

State enters Spreen case

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

The Michigan State Police Criminal Investigation Unit has launched a probe into the allegations against Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen.

Meanwhile, a County Board of Commissioners committee probe fell flat Tuesday when civil counsel told the chairman it had no investigatory powers.

State Police Lt. Philip Asiala said this week, "We're investigating the entire issue. We started Monday at the request of the sheriff and the county commissioners."

"We are investigating all allegations to determine if there are criminal violations and to clean the air," Asiala said, adding that he didn't know when the probe would be completed.

IN DECEMBER, Spreen's former undersheriff, Robert Nyovitch, and Jacqueline Coy, Spreen's ex-secretary, leveled charges against the sheriff at a news conference.

The charges included misuse of the road patrol; misuse of food from the county central store; use of county personnel for personal gain; use of money for personal programs not authorized by the Board of Commissioners and illegal electronic eavesdropping on employees.

Before the state police agreed to look into the case, the state attorney general and the FBI were queried, but both agencies rejected the requests.

UPON LEARNING of the allegations early last December, Oakland County Executive Daniel T. Murphy ordered his office of budget and management to conduct an audit of the central store. As of Tuesday, however, it was still reported incomplete.

Adding to the saga, the Board of Commissioners chairman asked the board's Public Services Committee to join the investigation, which was fruitlessly attempted Tuesday afternoon.

Committee Chairman James Lanni, R-Royal Oak, announced to his committee members that they were to take witness testimony from county employees on the charges against the sheriff in a closed meeting.

But Lanni's idea was quickly nipped by county Civil Counsel Robert Allen.

"SOMETIMES WE in this county think we may not be bound by Michigan law, but we are, and holding a closed session on this matter is clearly a violation of the Open Meetings Act," Allen said.

"In addition, no witness may be subpoenaed unless it is authorized by the Board of Commissioners, then signed by a circuit court judge."

"This committee (public services) has no subpoena powers, no power to conduct an investigation, no power to compel testimony and no power to compel someone to take a lie detector test," Allen said.

"Other than that, you can do what you want," he quipped.

Committee member Donald R. Geary, D-Ferndale, objected to having the Public Service Committee conduct the probe, contending the only information the group had was from newspaper accounts.

Tax help program next week on TV

Channel 56 and the Internal Revenue Service will present "Your Tax Return: The Bottom Line on Improving Your Form," a three-hour program designed to help Michigan taxpayers prepare their federal tax returns, 2-5 p.m. Feb. 7.

Robert Guillaume, the star of the television series "Benson," will host the program.

The show will provide step-by-step guidance through the Form 1040A, as well as a review of Form 1040 and Schedules A and B. A panel of IRS tax specialists will answer common taxpayer questions such as how the new tax legislation affects the average taxpayer, when income averaging can be used to save money, how to claim the Earned Income Credit and what tax

benefits are available to older Americans. Special accommodations for deaf and hearing-impaired will be made.

"Your Tax Return: The Bottom Line on Improving Your Form" will also alert viewers to some common errors on tax returns and to some tips on choosing a preparer. Information relating to payment of estimated tax and when to change one's withholding will also be covered.

Viewers who have questions as they go through their returns can call IRS toll-free assistance center. IRS tax aides will answer regular taxpayer service phones during the three-hour program as toll-free phone numbers are flashed on the TV screen. The toll-free phone number for Michigan viewers is 1-800-482-0570.



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