

Personnel drain

With development halted, Kuhn cuts jobs

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Less work requires fewer workers. It's that simple to Oakland County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn, who cuts staff whenever the number of public works projects falls off.

So Oakland County's Drain Commission, which employed 208 people in very busy 1979, started 1984 with only 59 employees. "It's just a very aggressive way of saying 'If you don't have the work, you don't need the people,'" contends Kuhn, who laid off more than 75 construction inspectors in five years.

"There's always room for some percentage cutback. I say it can be done."

IN OFFICE SINCE 1975, Kuhn increased staff from 107 to 208 in 1978. That year, there was more than \$250 million in county work on storm drains and sanitary sewer lines.

Expansion in Avon Township, Farmington Hills, Troy, Waterford Township and West Bloomfield created most of the business. "We put in place 400 miles of sewer lines. There was a lot going on in those days," he said.

But work fell off with declining federal aid for public works projects and an interpretation of the Headlee Amendment to the state constitution requiring voters to approve such construction.

So, as Drain Commission employees retired or left, their jobs were not filled. Personnel dropped to 173 in 1980, 147 in 1981, 106 in 1982, 80 in 1983 and 59 this year.

The number of vehicles also was reduced from 46 in 1978-81 to 44 in January 1983, 32 in December 1982 and 29 in December 1983.

OVER THE YEARS, the employee reductions have saved the county \$392,140.47 in salaries and fringe benefits, Kuhn said. The salaries and fringe benefits eliminated totaled \$4,205,305.

While saying he has a "good nucleus staff of very talented people," Kuhn admits he's trimmed to the bone.

"Some people have to wear two hats — just like in the auto plants."

"I think we've just about leveled out. We can't afford to keep cutting back."

New contracts for storm drain projects in Avon Township and Troy may require more people.

And Kuhn intends to keep plugging away for a return to the time when local governments had the power to pass resolutions to enact public works projects.



Expansion in Avon Township, Farmington Hills, Troy, Waterford Township and West Bloomfield created most of the work for the drain commission which put in place 400 miles of sewer lines during the peak building years. But with development halted, the drain commission's personnel ranks have been reduced from a peak of 208 in 1979 employees to 59 this year.

HE'S ESPECIALLY concerned about delays in building the Caddell Drainage Project in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi. The drain commissioner blames the Michigan Finance Commission for not allowing communities to sell unlimited tax bonds.

"I'm sitting on a time bomb. If there's another flood in Farmington, everyone will be on my back," Kuhn is considering a law-

suit to force the issue.

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But even if construction should pick up, Kuhn never expects to see his staff increase to the peak level of 1979.

"As soon as we break loose that log jam, I'd like to increase staff. But it will never get back to those numbers."

"That was a massive amount of work."

OU prof sizes up Chinese industry

Chinese and U.S. industries share many common concerns. They range from worker health and safety to competing with largely outdated equipment against modern Asian and European countries, an Oakland University industrial health and safety expert has found.

Uwe Reischl has returned after a 19-day tour with an American delegation of the heavily industrialized north and eastern seacoasts of China.

"The Chinese industrial managers kept asking how their facilities compared with the U.S.," Reischl said, "and we responded by saying they were about the same." This means the use of outdated equipment in many factories.

The 14 specialists were invited by the Chinese Association for Science and Technology. They were chosen by the American Industrial Hygiene Association. Reischl was one of only two academicians selected.

A SPECIALIST in occupational heat stress, Reischl is associate professor and director of the Oakland University program in industrial health and safety.

He and other members of the U.S. delegation visited five cities.

Their observations were based on visits to shipbuilding facilities, electronics manufacturing plants, textile mills, oil refineries, a steel mill, printing and publishing operations, a pharmaceutical factory, and two schools of public health.

"In some instances, China is actually far ahead of the U.S. In other areas, China is today where the U.S. was 40 years ago," Reischl said.

In a large industrial setting, one generally will find an industrial hygienist, a safety engineer, a nurse, and an industrial physician. In China, only the physician and engineer will be involved, he found.

Often the two do not understand one another's problems or areas of concern. They are missing the industrial hygienist, the link between them. In

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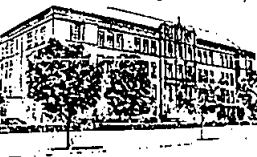
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