

Women take their place in the House

Though still out-numbered but not silent

By Tim Richard
staff writer

SHIRLEY Johnson tells the story of a lobbyist who spoke briefly before the Appropriations Committee of the state House of Representatives. "I will give this documentation to your secretary," he said, handing it to her.

The chagrined lobbyist felt his case collapse when Johnson informed him that she wasn't a secretary — she is the representative from the 68th House District of Oakland County and a member of one of the most potent committees in the Michigan Legislature.

That's what it's like, some days, in Lansing. But the women lawmakers — there are 14 in the House and two in the Senate — don't meet as a separate caucus, even though they sometimes feel a bit isolated when the good ol' boys exercise power.

They reinforce each other socially, rather than as a political caucus, and they are extremely fair about how they dress, both in the Capitol Building and on the campaign trail.

FIVE SUBURBAN women representatives were interviewed about their roles in a body that is 89.2 percent male. They are, alphabetically:

• Lyn Banks, 44, Republican of Livonia, in her first term after serving on the Wayne County Charter Commission.

• Maxine Berman, 39, Democrat of Southfield, in her second term, a one-time high school English teacher and the only single member of the group. She chairs the Elections Committee.

• Justine Barnes, 60, Democrat of Westland, in her second term after 17 years on the Westland City Council and service on the city charter commission and Wayne County Charter Commission. She chairs the Committee on Constitutional Revision and Women's Rights.

• Judith Miller, 46, Republican of Birmingham, in her first term after service on the Birmingham City Commission.

• Shirley Johnson, 47, Republican of Royal Oak, in her third term after coming up through the ranks of the PTA, civic groups and party politics.

THERE IS NO longer a women's caucus in the Legislature — deliberately.

"There are differing opinions if there should be one," said Berman. "I have strong feelings against it. So I volunteered to chair the group, knowing I'd never call a meeting."

Why not? After all the 1982 talk about Republican Richard Headlee's "gender gap," and after the apparent female enthusiasm for Geraldine Ferraro in 1984, isn't there some commonality of views among women?

"We don't all speak with one voice on every issue," Berman answered. "The press would focus on one or two (who didn't vote with the caucus) and say, 'See, women don't agree.'"

YET THERE are points where women, even if they aren't unanimous, clearly vote differently from men.

Take the issue of funding Medicaid abortions. Women representatives were 11-3 in favor while men were 75 percent opposed. Women made the difference in upholding Gov. James J. Blanchard's veto of the fund cutoff.

Take last week's balanced budget/constitutional convention resolution. Women were 11-3 opposed. Of the suburban group, only Banks, in the closing days, switched in favor of it — a vote which Johnson predicted will cost Banks a lot of female support.

"All of us support ERA (federal Equal Rights Amendment)," said Johnson.

"We communicate," said Banks.

"We used to have breakfasts," added Barnes. "We wanted to get acquainted. The good ol' boys go to bars. We're not as ingrained in The System."

ONLY TWO women serve in the state Senate after a dozen years in which there were none. One is Connie Blinfield, a conservative Republican from Leelanau County; the other is Lana Pollack, a liberal Democrat from Ann Arbor. There is no woman among Michigan's 20-member congressional delegation.

"Lana tells me they are very lonely," said Berman.

"They nominate women to Congress only when they can't win," Berman went on. "As seats become more powerful, it becomes more difficult for women and minorities to get those seats."

Johnson recalled she was approached to seek a state Senate seat when the veteran Bill S. Huffman retired in 1982, but turned it down because "I had a good House seat and didn't want to be viewed as extremely ambitious."

Barnes recalled that she wanted the state representative seat in 1970, but was shunted aside by the powers-that-be because "Tom Brown needs a job and you have kids." She made it in 1982.

ONE COMMON link the women reps have is the need to do their homework thoroughly.

"To be a woman legislator, you have to have some pretty strong opinions," said Barnes. "We're all issue-oriented."

"In general," said Berman, "no matter what the issue is, women of the Legislature..."

"Are smarter?" Barnes interjected.

"...are much tougher in terms of not caving in. Most of us went through so much to get where we are. You have to do twice as much work to be equal," Berman finished.

"That's no joke," Barnes added. "I always bring in a lot of paperwork."

OF THE FIVE, three wore suits that day; the other two, conservative dresses.

"I wear suits because I find I'm taken much more seriously," said Miller. "What you wear must neither attract nor detract from your work."

"I will never wear a flamboyant or flashy dress," said Barnes. "I will never wear slacks."

Johnson said she wears slacks only for the knock-down, drag-out midnight sessions over tax increases so she can put her legs up on her desk.

She shared a laugh at the way male legislators and lobbyists don pinstripe suits "for the power battles."

"Tuesday every single (male) legislator had on a navy blue or pinstripe suit," said Banks, recalling a key vote.

Suits are all right for the legislative halls, said



A former Birmingham councilmember, Judith Miller made the jump to the state House this year.



Livonia state Rep. Lyn Banks is one of this term's freshman legislators.



"To be a woman legislator, you have to have some pretty strong opinions. We're all issue-oriented."

— state Rep.
Justine Barnes
D-Westland

Shirley Johnson, R-Royal Oak, turned down a senate try so she wouldn't seem "extremely ambitious."



Rep. Maxine Berman of Southfield: "We don't always speak with one voice on every issue."

Johnson, but tough when you're on the primary campaign trail on a hot July afternoon. A male candidate can doff his coat and roll up his sleeves, but a woman candidate knocking on doors is advised to stick with the suit and bear the heat.

