

Civil suits, jury trials cram 47th District Court backlog

By LYNN ORR

A glance at neighboring courts finds Farmington's 47th District Court a little on the lax side in clearing the dockets.

But Judge Michael Hand says there's a number of reasons for Farmington's showing compared with district courts in Livonia, Redford Township, Dearborn, Dearborn Heights and Romulus.

An increase in civil suits, an increase in the demand for jury trials and a backlog of small claims cases

awaiting a Michigan Supreme Court decision on the no-fault insurance law account for an increase in cases held over from the previous year. Hand says.

And he believes a discrepancy in court reporting may be the major factor in skewing the figures.

"After July 1, we'll be using judicial activity report forms, which will make reporting among the courts more uniform," he says. A lack of uniform standards makes case volume comparisons untrustworthy, he adds.

"Courts were counting the number of cases begun differently," he says. While one court might count five cases for a suit involving five defendants, another court might count only one case for the entire procedure, he explains.

The 1976-77 fiscal year ended Friday for the State of Michigan, including the court system. However, court statistics for the year will not be available until at least late fall, says Art Chettle, deputy court administrator for Region 2, which includes the 47th District Court. Caseload comparisons were based on statistics of the last two years.

Last year's court reports weren't issued until last May, he adds.

But a case volume comparison of the 1975-76 fiscal year reveals that the 47th District Court began the year with 2,630 cases pending (held over from the previous year). It began the year and ended the year with 4,182 cases pending, nearly doubling the 1974-75 lay-over on the docket.

Livonia's 16th District Court, by comparison, began the year with 2,096 cases pending, began 21,434 cases during the year and ended the year with 1,681 cases pending.

Livonia's district court, however, gets relief from Wayne County Circuit Court which handles civil cases, unlike the situation in Oakland County.

Although most notable criminal cases take weeks to resolve, in reality the 47th District Court's civil suit caseload is more time-consuming than the disposing of criminal cases, Hand says.

But even criminal trials are becoming longer. Jury trials increased from 16 during the 1974-75 fiscal year to 49 in the 1975-76 fiscal year, which Hand believes is another factor affecting the case load. Jury trials are usually lengthier and more time-consuming than trials disposed by a judge, he says.

TWO YEARS AGO the limit for civil suits filed in district court was raised from \$3,000 to \$10,000, he adds.

"Due to the increase in the jurisdiction of the courts several years before, a lot of cases were pending in circuit court that were remanded back to use because of jurisdiction," he says.

And an increase in small claims cases has sprung from the no-fault insurance law, as many car owners file suit to recover the deductible amount of insurance, he says.

"Literally hundreds of small claims cases are pending to recover the deductible amount," Hand says. "All of those have been deliberately held up pending the Supreme Court's decision on whether the no-fault law is legal."

Eight circuit court judges have held the no-fault law unconstitutional in whole or in part, Hand says, which is why the issue of constitutionality is before the court.

Because there's a three-year statute limitation on small claims cases, plaintiffs have been allowed to file cases with the court. Meanwhile, district judges in the state have postponed their decisions awaiting the higher court's ruling, he says.



Practice makes perfect
John Van Vleck, a semifinalist of the state amateur competition, practices his putting skills at Glen Oaks in Farmington Hills. To read about the tournament, turn to page 7A. (Staff photo)

Supervision means safety

Nice weather brings out the spirit of adventure in youngsters and adults.

In Illinois, two young boys tried out their sleeping bags at home. One of them decided they needed a lamp in their bedroom and tucked a bare-bulb lamp into his sleeping bag. The resulting fire sent him to the hospital with severe burns and did \$600 worth of damage to his family's home.

In another midwestern town, two youngsters decided to cook their own meals in their tree house. So, they hauled a wok up to their private domain. The tree house caught on fire during dinner preparations, and the youngsters were caught in the tree house and died in the fire.

