

Parking from page 13A

"Our volunteers are very dedicated to their program. They are very attuned to the individuals who are physically challenged," said Sgt. Ray Cranston of the police department's traffic section. "They didn't think the system that existed offered the best balance."

In particular, some volunteers say the tickets they had given violators were being dismissed unnecessarily — and some by a court clerk.

"That doesn't happen anymore," said 47th District Judge Fred Harris, who acknowledged that happened when ticket holders arrived at the court and presented clerks with evidence, such as an original handicapped permit.

But Harris said that many tickets were dismissed with good cause, even those dismissed by clerks. Not all tickets automatically result in guilty verdicts and fines.

One of the processes involved with the tickets allows violators to

admit responsibility with an explanation. Volunteers were concerned because there was no way — before a judge or magistrate — to confirm the violator's claims.

On the other hand, Cranston said, the dismissals weren't only on the shoulders of the local court. Some tickets, because of a stolen plate or a transposed vehicle identification number, for example, are likely to be automatically dismissed.

"These account for a significant portion of the dismissed tickets. They are wrongly attributed to the court," said Cranston, who added that the program's purpose is educational, not necessarily punitive.

Consider tickets issued to rented or leased cars. The rental companies are not required to say who the

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car is leased to and there goes another ticket, Cranston added.

From the start of the enforcement program in October, 1990, through the end of July this year, volunteers issued 2,350 tickets. About 50 percent of the violators were found responsible. About 10 to 12 percent were defaults, which occurs when the violator does not respond to the court. In that case, when a person has defaulted twice on handicapped

parking tickets in the same jurisdiction, their license can be suspended, Cranston said.

At any given time, another 10 to 15 percent of the tickets written are still in the system and have not yet received a court date. "The balance is those tickets that were dismissed somewhere in the system," Cranston said.

Now there's a new way of doing business, thanks to meetings be-

tween program and court officials.

"We will now send copies of notes taken by volunteers to the magistrates along with every ticket," Cranston said. "So then we have an equal delivery of information."

The disposition of tickets also will be audited every 30 days. That way volunteers know exactly what is happening with the tickets they gave. "With the court we will do a rapid monitoring of the disposition. We will find out faster about dismissals so we can determine if it can be appealed. Volunteers will work with that," Cranston said.

Harris said he is optimistic about the changes. "The resolution seems to be working very well. In time, it will all work out."

Howe is taking a wait-and-see attitude. "It's really too early to tell.

It's not fair to judge it yet."

Howe and the volunteers believe education is the key. "People have got to be educated to use their permit properly."

Harris and Cranston say changes from the Michigan Secretary of State's office are frequent and confusing. "There is still misunderstanding as to what is the state of Michigan's lawfully issued indication of a disability," Cranston said.

Despite the concerns, the enforcement program is considered successful. "The mark of a successful program is the number of empty (parking) spaces or spaces used by those who truly need them," Cranston said. "People aren't abusing the spaces like they did. We are seeing more and more empty spaces and fewer violations written."

Fliers

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"People have been asking where it (brochure) is at. It's supposed to be out now. Our residents have come to expect programs from us and we are happy to deliver the services to them," said Andrew Lang, Farmington Hills recreation superintendent.

But the printer didn't print the brochure. "We apologize. We will try to minimize this problem," Lang continued. "This is due to things out of our control. We are trying to make a positive situation out of a bad one."

Parents will receive their special fliers through the Farmington Public Schools. Elementary school students will be given them to take home, Lang said.

Residents also may pick up the fliers at the following locations:

- Farmington Hills Special Services Department, 31555 11 Mile, located behind city hall.
- Farmington City Hall, 23600 Liberty.
- Farmington Community Library: Farmington branch, 23550 Liberty; Farmington Hills branch, 32737 12 Mile.
- Farmington Public School Community Education, 30415 Shiawassee.
- Mercy Center, 29600 11 Mile.
- Farmington YMCA, 28100 Farmington Road.

Seminar geared for women

The Oakland University Continuum Center is presenting a one-day conference, "Women Going Back to School: A Growing Majority" on Saturday, Sept. 19, 9-4 p.m. on campus.

The conference is a resource day geared to women at any stage of post-high school education.

Dr. Sandra Packard, the newly appointed and first woman president of Oakland University will be the keynote speaker.

The fee is \$39 per person; pre-registration and pre-payment are required. MasterCard and Visa are accepted. Call 370-3033 before Sept. 17 to register.

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