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Fifty Cents

trapped in TRAFFIC

County road or parking lot?

You noticed the difference this week. With summer vacations over and schools reopened, Oakland County's roads are traffic-jammed during the morning and evening drive times. Today, the Observer & Eccentric begins a two-part look at Oakland County traffic. Part 2 runs next Thursday.

By Bill Kots
staff writer

From the air in WWJ-AM traffic monitor John Sherwin's helicopter, Telegraph Road slices neatly and efficiently through southeastern Oakland County.

From the ground, Sherwin says, it's the route of all evil.

"When I'm up there, it looks pretty normal to me," he said. "But I have to come down and drive in the stuff every day. There's just too many cars and not enough pavement."

"It can be quite a parking lot." Welcome to Oakland County — the brightest gem in the state's economic crown, one of the nation's fastest-growing regions and the post-Labor Day birthplace of Michigan's most harrowing commuter nightmares.

THE REASONS, say area and state officials, are obvious. The county's population has grown by about 700,000 over the last four decades, including by an estimated 100,000 since 1980, according to David Hay of the county's planning division.

Babies haven't been the only ones to boom. In 1988, more than \$1 billion worth of new construction was built, said Marilyn Rubin, a county real estate statistician. As of May 1989, \$324 million worth of new homes, offices and businesses had been erected, Rubin said.

Hay and other planners predict the rapid expansion will taper off. They say recent statistics suggest that Oakland County will continue growing, but at a slower rate.

Meanwhile, thousands of motorists are choking the roads twice a day — turning once-bucolic Oakland County into the worst of asphalt jungles.

"You've got some places where traffic moves like marbles down a laundry chute, and then you hit another community where it backs right up because there wasn't any planning," said Bruce Madsen, director of the Bloomfield Township-based Traffic Improvement Association.

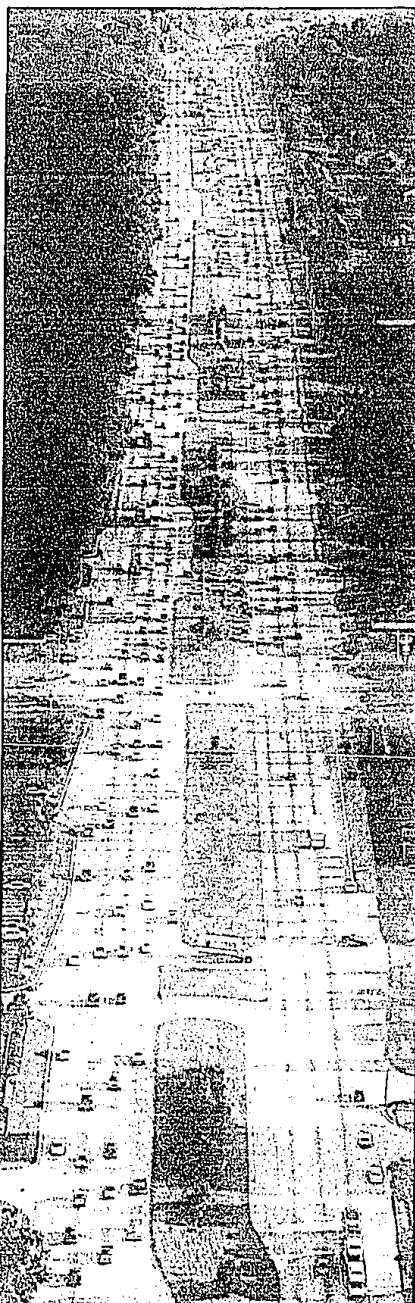
TO COMPLICATE matters, fewer drivers are commuting to Detroit for work, and more are both living and working in the county, Madsen said.

The Lodge Freeway in Southfield is a highway to hell, according to county figures. In 1987, as many as 115,676 vehicles daily clogged the main artery south to Detroit and north to Rochester, Pontiac and Flint.

Interstate 96 in Farmington Hills and Interstate 75 in Troy were the second and third most-traveled routes that year, with average daily traffic counts of 101,502 and 100,020, respectively.

Frustrated drivers who seek relief on secondary roads are confronting and creating similar congestion.

On Telegraph Road in Bloomfield Hills, for example, 82,445 vehicles jockeyed for position during an average 24-hour period in 1987, figures show. As many as another 70,000 drivers daily clogged Ro-



The view of Telegraph, north and south of Maple Road, from John Sherwin's traffic copter.

chester Road from Troy to Oakland Township, Woodward Avenue from Royal Oak to Pontiac and Southfield Road from Southfield to Birmingham.