Every year in Farmington, area firefighters are called out to extinguish a burning lawn mower because the owner decided to refuel when the mower's engine was hot.

his department averaged 164 runs in May, compared with 33 the same time last year.

"In the past week, we've been running like crazy after brush fires," he said.

One of the reasons open burning was barred from both cities is the hazard it presents in dry weather, according to the firefighters.

"Only approved incinerators can be used to burn things," Madison said. Leaves, papers, grass clippings and other refuse should be placed in the trash if an incinerator is unavailable to residents.

Milkman sees city by dawns early light

By CAROLINE PRICE

Some 20 years ago, the route started about 3 a.m., when the streets were quiet and the world was still asleep.

Charles Murray would pull his truck up in front of a row of houses in Detroit and bound up the steps while his nephew waited. Murray would find a row of empty bottles waiting for him along with a note.

"I need two quarts today and a dozen eggs," the note might say. Murray would signal down to his

nephew; they used hand signals so they wouldn't disturb the sleeping occupants) and they would deliver the specified number of dairy products in the milk chute, or even in the refrigerator. If Murray had a key to the house.

It was a time when milk still came in bottles with thick cream on top, and eggs were fresh from a farmer's hen house.

Much has changed since the days when milkmen made their early-morning trips to the family refrig-

erator. Glass bottles have given way to the waxed cartons that most people buy at the local supermarket.

But Murray is still making his rounds, delivering what he considers the most wholesome product available.

THE ROUTE has changed. Murray no longer leaves his Redford Township home about 7 a.m. and goes to the Borden's depot in Livonia. He serves 500 customers throughout the Farmington-Farmington Hills area.

In addition to dairy products, Murray delivers bread, fruit drink and potato chips. He even picks up dry cleaning for his customers. Murray devotes 60 hours a week to his route, and puts in another 20 hours at a part-time job. He has come full circle in 23 years.

"I began with Borden's in 1954, then went to Twin Pines Dairy in 1958. No one ever came close to duplicating Twin Pines—it was the Cadillac of the retail business. Each man owned stock in the company.

"When Twin Pines went out of business as an independent company in 1974, I had a hard time finding a company that gives as good a product. I think Borden's is the best now."

Murray says the milk business has almost been destroyed by two factors. "Stores began using milk as a loss leader (selling at low profit) to get cus-

tomers into the store, and we began to have two-car families. The Indies don't need us anymore.

The only retail men left have taken a cut in their percentages to stay in business. That's why I've had a part-time job for the last ten years.

"It's funny though—even if people may pay a little more to get milk from me, I've seen them buy other dairy products in the store that they could get for less from me.

"If stores made a halfway decent profit on milk—not an exorbitant one—everyone in the dairy business would be in better shape."

MURRAY SAYS he often spends a few hours a day looking for new customers. "I pull up to someone's house and tell them I'm the Borden's milkman, and they look surprised because they didn't know there were milkmen anymore.

"It gets discouraging though, to solicit for two or three hours every day and get no, no, no."

"The customers I do have are beautiful people. I had an accident a couple years ago, and they sent me cards and gifts.

"After a while you become a part of the customer. You see their kids grow up and get married—I guess that's why I stay in it."

Murray makes deliveries six days a

week all through the year. He hasn't had a vacation in 23 years. "I never got ahead enough to have a man run the route for me for a week or so.

"It takes a lot of dedication. I remember one day I fell and cut my leg real bad. I put a bandage on my leg and didn't get over to Garden City Hospital until 7 p.m. that night. I told the doctor my customers come before me. He thought for sure the leg would get infected, but it didn't."

Murray laughs. "You have to be healthy to be a milkman."

"You have to like people too. It's a challenge to get out there every day delivering to customers. Winter is the most challenging time. Seems like every winter I get out on those country roads and pull people out of ditches."

