

Blinking lights, maps help computerize cops

To an outsider, the patrol car's message sounds like the reading of a winning lottery number.

But to the Farmington Hills police dispatcher, the string of digits represents the exact location of a patrol car.

After deftly punching the numbers into a computer, the dispatcher can see the location of the car represented by a tiny red light nestled into the wall-sized city map, dominating the communications station.

Within seconds, the dispatch officer can decide which car is closest to a call for help of a routine complaint. Neither party in the exchange gives much thought to the fact that they are using a system that is utilized by only 22 other departments in the country.

The introduction of the Automatic Communication and Control Evaluation Status System (ACCESS) has changed the appearance and operations of Farmington Hills Police communications.

"It's sure not like the old days," said police dispatcher Fred Imus as he looked around the blue-lighted communications room which is wrapped in beige carpeting to deaden outside noises.

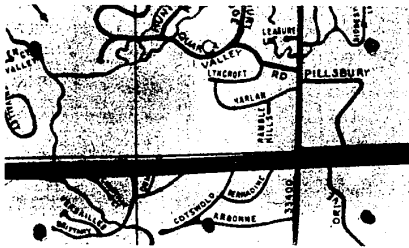
"WE USED TO HAVE a little crackbox down the hall," said Imus, a 10-year veteran of the department.

Ten years ago, dispatchers were required to memorize the location of city streets. Usually it took a dispatcher six months to know a city well, according to David Vincent, whose Farmington Hills based company Audio Alert developed the ACCESS system.

Now it takes just two weeks to train a dispatcher.

Within 15 minutes of installation, Farmington Hills dispatchers were able to use his system, Vincent said.

"That's because they can see the map. They don't have to memorize the city," he said.



The system, which the city has used for a year, took two hours to install.

"It's a little heavy," Vincent said. "The sheet of glass over the map weighs 80 pounds. And we put a heavy metal sheet under the map to shield the radio frequency from the computer mechanism."

"Next time, I'll use thinner steel," he adds.

The system was developed by Charles Ashworth, an engineer who works out of Audio Alert's Royal Oak research facility.

"He's a genius. He's brilliant," Vincent said.

"WE KEEP HIM in a locked room and slip food under the door. He passes us slips of paper through the slot," Vincent joked.

Ashworth's design strikes a middle ground between the completely human-operated dispatch system and one which is totally computerized.

"People still make the decisions," Vincent said. "We don't eliminate them."

The price of the semi-automated system is lower than its fully computerized counterpart. That makes the device attractive to smaller cities and townships, Vincent said.

"A community of the size of Farmington Hills can't afford a six-figure system," he said. "We can deliver a system for half of the price."

In another phase of the revamped communications system in-car computers are being added which will allow patrolmen to report their position by punching a code number into small computer hooked up to the communications room map.

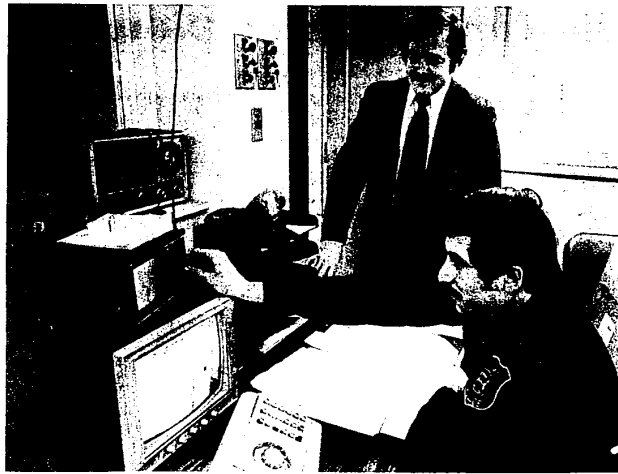
The small box resembles a push button telephone.

BESIDES SHORTENING the time it takes for a car to report in, the new addition will help to confuse citizens who monitor the police radio band, according to City Manager George Majoros.

"If a person did crack the verbal system, he couldn't use it now. With the in-car terminals, the car can report to the dispatcher without verbal communication," he said.

Another aspect of the system is the installation of television monitors in the offices of the city manager and the public safety director.

"In case of an emergency, I know how many cars are on the street and their location without coming down to the dispatch area," Majoros said.



David Vincent (background), watches as Farmington Hills Officer John Kotes checks the position of a patrol car on the street by using an ACCESS monitor. Monitors were placed in the police chief's and city manager's offices.



Officer Fred Imus adjusts the camera that transmits a picture of the ACCESS map to monitors in the Farmington Hills city hall complex. (Staff photo by Harry Mauthe)



Locating a patrol car on the road is as easy as making a phone call as Officer Fred Imus discovers. The computer system provides the dispatchers with a picture of the locations of any car in use by the department.

Thompson combines wit, pragmatism in OCC post

Whether dealing with parents, students or a proliferation of interoffice memos, Orchard Ridge provost Richard Thompson tempers his pragmatic views with a sense of humor.

After a year as head of the Oakland Community College campus in Farmington Hills, Thompson, 37, believes the communication is the key to smoothing out the bumps in the academic grind.

"I like administrative work," he said, leaning back in the low chairs of his Orchard Ridge office. "I like working with people and helping to solve their problems. Communication can relieve a lot of frustration."

Although Thompson graduated from Eastern Michigan University in 1961 with a BA in English, he empathizes with the attitude of students of the '70s.

"I feel fairly comfortable with the students of today and their lifestyle," he said. "They're pragmatically oriented, as I am."

HE VIEWS THE CURRENT crop of students as having a common attitude with their counterparts of 20 years ago.

"They're a quiet group, now, more like students in the '50s," he said. "They're conservative but they've retained the positive statements of the '60s. They're humanly oriented—that's one of the residual goodnesses of that troubled period."

Thompson, who left EMU with his masters in English in 1965, doesn't identify with the part of his generation that floated through school.

"When I was a freshman, I knew I wanted to be an English major. It was my initial job choice and it was like the handwriting on the wall," he remembered.

"It was the influence of my eleventh grade English teacher. I liked to



RICHARD THOMPSON

write and I liked English and it seemed a nice combination of interests," he said.

But he noticed that many of his fellow students were content to float through their college years and worry about a job after graduation.

That's where he can sympathize with the current crop of students.

"Today, they're older and career-oriented. They're older students. Most of them are fulltime workers. They're demanding their money's worth as any consumer would be," he said.

"IT'S RARE TO find an 18-year-old male out of high school in college, today," he said. "There are more women in their mid-30's who want to be on their own and are going to college for jobs."

Thompson admits that he went through college by adopting a chame-

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