

Police officer wins praise for cutting short high-speed chase

BY RICHARD PEARL
STAFF WRITER

A Farmington Hills police officer who cut short a high-speed chase Monday out of concern for the safety of innocent persons earned the praises of the department's top cop Tuesday.

Farmington Hills Police Chief William Dwyer said Officer Mitchell Skazalski used "excellent judgment" in backing off of the 80- to 90-mile-an-hour pursuit of a car theft suspect on westbound 12 Mile around 11:30 a.m.

The suspect was arrested about 1 1/2 hours later near 10 Mile and Grand River after a manhunt and was scheduled for arraignment in district court Tuesday afternoon.

The chief said Skazalski, a veteran of both the Hills and Detroit police departments, was "concerned about the safety of innocent persons (who) could have been injured or killed as a result of the chase."

Police videotape shows the fleeing suspect running a red light at the busy 12 Mile and Farmington intersection, said Dwyer.

It then shows the 19-year-old suspect, a Detroit resident, continuing west at a high speed to Haggerty, where he turned south, sideswiped a van on the I-696 overpass, careened into the concrete guardrail and totaled the vehicle.

HILLS

The Detroit man, who sustained cuts in the crash, abandoned the vehicle and headed into the woods west of Haggerty, triggering a manhunt by a task force of 25 officers from several departments with tracking dogs, Dwyer said.

The chief said Skazalski's decision was "the typical incident of (an officer) making a split-second decision."

"I give him a lot of credit" for deciding the speeds "were getting to the point where they would risk death or injury if he had continued. It's not an easy decision to make," said Dwyer.

He said Skazalski was hired about two years ago following passage of the police and fire tax millage. Skazalski was then recently promoted as a lieutenant in the Detroit Police Department, having served 25 years.

"He is highly respected and admired by his peers," said Dwyer, adding that, with Farmington Hills, Skazalski had "started over" as an officer.

The incident Monday began at 11:15 a.m. when police received a

call from the Honey Tree Restaurant on Orchard Lake Road that a 1987 Chevrolet Camaro had been stolen from its lot.

Skazalski picked up the vehicle just west of Orchard Lake on 12 Mile and gave pursuit.

Hills police were joined by officers from Novi and their K-9 patrol plus the Oakland County Sheriff's Department and the State Highway Patrol.

Aided by calls from citizens who spotted the suspect running, Hills and Novi officers arrested him as he attempted to enter the Delta Fuels offices at 40600 Grand River about 1 p.m., Dwyer said.

He was treated for cuts at Providence Medical Center.

He was charged with auto theft, leaving the scene of an accident and fleeing and eluding, according to Dwyer.

"He has an extensive record for armed robbery, burglary and car theft" dating back to 1993, when he was arrested for felony robbery, the chief said. The man also was arrested in 1995 for a Redford car theft and in 1997 for felony burglary, according to police records.

Farmington student returns home as choir conductor

Michael Begian has returned to Michigan to conduct the Chancel Choir at North Congregational Church.

Begian is concluding nine years as a featured bass soloist and announcer for the United States Army Chorus, whose home base is Ft. Myer, Va.

During his years with the chorus, he also assisted in conducting and instructing. He was the founder/director of the U.S. Army Chorus Barbershop Quartet. He has also developed a reputation in church music, teaching, songwriting and arranging.

Begian attended schools in Farmington and West Bloomfield and was a bass soloist for the North Church Choir in the early 1980s. He is a graduate of the University of Michigan and the Penobscot Conservatory in Baltimore with a master's degree in music.

He has performed with the San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, Baltimore National and Detroit symphonies. Having the pleasure of performing in the presence of four presidents, the Joint Chiefs of



Michael Begian, former student

Begian attended schools in Farmington and was a bass soloist for the North Church Choir in the early 1980s.

Staff, and at the residence of Gen. Colin Powell, Begian is enthusiastic about "coming home."

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Woman killed on M-5 ramp

BY JOANNE MALISZEWSKI
STAFF WRITER

A 35-year-old Davisburg woman was killed during evening rush hour Monday on the M-5 ramp from northbound I-275.

Nancy Haller was killed when her mini-van rolled one-and-a-quarter times after a motorist driving on the westbound I-696 ramp crossed the median where the ramps merge. Haller's dog, in the mini-van at the time of the accident, was unhurt. Haller's mini-van was struck by the rear of the other car, said Michigan State Police Trooper John Ferguson of the Metro North Post.

"It's a busy interchange," Ferguson said. "He (the driver in the other car) had been driving erratically for a couple thousand feet."

Alcohol does not appear to have been a factor in the accident, Ferguson said.

Haller was wearing a seat belt when she was killed in the rollover, Ferguson said.

Oakland County prosecutors are reviewing the case to determine if the other driver will be charged.

The accident at 5:45 p.m. closed the ramps to I-696 and I-275 for almost six hours.

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