

Farmington City Council joins push for third judge

BY TIM SMITH
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The quest for a third 47th District Court judgeship is leaving the Farmington area and is headed for Lansing.

The Farmington City Council recently unanimously supported a resolution to support two legislative bills that would authorize a third judge for the overloaded 10 Mile Road facility. The measures, House Bill 5940 and Senate Bill 1207, were previously endorsed by the Farmington Hills City Council.

"We had to have the support of both cities," said an elected 47th District Judge Fred Harris following the meeting. "We're dead in the water without it."

Because the bills are leftovers from the 1998 session, they will need to be re-introduced in 1999, said David Walsh, 47th District Court's administrator.

"It's a new session," Walsh said afterward. "So any bills still outstanding from this year have to be given new bill numbers and (be) re-introduced into the next session."

With both councils officially

behind the endeavor, Harris emphasized that "our work now has to be in Lansing. We have to get the ear of the governor. Obviously, the Legislature is mindful of it."

Both legislators who serve Farmington and Farmington Hills (state Sen. Bill Bullard; state Rep. Andrew Raczowski) back the measures. Other supporters include the Oakland County Bar Association and an ad hoc judiciary committee, Walsh said.

If the bills are passed, and are subsequently signed into law by Gov. John Engler, Walsh said

authorization for a new judge likely would be decided in the November 2000 election, with the new judge's term to begin Jan. 1, 2001. Besides Harris, 47th District Court is served by Judge Maria Parker.

According to Walsh, "We're getting widespread support from all corners. I think there's a long-term recognition that the court load here at 47th District Court warrants the authorization of a third judge."

It is estimated that 47th District Court's case load is 30 percent higher than neighboring courts in southeastern Michigan,

47TH DISTRICT COURT

said Farmington City Manager Frank Lauhoff.

Harris said the problem faced by district courts is only going to worsen next year, when the so-called "threshold" for misdemeanors on most property crimes goes from \$100 to \$1,000.

It means that those cases that previously were deemed felonies, and automatically went to circuit court in Pontiac, "don't move,

they stay with us," Harris said. Such cases, under \$1,000, will be classified misdemeanors, and thus be handled by district courts.

Lauhoff also noted how the change in the threshold will "dramatically" impact 47th District Court.

"Many of your shoplifting complaints that were felonies, that went up there (to Pontiac), will no longer automatically go up there," said Lauhoff, longtime director of Farmington's Public Safety Department.

Waterford man arrested in armed robbery

BY LARRY O'CONNOR
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A man's lack of dental work put teeth into a Farmington Hills police armed robbery investigation.

As a result, police arrested a Waterford Township man, 38, in connection with the armed robbery of Clotheshime Dec. 5. He is also a suspect in two armed

heists in Southfield. He is being held in Oakland County Jail in lieu of \$15,000 cash bond after being arraigned on one count of armed robbery. He entered a not guilty plea before 47th District Court Judge Fred Harris Dec. 11. Preliminary exam is 8:30 a.m. Monday, Dec. 21.

Using a description of the robber, investigators fed the information into an Oakland County database that through a photo imaging process that narrowed the search down to a few suspects. Two witnesses in the Clotheshime heist identified the robber from photographs while three others picked the same man in connection with two Southfield holdups.

On Thursday, police took the man into custody at his home where they found him in possession of crack cocaine.

"One of the reasons we arrested him on Thursday is we were a little concerned that these robberies were happening on the weekends," Assistant Chief Chuck Nebus said.

On Dec. 6, a Saturday, a man described as having dirty,

One of the reasons we arrested him on Thursday is we were a little concerned that these robberies were happening on the weekends.

Chuck Nebus
Assistant police chief

unkempt blond hair and crooked teeth made off with \$65 cash from the clothing store on Orchard Lake.

The robber, who said he had a gun in his pocket, told the cashier to ring up a frame he had brought to the register as a cash sale. After she emptied the register, the robber said he wanted more money before scurrying out of the store.

Witnesses said he ran south along the sidewalk and around the back of the building. Police also found a piece of clothing that is similar to what the robber wore in the Clotheshime holdup.



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