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Fatalities Dip; Call Recession Factor

Oakland County's improved 1970 traffic safety record was one of the major reasons Michigan was able to become the nation's safest state for travel by reducing highway deaths 13 per cent over 1969. A recent Automobile Club of Michigan study, titled "Portrait of a Year 1970," points out that such factors as unemployment, the General Motors strike and reduced alcohol sales were the major reasons Oakland's auto fatalities were down 28 last year compared to 1969. Only Genesee County, with 72 fewer traffic fatalities, and Wayne County, with 69 less deaths, had a better 1970 traffic safety mark than Oakland, which dropped from 201 fatalities in 1969 to 173 last year.

"OAKLAND COUNTY motorists are to be commended for the impressive gains they made in traffic safety last year," states Auto Club General Manager Fred Rehm. "For without their safe driving efforts, the county's highway death toll probably would have been much higher." The 72-page Auto Club report - 13th in a series - singled out Oakland for detailed analysis since stepped up traffic enforcement was not as

dominant a contributor to reduced traffic deaths as it was in Jackson, Wayne and Genesee counties, which also had major decreases last year. "It is significant that while auto deaths were down in Oakland, the total number of injury and all accidents were up slightly in 1970," Rehm explains. "These increases could be attributed to the decline in traffic enforcement." While it is difficult to determine how much lower enforcement was countywide last year than in previous times, one basic fact stands out. Even though the County Sheriff's Department increased its road patrol mileage more than 50 per cent, deputies issued fewer traffic tickets.

"It could be that the physical presence of well defined patrol cars caused many motorists to drive more carefully," says Rehm. "If this was the case, it would account for the decreased issuance of traffic violations." Drunk driver enforcement, while up in some areas, including the City of Pontiac, was down at the county level. Only 345 drivers suspected of drinking were tested on the breathalyzer by deputies. This compares to 387 in 1969 and 438 the previous year.

AUTO CLUB feels that with law enforcement less a factor in Oakland than in other counties with traffic death reductions last year, unemployment, the GM strike and the recession may have been more instrumental in helping to keep traffic deaths down. "The theory is that when money becomes tight and jobs are scarce, conservatism dominates most people's thinking," explains Rehm. "Indications are that this conservatism spills over into driving habits." A chart contained in the study shows that when employment is up, deaths go up and vice versa. This correlation has been true in all but four of the past 20 years in Michigan.

The average unemployment rate, exclusive of strikers, in Oakland last year was fairly high - 7.1 per cent, or 32,000 of the 312,000 work force. During the auto-model change - over period, August unemployment hit 10.2 per cent as about 39,000

employees were out of work. Oakland's drop in car deaths may have been aided by this high unemployment since the work force traveling to and from jobs during peak driving hours was down. Adverse economic conditions also may have helped keep alcohol consumption from increasing more than it did. While consumption was up last year, it was below rises in previous years. And in the final half of 1970, when alcohol sales were highest, traffic deaths jumped 22 per cent over the first six months of the year. Had alcohol sales remained at the level of the first six months, Oakland may have had an even more spectacular drop in traffic deaths.

The study also shows that Oakland residents were doing more drinking at home than in bars. When alcohol is consumed at home, a car is seldom involved while a car is almost always involved when drinking is done at a bar, the report states.

Certainly each of these factors and several others were influential in helping Oakland establish a most impressive reduction in traffic deaths last year. However, Auto Club feels that a more concentrated effort by police agencies, especially in the city of Pontiac, to cut traffic deaths would have helped Oakland County achieve an even greater traffic safety mark than it did last year.



Adult Swimming Set At C'ville

The winter session of adult swim instruction at Clarencville is scheduled to start on Monday, Dec. 6, at 7 p.m. Adults can register at the Clarencville pool from 7 to 8 p.m. Instruction is offered for the beginning swimmer and those more advanced. The fee for 10 lessons is \$6. Registration for student swim classes will be held at the pool entrance Saturday, Dec. 4, from 9 a.m. until 11 a.m. Fee is \$6 for 10 Saturday lessons. Beginners will swim from 11 a.m. until 12 noon, advanced beginners from 12 noon to 1 p.m. and intermediate swimmers from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. The first lesson will be Dec. 11.

Winter recreational swimming is limited to Wednesday evening. Hours are from 7-8 p.m. and swimming is open to all. The 8 to 9 p.m. hour is for adults and families.

Height requirements for swimmers is 48 inches (42 inches at the shoulder) unless accompanied by an adult or responsible swimmer. Cost is 25 cents for students and 50 cents for adults.

The pool will be closed during winter vacation, Dec. 21-Jan. 3.

Questions will be answered by William Waters, pool director.

Oakland Sues On Courthouse

The Oakland County Board of Commissioners has filed a \$435,000 damage suit against architects and contractors seeking recovery of costs to repair the 11-year-old county courthouse. The case, assigned to Oakland County Circuit Judge Clark J. Adams, includes charges of "negligence" in construction and design of the courthouse marble facade and roofing. Some of the 600-pound marble slabs are coming loose from the facing and overhangs and roofing has torn because of insufficient allowance for expansion of the marble. Repairs have been estimated at \$385,000.

THE COUNTY is also charging breach of warranty, failure to honor performance bonds, use of defective materials, improper method of construction and failure to build to contract specifications. Bonding companies of architectural firms and general contractors are also cited in the suit which names O'Dell, Hewlett and Luchenbach, Inc., Birmingham architects; Bundy Construction Co.;

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SEMTA Prints Woodward Plan

More than 5,000 copies of a report describing the plan for a rapid transit line along the Woodward Corridor and the cost and benefits expected from the line are being distributed by the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA). The report, "Rapid Transit Along Woodward," is being mailed to government officials and community leaders in the six-county Detroit region. THE SEMTA plan is subject to change based on public reaction and on further engineering and design studies to be conducted during the coming year by the firm of Gannett, Fleming, Corddry & Carpenter, and associated firms.

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