

New firm picks up on taxi service

BY MATT JACHMAN
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The meter is running at the first new taxicab company in Redford Township in more than three decades.

Valerie Duarard, the former business manager at ABC Cab in Farmington, sees a need for local taxi service and plans to fill it with her company, Catch-A-Cab.

Based at the Duarard house in Redford, Catch-A-Cab has two cars - sleek black Chevrolet Caprices - licensed in the township. A third is waiting in the wings for traffic to pick up.

Duarard has modest goals:

'I don't want to get so big that I can't keep things under control.'

Valerie Duarard
—Owner,
Catch-A-Cab

things under control," Duarard said.

She can't see her fleet growing to more than five taxis, she said.

"I don't care to be rich," she said.

Duarard's idea is to keep a Redford base (she's got her eye on a couple of potential permanent sites on major thoroughfares) and offer pickup service in the township and in Livonia, Farmington and Farmington Hills. She has cabs licensed in Farmington as well as in Redford. Her application in Livonia is pending, and Farmington Hills doesn't require cab licenses.

Catch-A-Cab is the only licensed taxi service in Redford, said township Clerk Garth Christie. Cabbies without township licenses risk tickets if they make pickups in Redford.

Northwest Transport, based in Livonia, for years had cabs in Redford under various names, but didn't renew its "bond plates" - the small plates some communities issue when they license taxis - within the past year, Christie said.

"There was a void here for about a year where we did not have a licensed cab company," he said.

Catch-A-Cab was the township's first new taxi licensee in 31 years, said Christie, a sometime cab driver for Northwest Transport during his college days.

Duarard started with ABC Cab, which was then owned by her parents, as a driver in 1988. She was later a dispatcher and then the business manager, but still drove during busy times.

"This is what I know how to do," she said.

Duarard was gradually phased out of a job after her parents sold ABC Cab last year, and her husband, Larry, recently lost his job as a mechanic there.

Catch-A-Cab's "right-sized" philosophy applies to Duarard's route preferences as well. While drivers at ABC wanted long runs, to downtown or Detroit Metropolitan Airport, for example, "I don't care for those," she said.

Shorter runs use less fuel and require less return-trip time, as well as provide a more localized service, she said.

"They need cab service here," Duarard said.

For now, Duarard and her son-in-law, Jamie Melster, are Catch-A-Cab's drivers. Larry Duarard will get licensed if things get busy.

Duarard is admittedly nervous about the venture.

"I might be reaching for the stars right now. I don't know," she said.

Catch-A-Cab can be reached at (313) 794-4450 or (734) 522-2520. The fare - regulated by the communities in which the company is licensed - is \$2 for the first quarter mile, 50 cents for each additional quarter mile and 50 cents every one minute, 40 seconds of waiting time.

Hills' new ALS system working well

BY PAUL R. PACE
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The Farmington Hills Fire Department's new advanced life support system appears to be working as expected as it went into effect Jan. 2.

"So far, so good," Fire Chief Rich Marinucci told the city council Monday.

He said so far this year, the department has responded to 149 patients seeking medical

care and of those, 89 used the fire department's new service. Those numbers fall in line with projections, the chief said.

Previously, the city contracted with a private firm for all medical transfers to the hospital; anywhere from \$250-\$450 per run is billed to insurance companies. As a way to increase service and revenues, the fire department can now transport patients.

"We're moving along as projected," the chief said as far as

having the new service prove profitable.

He noted the department is owed about \$37,000 so far.

The city still contracts with Community EMS as a back up for ambulance service on a monthly basis.

Councilman Jerry Ellis said the department can be more efficient and provide a higher level of service under the new program.

The department added four

full-time firefighters to boost the number of units able to respond to EMS calls. Money gained through insurance reimbursements will cover the cost for the added staff.

The chief predicts the department will make about \$165,000 this year after expenses.

The ratio of revenues over expenses is expected to decrease over the next few years, however, due to projected step increases in firefighters' pay. The

increased revenue is not currently earmarked for the department, noted Marinucci.

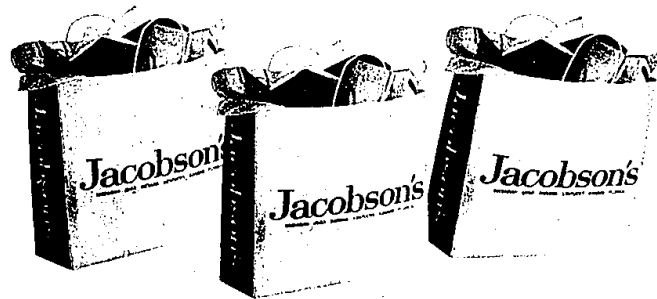
"We're waiting to see if the calls will cover our additional expenses," he said, adding any surplus revenues will go to the department's general fund for now.

It will be up to the city council to decide later if the money should be used for any project or capital improvements, the chief said.

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