Hills firefighters find their role expanding

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

'We're starting to wear more than two hats. It was fire and medical. Now it's becoming fire, medical and hazardous materials.'

— Peter Baldwin
Hills deputy fire chief

Next time you hear a fire alarm in Farmington Hills, don't be too sure it's a raging fire. More than likely, medically trained firefighters are responding to a heart attack, car accident or other medical emergencies.

"I think people just started calling the fire department when they needed help," Farmington Hills fire Chief Richard Marinucci said. "We responded to the public wanting the fire department to be more productive, and that began with serious medicals."

Over the years, changes have come to full-time and part-time firefighters as public demand has changed and the number of fires has decreased.

Of the total 3,956 fire department incidents in 1989, medical emergencies topped 1,763 or 56.1 percent. In comparison, 398 of the total 3,965 incidents were fire-related. And only 99 were actual structure fires.

"Where things we used to go to burned down, now we're them putting out," Marinucci said. "There's definitely some luck, fate involved. But you can't look at the number of fires and not think we are having an impact."

IN 1989, not only were there fewer fires, a 19.2 percent decrease, but also an accompanying 21.4 percent decrease in fire loss. Total loss for 1989 was $1.3 million.

"The number of fires is going down yet the population of the community is going up," Marinucci said. "Even when we have fires, they are smaller in magnitude."

Fire prevention, building inspections, public education, smoke detectors, automatic sprinklers, improved equipment, training and response times, have all played a role in reducing the number of fires and damage, Marinucci said.

"We're starting to wear more than two hats. It was fire and medical. Now it's becoming fire, medical and hazardous materials. We have to be trained across the board to respond to deal with all these incidents," deputy fire Chief Peter Baldwin. "It's a natural in the public's perception that immediate response belongs to the fire department."

In order to respond properly to specific types of emergencies, firefighters must be trained in various fields. "We're trying to get up to the basic emergency medical training (EMT) level as a minimum," Baldwin said, referring to the state-licensed level of emergency care.

THOUGH SOME firefighters are trained as advanced EMTs, the department "does not operate on that level. We don't have the equipment to provide that type of care," Baldwin said.

The department's commitment to patient care is continually strengthened through training and the defibrillator program, for example.

In 1989, the defibrillator — a device that applies electrical current to the heart — was used 27 times. It saved three people.

"This 12-percent success rate doesn't seem significant, but in reality, the statistics are much better," according to the annual fire report. ". . . of the potentially salvageable patients in cardiac arrest seen by the fire department, 28 percent (three out of 11) survived — well above the national average of 20 percent."

Training in the handling of hazardous materials is of extreme importance today, particularly as state and federal legislation puts responsibility on fire departments.

FIREFIGHTERS RECEIVE training in hazardous materials, including recognizing situations involving the materials and how to protect against exposure.

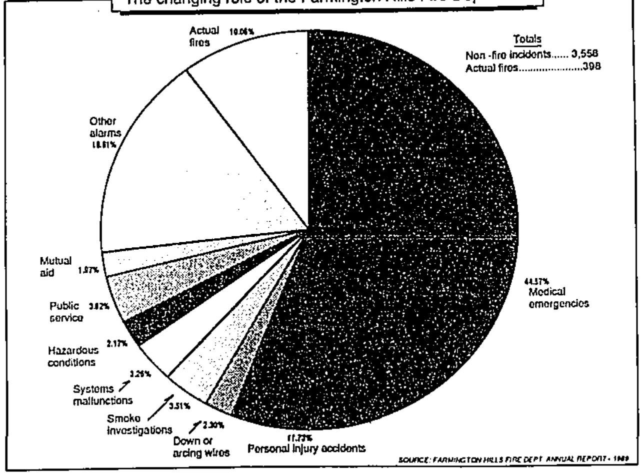
"We take our firefighters through a basic awareness course. They are the ones who are at risk," Baldwin said.

When not responding to runs, firefighters spend a lot of time helping the public — business and residential — reduce the possibilities of having fires. Whether through the smoke detector program or building inspections, the idea is to do all that can be done to make conditions such that fires don't occur.

In 1989, the fire department installed, free of charge, 111 smoke detectors in homes. Since the program's beginning in 1985, a total of 585 detectors have been installed.

In addition to education programs provided to 15,887 children and adults last year, firefighters are involved in building inspections, including review of hazardous material storage facilities in site plan reviews. In 1989,the fire department conducted 3,194 inspections.

The changing role of the Farmington Hills Fire Department



SOURCE: FARMINGTON HILLS FIRE DEPT. ANNUAL REPORT - 1989

police/fire calls

Listed below are some of the Farmington-area police incidents, fire calls and court cases reported during the past week:

● WEAPONS FOUND

Two men, one from St. Clair Shores and another from California, were charged with eight weapons offenses June 23 after Farmington Hills police Det. Charles Hubbard stopped them and found weapons in their car.

Hubbard followed what he considered a suspicious car near 10 Mile and Orchard Lake Road. He followed the car to Hawthorne Street where he saw the four occupants transfer weapons from a house and another car to the car the men were driving.

Hubbard followed the foursome north onto I-696 and to the Lodge Freeway, where he stopped the car in Southfield. He was assisted by other Farmington Hills officers.

"We don't know what the intended purpose of the weapons was," Sgt. Charles Nebus said.

When police searched the car, they found five knives, a battle ax, ammunition clips, ammunition pouches, a 30-caliber carbine and a loaded sawed-off shotgun, police said.

Two other men, Detroit residents, in the car with the others were charged on traffic and alcohol possession offenses, Nebus said.

● SIX TICKETED

Six men, two Farmington Hills residents, were ticketed in connection with a disorderly house party at 3 a.m. June 24 on Perry's Crossing.

The men were ticketed for violating the city's open house party ordinance and interfering with police. One of the men was charged with assaulting an officer as police tried to disperse the party, with the assistance of West Bloomfield Township police.

When police responded to complaints of a disorderly party, they were denied entrance to the house at least three times. Finally about 30 of the 60 people in the house left when asked by police.

● CARS ATTACKED

Thirteen cars at Polo Club Apartments, 39352 Polo Club Dr., north of 9 Mile, were damaged sometime during the night June 24 when someone slashed tires and smashed windshields and sunroofs.

Damage to individual cars ranged from $850-$100. The cars were parked in the west parking lot of the complex. No one heard or saw anything unusual, police said.

● THEFTS REPORTED

Approximately $925 in tools, cash and a two-way radio were reported stolen from Grand Haggerty Auto Inc., 25000 Haggerty, June 21-22.

St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center gets grant

The St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center in Farmington Hills has received a renewed grant of $5,000 for 1990 from the Target Stores Project Family.

Target stores, a division of the Dayton Hudson Corp., has awarded grants to a variety of agencies in the tri-county area whose programs strengthen and enrich families. Project Family grants are made possible through the generosity of Target employees and customers.

The grant will continue to provide funds for the Center's Teen Mother and Infant Parenting Program. Located on the grounds, this program serves young mothers, ages 16 to 18, and their families.

While helping young mothers continue their education and develop independent living skills, the program also stresses an understanding of child development and a healthy emotional relationship between mother and child.

The St. Vincent and Sarah Fisher Center provides services to over 200 children, adolescents and their families through its six different programs. Administered by the Daughters of Charity, the Center has cared for children for over 60 years.

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