

Sheriff asks board to wait for facts

BY PAT MURPHY
STAFF WRITER

It wasn't an apology. And he didn't whine. But Oakland Sheriff John F. Nichols was obviously angry when he addressed county commissioners Thursday in his first public acknowledgment of the problems besetting his 800-person department.

"I do not come to ask for sympathy," Nichols told commissioners during the public comment session of their regular meeting, "nor to give excuses. But to point out some facts you should keep in mind as you deal with the vast amounts of publicity given these events."

Criminal warrants and internal disciplinary action will likely result, Nichols said. And the investigations will take longer than two or three more weeks.

"These events," of course, are three separate scandals that have surfaced within the last six weeks in a department previously thought to be running like a Swiss watch. Those scandals have prompted even the most staunch supporter to privately question Nichols' management style. The most recent — and clear

cut — scandal surfaced last week with a civilian employee, Terry A. Malers, appearing in court for allegedly taking an undisclosed amount of money — possibly as much as \$50,000 — from a secure property room.

The other scandals — with more implications — involve the work release program and alleged misuse of money or resources in the sheriff's substation which serves Rochester Hills.

Sheriff's investigators are probing the work release program, where inmates apparently did work or performed favors illegally for deputies and/or their supervisors.

But the prosecutor's office along with sheriff's investigators are looking into problems at the Rochester Hills substation.

"We're approaching this with a task force," Prosecutor Richard Thompson said Friday. The prosecutor declined to elaborate.

Nichols was almost as tight-lipped in his brief address to commissioners. Problems in the work release program and at the Rochester Hills substation were detected internally, he said. "These issues were not thrust upon us by

outside forces. They were issues that we discovered ourselves and brought to light ourselves, and we dealt with openly and candidly."

The lack of charges — or internal disciplinary action — so far does not indicate a reluctance to deal with the issues, Nichols said, but were a result of the magnitude of the investigations "coupled with a number of allegations published in the paper."

The prosecutor has handled the investigations promptly and appropriately, Nichols said. "He must prove and verify (allegations) before he may take them into a court of law. This is not a reluctance. . . to deal with issues, but merely a desire to be thorough, fair and honest to all parties concerned."

Nichols urged commissioners — and presumably residents — to avoid jumping to conclusions and to withhold judgment until the investigations are completed and the relevant facts made public.

"I ask that you stop and take all factors into consideration before you involve yourselves in remarks that are unfair and deleterious to the overall morale of the department," Nichols said.

Commissioners remained silent as Nichols finished and brusquely walked to his seat. He tersely answered a few questions from reporters then left the building.

Commissioner Donn Wolf, R-Farmington Hills, said he was satisfied with Nichols' address. "I think I speak for most of my colleagues when I say I have faith in the sheriff and I'm willing to withhold judgment."

Commissioner Lawrence R. Pernick, D-Southfield, however, reiterated his earlier request that outside agencies — such as the Michigan State Police which handled the Malers case — investigate all allegations of impropriety.

That's the only way to assure full disclosure, insisted Pernick — a contention that many colleagues, especially Republicans, strongly reject.

B'ham lawyer runs for Senate

Pledging an independent campaign addressing the important economic issues facing the country, Birmingham attorney Jim Elaman became the first Republican to formally announce he wants to challenge incumbent U.S. Sen. Donald W. Riegle Jr.

"He (Riegle) was asleep at the switch for the Savings and Loan Scandal," Elaman said, referring to his chairmanship of Senate Banking and Finance Committee charged with overseeing financial institutions. "His negligence cost every American family \$10,000."

Elaman, 56, said he was "getting in the race early" because he hoped to get an edge on other Republicans candidates. Among those reportedly consid-

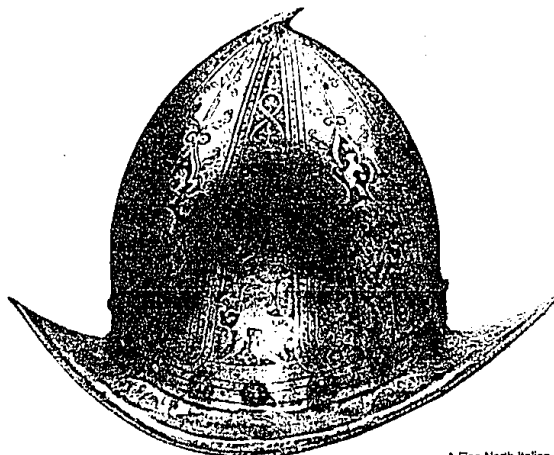


Jim Elaman

ering a bid in the primary election, former GOP state chairman Spencer Abraham and former U.S. Rep. William Schuette.

