Board renews attorney contracts

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The Farmington School Board has authorized renewal of its contracts with four legal firms from July 1, 2001, through June 30, 2002.

Each of the four has a different area of expertise, explained Cheryl Cannon, director of finance.

The firms are:
■ Freeman, Cotton & Norris, PC of Bloomfield Hills, $150 an hour. This firm handles special education and student services. "If there was an issue regarding a suspension and somebody retained an attorney because they were not happy that their child was suspended, they would work with us on that," said Farmington School Superintendent Bob Maxfield.
■ Pollard & Albertson, PC of Bloomfield Hills, $165 an hour. This was the only firm that increased its rates this year. The firm works primarily on labor relations issues and the Durant lawsuit over special education funding.

The district gets a separate bill for its share of the Durant suit. "All 480 districts in the Durant suit split that on a pro-rated basis based on student population. That amounts to about $200 a month," Maxfield

said.
Durant vs State of Michigan, a class action lawsuit filed in 1980 by various districts in Michigan, claimed under-funding of programs and a violation of Section 29 of the state constitution known as the Headlee Amendment. This amendment requires the state to fund mandated programs at the same proportion of the state budget as when the amendment was adopted in 1978.

The mandated programs involved were special education, special education transportation, school lunch program and driver education.

In July 1997, the Michigan Supreme Court ruled that districts were harmed by the under-funding and ordered payment for three years, according to information contained in the Farmington Public school district budget manual. On April 15, 1998, Farmington received $9,496,233 related to this suit.
■ Miller, Canfield, Paddock and Stone, PC of Detroit, $165 an hour This firm acts as bond attorney. "If there are issues involving millage renewal, the Headlee rollback, et cetera, they work with us on that," Maxfield said.
■ Oakland Schools Legal Services in Waterford offers about 40-80 hours of free legal services

primarily for issues that may affect all Oakland schools. After that amount, the fee is $100 an hour, Cannon said.

The district's total legal bill was about $115,000 last year, according to Cannon. "When I came here in 1995, it was a quarter million dollars," she said.

"We cut it by more than half," Maxfield said, adding he and Cannon agreed legal fees should be reduced.

Though cities generally have an attorney at their meetings, Maxfield said district officials couldn't really think of a good reason for it.

"I understand city business is different and more technical," he said. "If a question came up about a complex special education issue and somebody came to public forum and said, 'My child is being denied his due process rights in your learning disabilities program,' I would never want an attorney there trying to answer that question on the spot. You obviously owe that person an answer, but you shouldn't expect someone to do it on their feet."

Correction

The phone number for Backdoor Friends Purebred Rescue was incorrectly reported in last Thursday's Observer.
It is 248-442-0840.

CRIME PREVENTION

Stay safe around emergency vehicles

Several years ago, in the district where I live, a school bus driver almost collided with an emergency vehicle because the children on the bus were so loud that she could not hear the siren. Recently, I watched an ambulance nearly collide head-on with a four-by-four truck.

The ambulance driver had lights and sirens on, but the vehicles in the eastbound lanes could not pull over to the right, so the ambulance was forced to go around, into the westbound lanes. The four-by-four truck was in a rush to turn left from Orchard Lake onto westbound Twelve Mile. Instead of the truck staying at the corner of Twelve Mile and Orchard Lake until the ambulance passed, he decided that he would try to beat the ambulance before it arrived at the intersection. It arrived sooner than he thought.

You may be asking yourself, "What is considered to be an emergency vehicle?" According to the Farmington Hills Traffic Code, Section 30-31, it is a police, fire or ambulance vehicle. In addition, it can be a volunteer

or paid call-back firefighter, a volunteer ambulance driver, or a licensed ambulance driver.

These vehicles can cautiously proceed through traffic signals or stop signs with a lighted, flashing or rotating red light that is visible from at least five hundred (500) feet. They can also drive against the direction of traffic or disregard turning directions, as well as exceed the posted speed, if they can do so safely without putting anyone in danger. They can even continue through funeral or other processions.

However, the driver of an authorized emergency vehicle must show due regard for the safety of all persons, and the driver is not protected from the consequences if his/her disregard for the safety of others is determined to be reckless.

What are our responsibilities? We have to yield the right-of-way immediately, pull as far to the right as possible, and stop to allow the emergency vehicle(s) to pass.

Anyone found to be in violation of this section of the law, is

subject to a fine being assessed and points added to his license. The number of points added to your license is dependent upon the ordinance or statute that has been violated.

The little delay in time that the four-by-four truck caused, could be the difference between life and death. It would have been ironic if the ambulance was making a call to a loved one who was related to the driver of the truck. Think how you would feel if someone delayed the vehicles from getting to your emergency when time was of the essence.

If there had been a collision between the two vehicles, another ambulance would have had to have been dispatched to the original call and a second one to the head-on collision of the two vehicles. So the next time you take a chance on trying to beat an emergency vehicle, think twice.

They could be on their way to help someone that you know.

Ro-Adrienne Evans is a Crime Prevention Technician with the Farmington Hills Police Department.

Sign up now for Hills Special Services' 'Mud Olympics'

Join the City of Farmington Hills Special Services from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 11, at Heritage Park for a day of messy fun that will start with lunch and end in a big muddy mess.

Everyone is welcome from age 6 to 99. Sign up with a team of

five, or you can be put on a team. Please wear clothes and shoes that can get dirty and bring a change of clothes.

The cost is just $5 per person ($10 nonresident) and includes lunch, mud games and a T-shirt. Heritage park is located on Farmington Road, just south of 11 Mile Road.

To sign up, come into the Costick Center at 28600 W. 11 Mile Road, between Middlebelt and Inkster before July 27. Spaces are limited so sign up soon.

For more information, contact Emily at 473-1800.