MURRAY GIVES a lot of credit to his wife Delores for making his job easier. "She's my right-hand gal. If I didn't have her to help me I'd be in bad shape." The Murrays also have three children. The youngest has just finished high school.

Being a milkman has its frustrations, but Murray says he enjoys the job. "It's satisfying, being self-employed. And there's no one telling you what to do.

"It feels good to be delivering such a wholesome product too."

BOTH Farmington Fire Marshall Norm Madison and Hills Fire Chief John Van De Voort urge some summertime caution for adults and supervision for children.

Youngsters and tents go together like summertime and ice cream. Their tents should be made of non-flammable material, according to Madison. If they want to crawl into their sleeping bags or tents with a light, it should be a flashlight instead of a candle or a bare bulb.

Parents need supervision, too.

Barbeques should be started with regulation starter fluid instead of gasoline.

"People don't realize how powerful a cup of gasoline is," Madison said. Grills should be set up in open areas away from the house. Garages are poor places to conduct barbeques. Sliding doors can fall, tipping over the grill and starting a fire in the building.

"Don't barbeque in a closed area. That creates carbon monoxide fumes," he warned.

Sprinkling water over the charcoal is a good way to control the flames, he suggested.

HOLIDAY DRIVERS SHOULD be mindful of dry weather and refrain from flicking burning cigarettes into dry fields, according to Van De Voort. Brush fires are one of the reasons

Renaissance Center welcomes AC-DeLo

Fourteen Farmington residents are working high in the sky in the new downtown Renaissance Center, since the central office of the AC-DeLo Division of General Motors moved to the riverfront complex.

Among the Farmington residents employed by the company are Rosemary Barnowski; Erskin W. Brindle; Margaret Dirderian; Marilyn L. Sitron; Dolores A. Gateman; Lawrence H. Hale; Paul T. Kraft; Francis L. Kugar; Arlyne B. Rawson; Barbara A. Sitter; Robert H. Waidelich; and Edwin F. Werny.

They are among 458 men and women in AC-DeLo's ultra-modern new headquarters, according to General Sales Mgr. Robert J. Smith, also of Farmington Hills.

Smith said he was confident the employees will meet the twin challenge of continuing to effectively serve the nationwide customers of AC-DeLo and also participate in the revitalization of downtown Detroit.



Borden's milkman Charles Murray delivers dairy products to about 500 customers in both the City of Farmington and Farmington Hills. (Staff photo)

Police look for man trying to lure children into car

Farmington Hills police are continuing their search for a man, who, on at least two occasions, has attempted to lure youngsters into a car with the promise of a dinner in Ulica Hills. Hills police have alerted the Oakland County task force working to find the murderer of four children about the June 28 incidents.

Earl Howcroft of Warren told police that he was in Waaek's Bar on Grand River, Farmington Hills, when his daughter, Tina, came into to tell him that their companion, Esther Eustace, 9, was being harrassed by a man as she waited in the family truck in the parking lot.

When Howcroft arrived on the scene, the man was attempting to pull MaKay Howcroft, 8, into his car while convincing the youngster a dinner in Ulica if he would accompany him. Earlier, the man tried to lure Tina into the car with the same promise.

Mark was released when Howcroft yelled at the man. The would-be-abductor, in his 40s, about five feet, 10 inches tall and weighing about 200

pounds, fled to his car. The man had been seen by Howcroft drinking in the bar.

IN HIS HASTY to leave the parking lot, the man struck the side of a building adjoining the bar with his 1976 silver two-door Ford. He left after

trying to run down Howcroft. Howcroft tried unsuccessfully to catch up with the man as he drove down Grand River.

Later that day, the man was seen in the bar's parking lot trying to convince children to enter his car, according to another witness.

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**SEEING DOUBLE
SEEING DOUBLE**

Farmington area residents could have sworn they were seeing double the other day. They can relax and quit worrying about their eyesight. Everyone sees double at the annual convention of twins. To get an eyeful, turn to 1B