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Take a few minutes to walk through your home—use this check-list to make sure your home is in good shape

SMOKE DETECTORS

- ☐ Place smoke detectors near bedrooms and on every floor.
- ☐ Test the batteries monthly.
- ☐ Keep smoke detectors away from air vents.
- ☐ Place smoke detectors at least 4 to 6 inches away from walls and corners.

ELECTRICAL WIRING

- ☐ Replace wiring if it's frayed or cracked.
- ☐ Do not place wiring under rugs, over nails or in high traffic areas.
- ☐ Avoid overloading outlets.
- ☐ Keep covers over electric plates and avoid exposed wiring.

ELECTRIC SPACE HEATERS

- ☐ Plug heaters directly into the wall socket, and not into extension cords.
- ☐ Unplug heaters when they're not being used.

KEROSENE HEATERS

- ☐ Be sure kerosene heaters are legal in your area.
- ☐ Fill only with K-1 Kerosene, and never use gasoline or camp stove fuel.
- ☐ Refuel kerosene heaters outdoors and when they're cool.

WOODSTOVES AND FIREPLACES

- ☐ Only use seasoned wood, and never use green wood, artificial logs or trash.
- ☐ Always use a protective screen.
- ☐ Clean chimneys yearly.

FIRE SAFETY TECHNOLOGY

- ☐ Consider installing residential fire sprinklers.

For more information about how to keep your home and family safe from fire, please write to:

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SAFE COOKING PRACTICES

- ☐ Don't leave food unattended on the stove.
- ☐ Keep appliances clean and free of grease and crumbs.
- ☐ Keep curtains, clothing and other combustibles away from the stove.
- ☐ Make sure the stove is off and small appliances are unplugged before going to bed.
- ☐ Keep a fire extinguisher handy.

SAFE SMOKING HABITS

- ☐ If you must smoke, never smoke in bed.
- ☐ Keep ashtrays away from upholstered furniture and curtains.
- ☐ Always attend burning cigarettes.

CHILDREN AND FIRE SAFETY

- ☐ Keep lighters and matches away from children.
- ☐ Teach children how to call for emergency assistance.
- ☐ Use safety plugs in electrical outlets.

HOME FIRE ESCAPE PLAN

- ☐ Have an escape plan and make sure all family members know it.
- ☐ Practice the plan every six months.
- ☐ Keep emergency numbers handy.
- ☐ Identify an outside meeting place and never return into a burning building.
- ☐ Know how to call for emergency assistance.

SPACE HEATERS

- ☐ Use heaters only in well-ventilated rooms.
- ☐ Place heaters where they will not be knocked over easily.
- ☐ Do not use heaters to dry clothing or other items.
- ☐ Keep heaters at a safe distance from curtains, furniture and all combustibles.



Ski Time! Get on track with THE Observer & Eccentric Cross-Country Ski School.

Cross-country skiing is a fun, exciting, and healthful way to enjoy the outdoors this winter. Learn to cross-country ski at the Observer & Eccentric Ski Schools listed below. Because there is limited space availability, pre-registration is required. For more registration information, call Monday through Friday at least one week in advance of the lesson.

Pine Trace Golf Course

c/o Rochester Avon Recreation Authority
3600 Pine Trace Boulevard, Rochester Hills MI 48309
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c/o Oakland County Parks & Recreation
1460 West Romeo Road, Leonard MI 48367
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Ski a special event!
Family and Friends Ski Nights
January 17, 23, and February 6
Winterfest, January 30

Independence Oaks County Park

c/o Oakland County Parks & Recreation
9501 Sashabaw Road, Clarkston MI 48348
625-0877
Ski a special event!
Family Affair Ski Tour, January 9

Bloomfield Hills Schools

Recreation and Community Services
4174 Dublin Drive, Bloomfield MI 48302
433-0885



Wayne County Parks & Recreation
33175 Ann Arbor Trail, Westland MI 48185
261-1990

Individual dates and times may change in each community. Clinics begin in January (weather permitting). Non-resident fee or local parks and recreation policy in effect.