Even drivers who opt for smaller routes have found themselves in plenty of sluggish company. More than 40,000 motorists daily cruise Orchard Lake Road from Farmington to West Bloomfield, according to traffic counts.

SO-CALLED "back roads" offer little relief. Auburn and Avon roads in Rochester Hills and Troy's Wat-

ters Road daily host more than 26,000 commuters.

"We're really not in a crisis situation yet in Oakland County, but we're on the leading edge of one," said Madsen, whose non-profit organization advises communities on traffic and road safety issues. "Anyone who's been in Los Angeles or Boston can understand that."

"All we can do is to really work right now to make it less worse. It's going to get worse. But, my God, let's do what we can."

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Hills plans countersuit against Boys Republic

Related opinion, 18A

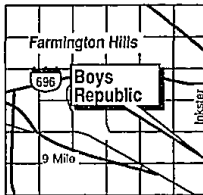
By Noreen Flack
staff writer

Farmington Hills plans to file a counter-suit against Boys Republic this week, claiming the new assessment program at the state-subsidized home for juvenile offenders has violated the city's zoning ordinance.

In a closed city council meeting Sept. 6, the counter-complaint was advised by John Donohue, a specialist in zoning and land use who was recently assigned as special legal counsel for the Boys Republic case.

In a statement presented by Mayor Terry Sever Monday, city officials concurred that "... the structural alterations and improvements and the new program at Boys Republic amount to an expansion of a non-conforming use in violation of the city's zoning ordinance."

Boys Republic officials have 28 days to respond to the complaint. To protect interests of the city and its



residents, no further comment will be made by city officials until then, said Donohue, from the Farmington Hills law firm of Kohl, Secrest, Ward, Lynch, Clark and Hampton.

Boys Republic — on 80 wooded acres north of Nine Mile west of Inkster — is in a RA-1 residential zoning area. Any change or expanded use of the land must be approved by the board of zoning appeals, under the city charter.

"We want to make sure the zoning laws are upheld," said Cyndi Cohen



John Donohue
special counsel

of Forest Park subdivision, which borders the site. "You can't place towers in an area designed for families."

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Bush takes drug war to schools

T-shirt fund-raising
drive nearing goal, 18A

Related opinion, 18A

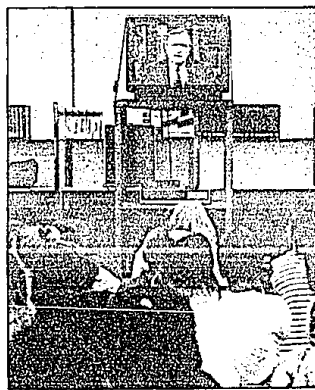
By Casey Hans
staff writer

"Saying 'no' won't make you a nerd, it won't make you a loser" and those who use drugs, even casually, "will pay the price," President George Bush told students Tuesday.

Mobilized in classrooms and assembly halls across the nation, students gathered to hear Bush's anti-drug plea, directed especially at them.

"Even if you don't use drugs, you ought to be angry about it," Bush said during the broadcast, shown on

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Fourth and fifth graders in Longacre Elementary's media center watched President George Bush's nighttime, anti-drug message Tuesday. The 12-minute speech addressed students across the country on network television.

March leaders shut out press

Related opinions, 18A

By Susan Buck
staff writer

The press was not welcome. In an interview Friday with Derwin Success, a black resident in a biracial family planning a fall peace march for racial harmony in Farmington, said the Observer was welcome to cover a Love Force United meeting Monday night.

But on Monday afternoon, one hour after this reporter started making phone calls about the meeting, Success' wife Dianna called and pulled in the welcome mat.

"It's a closed meeting as far as any press is concerned," she said. "I can't give you any information about it."

She said group members feel "uncomfortable" about having the press at meetings. On Tuesday, she further declined comment, deferring to her husband, who was unavailable for comment both Monday and Tuesday.

Some supporters have become close-lipped.

And Frank Lauboff, Farmington Department of Public Safety director, expressed concern the whole event will turn into a "Nazi/Anti-Nazi conflict," drawing outsiders rather than community support.

Support base unclear

By Susan Buck
staff writer

Frank Lauboff, Farmington Department of Public Safety director, believes part of the reason some of Derwin Success' followers are turning away is that the peace march organizer is too media-conscious.

Success, a black Farmington resident in a biracial family, has raised questions in some people's minds.

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