre-arbitration conference under State Act 12, which prohibits city emergency personnel from striking. All labor disputes are settled through binding arbitration.

At that meeting, they decided to give bargaining one more shot.

"I think we all agree that a negotiated settlement is always better than a settlement that is assigned to you by a third party," Hills Assistant City Manager Dana Whinnery said.

Under the new pact, firefighters receive annual 3-percent increases back dated to July 1998. Retirement multipliers, which are factored with years of service to determine pension benefits, also increased.

Union members ratified the agreement, which the Farmington Hills City Council approved Oct. 18.

Contract language rather than money proved to be a sticking point. Union leaders wanted to maintain a clause whereby every advance life support run is staffed by two career firefighters, who are also trained paramedics.

City negotiators asked for more flexibility, using part-time paramedics in some instances.

The department inaugurated advance life support service in 1998.

Firefighter negotiators saw the issue as possibly eliminating future jobs. Those who need critical care benefit from having two career firefighter/paramedics respond, a union negotiator said.

"People who work together regularly as career professionals develop a rapport, a cadence," said Fire Department Lt. Tom

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Hills Fire Dept.  
Lt. Tom Shurtleff

Shurtleff, who is vice president of IFA Local 2659. "Each shift develops its own rhythm, its own pace. Those are things that make for scene efficiency."

Such staffing requirements lead to more personnel being juggled between the department's five stations, city negotiators said.

"It's not uncommon for us in the morning to have to shift firefighters around from one station to another in order to accommodate having two career people per unit," Whinnery said. "It's not that we don't have the staffing — it's that we have to do some musical chairs." The retirement multiplier goes up to 2.65 from 2.50 for those under age 65. Those over 65 will see their multiplier increase from 2.25 to 2.375. As a result, a firefighter who retires at 55 with 26 years service would receive 66 percent of his salary.

The city also agreed to pay the full cost of retirement insurance premiums, removing a \$600 monthly cap.

In exchange, union fire employees will increase their pension contributions from 4.5 to 6 percent of their pay to help offset those costs.

For a majority of department members, retirement is a ways off yet. Only six firefighters have 20 years or more experience, Shurtleff said. Despite the stalemate, both sides described the talks as amicable.

"Sometimes there are differences in our positions, but from a relationship standpoint there has never been a strain," Whinnery said. "We're looking forward to getting back to business as usual."

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