MANY ECONOMIC issues have faded as "women's issues" in recent months and years. An appeals court struck down a state of Washington "comparable worth" ruling which would have required equal pay for different jobs where certain jobs were female-dominated. The difficulty of women getting bank credit to start businesses seems to have faded as a legislative issue.

Child care centers for working parents, however, are no the front burner. "Day care clearly is the most important issue for women who want to work or need to work," said Berman.

Banks said, "A poll shows it's becoming a man's issue. They need the woman's income."

"And more (divorced) fathers are getting custody of the children," added Johnson.

"We're talking pay equity," said Barnes, who chairs the Constitutional Revision and Women's Rights Committee. But she deplores the fact that "women are not taking the math" they need to get better jobs.

WITH THAT handful of exceptions, the women are interested in the same issues as the men.

"My focus is higher education," said Miller. "Anything we do affects every one."

Staff photos by
Bill Brosler

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police and fire calls received during the past week:

DELIVERY ALLEGED

A 25-year-old Farmington Hills man is charged with two counts of delivery of a controlled substance.

Arrested Thursday before District Judge Michael Hand of Farmington, Martin A. Cook stood mute to one count of delivery of marijuana and one count of delivery of lysergic acid.

The felonies carry maximum penalties upon conviction of four years in prison and a \$2,000 fine, and seven years in prison and a \$5,000 fine, respectively.

Cook was released on personal bond pending a preliminary examination in 4th District Court.

Cook's arrest followed execution of a search warrant Sept. 30 at his house.

"We had learned a police prep radio lost by an officer earlier this year during an incident outside the house was inside the house," Hills Police Sgt. Dennis Rochford said.

"When we got there, however, we didn't find the prep radio. Instead, we found a police scanner."

"But we also found several baggies of suspected marijuana, several hits of suspected lysergic acid and \$400 in cash, as well as scales and other suspected drug paraphernalia. That led us to believe he was in the business of selling."

DESCRIPTION GIVEN

A description has been given of the man who acted as if he had a gun while robbing the Wendy's Old-Fashioned Hamburgers restaurant at 27630 Eight Mile of 1104 Nov. 4.

According to Hills Police report, a man who appeared tense approached the counter. When an employee asked if his order was "for here or to go," he answered, "to go, get a bag and put the money in it." No gun was seen, but the man kept his hands in his jacket pockets, waving them as if he had a gun. The man was described as in his mid-40s. After the employee complied with his request, the gunman fled on foot.

The gunman was described as white, 5-5 and 130 pounds, with hazel eyes, dirty blonde, shoulder-length hair, a slim build and medium skin tone. He was wearing a tan suede or rough leather waist-length jacket.

MONEY STOLEN

From \$150 to 200 was stolen early Friday from a safe and cash register at Little Caesar's Pizza, 33103 Grand River, Commander Thomas Cox of the Farmington Department of Public Safety said.

This is the second incident at the restaurant in a week, but detectives have not determined whether the two are related. Unknown assailants entered through the building's north glass door, breaking it with cement blocks, and escaping through the back door, Cox

said. The incident occurred sometime between 4:30 and 6:30 a.m. The department does not believe there's a connection between the Little Caesar's incidents in Farmington and the recent armed robberies at Little Caesar's locations in Farmington Hills.

CAR VANDALISM

Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi weren't the only cities to report car windows having been shot out in the past two weeks.

Northville and Plymouth police agencies report similar incidents, Hills Sgt. Charles Nebus said. Cars have been parked either on the street or in a drive. Weapons are believed to include a wristrocket and a BB gun. Incidents have occurred after 11 p.m., generally on Saturdays and Sundays.

Windows were reported damaged in more than 130 cars in Farmington, Farmington Hills and Novi.

WINDOWS SMASHED

A window in the social room of Prince of Peace Lutheran Church of Farmington Hills, 25000 New Market, was broken about 10 p.m. Wednesday. Damage was estimated at \$50, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

A Thermopane drive-through-area window at Wendy's Old-Fashioned Hamburgers, 27630 Eight Mile, was smashed shortly past midnight Thursday, according to a Farmington Hills police report. Damage was estimated at \$200.

SITES VANDALIZED

The rough plumbing was broken up and torn apart at the Tiffany Plaza construction site, 32839 Northwestern Highway, sometime Nov. 1-5, according to a Farmington Hills police report. Damage was estimated at \$3,000.

Red paint was sprayed on the ends of 35 sheets of plywood paneling at a house under construction on Lancaster sometime Nov. 4-5, according to a Farmington Hills police report. Damage was estimated at \$875.

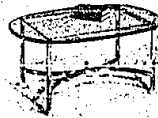
THEFTS REPORTED

A human skeleton valued at \$300 was stolen from a hallway at Alameda Elementary School, 32400 Alameda, sometime between 7:15 and 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

Nearly \$500 worth of property was stolen from Kemron Environmental Services, 32740 Northwestern Highway, sometime Nov. 4-5, according to a Farmington Hills police report. The property included a laughing-gas tank, two AM/FM cassette recorders and cash.

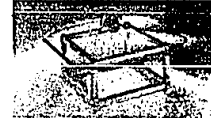
A micrometer caliper valued at \$870 was among the tools stolen during a break-in at Yale Tool & Engraving, 14501 Hollywood Court, sometime Nov. 7, according to a Farmington Hills police report.

A Touch of Glass From LaBarge



List \$875

SALE \$519



List \$1650

SALE \$989

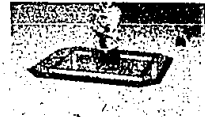
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