

## FPS hikes false alarm call fees

By Sue Buck  
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The Farmington Public Safety Department recently adjusted its fee schedules on false alarms, through a city council vote.

"We respond annually to almost 500 false alarms," Farmington Public Safety Director Gary Goss explained. "It takes resources away from the rest of the community. It's reasonable to charge a fee for the department's response. The philosophy behind it is to deter false alarms."

Here's the way the billing system works. Residents and businesses can have two false alarms in a month or four in a year before they are billed. That means the third alarm received in a month will be billed and the fifth alarm in a year will be billed.

The first fee is \$25, the second \$50. The billing calendar starts with the date of the first alarm received rather than in the confines of the calendar year, from Jan. 1 through Dec. 31, Goss said.

"The third alarm in that month which constitutes the first alarm billed would be \$25. The second at \$50 would bring

the total for that month to \$75," he explained.

Previously, the charge was \$25 regardless how many times the public safety department responded. However, the actual cost for responses vary, depend on the type of alarm.

"Each response may be different," Goss said. "If it is a high-risk response, we'll send three officers."

In a burglar alarm, two cars are sent to check the perimeter of the building. The size of the building determines how long the officers will be there, Goss said.

"If it's a residential alarm, that may involve touching base with neighbors to see if there is a key holder," Goss said.

It was time to change the fee structure to put a bit more bite in it, Goss said. "You can compare it to other communities who charge as much as \$100 in fines."

The city makes every effort to bring alarm users into compliance. They get several notifications from the city and a notification from the city attorney.

"Eventually an officer will issue a violation which brings them to court," Goss said. "We have had a few instances where an officer

has had to go in and talk to a new business owner and rather than issue a ticket, the fees are paid," he said. "There's very few people you have to send notices to, only a handful of which invoke the ordinance."

Usual cause for false alarms

**■ You compare it to other communities who charge as much as \$100 in fines.**

**Gary Goss**  
—Public Safety Director

are faulty equipment or employee error. Sometimes problems occur when equipment is newly installed.

Employee error is more prevalent, Goss said. Someone coming in after hours and not turning off the alarm is one example.

Exceptions to the fee are made during power outages.

False alarms come mostly from commercial users. Usually the alarm goes first to the alarm company. When there's an audible alarm, the neighbors may call in, Goss said.

## 'Welcome Home' musical performed July 4th at the Farmington Civic Theatre

*Welcome Home*, a patriotic musical, will be performed at the downtown Farmington Civic Theatre at 7 p.m. Wednesday, July 4.

The performance will include over 70 community members of all ages, singing traditional American songs in celebration of our country's heritage.

An appearance by Abraham Lincoln will be among portrayals of famous American historical figures. Confetti explosions and other special effects will be included as well.

The performance is open to the

public; admission is \$1 at the door. All area veterans are invited to attend and will be specially recognized at the performance.

The musical is presented by Harvest Ministries Church in cooperation with the cities of Farmington and Farmington Hills. The Civic is the recently restored historic theater on Grand River that boasts a wonderful new art deco interior.

Harvest Ministries produced a version of *Welcome Home* in its own church last year to sell-out audiences and expressed the desire to offer it to the community at large.

The production of *Welcome Home* is part of an effort by the city of Farmington to encourage community groups to utilize the Civic Theatre.

For more information on *Welcome Home*, call Pastor David Hutton at Harvest Ministries Church at 478-1511.

## McKenzie

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angry about a fine her son had to pay and began complaining loudly. Without raising his voice — or even an eyebrow — he dictated to the woman by simply talking to her.

"McNamee, I'm four feet away from you," McKenzie said. "To let her know he meant business, he added, "There's a whole courtroom full of witnesses here."

The woman calmed down and lowered her voice.

McKenzie, a former police officer, has worked as a court officer since 1996.

"The thing I enjoy about it is I have a very distinct advantage. Before I left the police department I was assigned as a detective to court services."

This meant he was in charge of delivering warrants to the court, and persuading suspects to turn themselves in. The knowledge he gained gave him an edge when he began working at the courthouse.

### Police skills

Working in court services as a police officer gave him the chance to sharpen his people skills when dealing with crime suspects.

"I would see if they would voluntarily surrender," he said, adding that he would tell suspects if they cooperated, they would have a personal bond instead of a more costly cash bond.

But if persuasion didn't work, he would lay down the law.

"I had to emphasize the fact that if these people did not voluntarily surrender themselves, I would have to ask for a high cash bond and they would sit in jail until the case comes before the judge," McKenzie said.

"A lot of the crimes were very serious — you can't broom it under the carpet."

David Walsh, 47th District Court administrator, said McKenzie's *savoir faire* is extremely valuable.

"He has a real good way with people who are upset," Walsh said. "He's an excellent court officer and he keeps the atmosphere light around here."

McKenzie, 63, has lived in West Bloomfield for 14 years. He is married to Jeannene and has five grown children. He began his career as a police officer in 1962 with the Detroit police department. After working for several different local law enforcement agencies, he began working for the Farmington

Hills Police Department, retiring after 26 years in 1996.

### He has his words'

A former colleague, Sgt. Charles Hubbard of the Farmington Hills Police Department, said McKenzie's demeanor was a gift and he is still missed.

"He has his words," Hubbard

said. Michaels Trio, which plays 8 p.m. each Wednesday at Ron's Fireside Inn in Garden City.

The band will also take the stage at the Michigan Jazz Festival at Schoolcraft College, Sunday, July 16.

He began his musical career in the late 1950s, drumming for the Stan Kenton Orchestra and



STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BREKLER

**Starry nights:** Court officer Jerry McKenzie played with the Matt Michaels Trio when they performed for this year's "Starry Night Gala" at the Costick Center.

said. "He can disarm a person with his words."

As a detective, McKenzie had regularly interview crime suspects, some of whom could be hostile. But rather than put on a tough-cop attitude, he would instead chit-chat with them as though they were friends.

He was a fantastic interviewer because of his outgoing personality, Hubbard said. "He developed an instant rapport with people — they feel comfortable with him. He could dine with kings or eat corn with the chickens."

But he was no doormat, either. "He was stern when he needed to be," said Hubbard.

McKenzie didn't have a traditional retirement.

"I left the Hills police department at 4:30 on a Wednesday and the next morning at 8:30 I was in this courthouse working," McKenzie said. Rather than attribute that to a "retirement is death" attitude, however, he said he just became accustomed to the 9 to 5 work life and wasn't ready to stop working.

### Jazzing it up

When he's not keeping order in the court, he enjoys drumming, his passion since the late 1950s. He holds down the rhythm section for the Matt

Michaels Trio, which plays 8 p.m. each Wednesday at Ron's Fireside Inn in Garden City.

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**Festival harbinger:** Bryan Collins of Collins Signs hangs new Founders Festival banners along Grand River. About 30 of the banners went up. The community festival kicks off July 19, with Kids Day in the Park.

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