

Volunteers help enforce handicapped parking rules

By BILL COUANT
STAFF WRITER

A group of volunteers is helping Farmington Hills police enforce its handicapped parking program — with dramatic results.

Despite their frustration over working with a legal system that often seems to put their concerns at a lower priority, the city's handicapped parking volunteers have helped the department write almost 3,000 tickets since they started in 1990 and they've helped keep repeat offenders to a minimum.

"Success is measured by the available parking spaces reported," said Sgt. Ray Cranston, a traffic specialist and liaison to the group for the Farmington Hills Police Department. "We've had only eight repeat offenders over the last calendar year (out of 1,263 ticketed in 1991)."

But the group, made up of volunteers that include handicapped and family of handicapped, has found out how frustrating compliance can be. Companies that plow lots will sometimes use handicapped trucks and lunch-time shoppers will use the spaces, and the courts often dismiss cases of violators.

"Welcome to the world of police work," Inspector Richard Niemisto told the volunteers at a recent meeting.

Penalties for illegal parking in handicapped spaces are stiff in Farmington Hills. The fine is \$100 for individuals and \$500 for commercial vehicles, the maximum allowed by state law.

In order to prosecute someone for illegally parking in a handicapped space, the volunteer who wrote the ticket must appear in court. If the case is delayed, adjourned or dismissed, the volunteer has often spent a half day for nothing, or so it seems.

"It was in the beginning all gung ho," said volunteer Thelma Goldstein. "A lot of people were willing to go without the witness fee (\$6 for a half day) if you could see some result."

In addition to wasted time in court, volunteers sometimes come back with no tickets to write.

"Some days you go out there and get zeroed out," said officer Ed Fitzpatrick, who works with the group. "That means we're getting compliance."

But the person accused of parking in a handicapped space must also spend time in court, which can be effective as a fine.

"Missing work for a half a day can be worse for some people than a fine," he said.

Cranston said the group was modeled after a similar volunteer concept in Flint, which in turn was modeled on a group started in Coral Gables, Fla. The number of parking places allotted for handicapped is determined by a federal formula.

The problem in Michigan with determining who can and can't park in a space is complicated, Cranston said. The state has changed how it determines handicapped status and identification of vehicles driven by the handicapped has changed.

There have been permits for permanently and temporarily handicapped, non-handicapped people drive a handicapped-plated car belonging to a friend or family member, people making a copy of a handicapped document and people using handicapped plates belonging to a dead person, he said.

The state now issues an individual laminated handicapped document that is to be kept by the handicapped person and put on the rear view mirror of the vehicle when it is parked. Each document has a number police can enter into a computer to verify identity, he said.

In that way, a handicapped person can drive any car and still use a handicapped sticker.

Cranston said getting businesses to put up the proper signs is another big problem.

But the contribution of volunteers has helped police enforce a law they probably couldn't given manpower limitations.

"You've definitely got the court's attention," said police Chief Bill Dwyer.



ANN HEALRY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Stop the clock: Tom Lyczkowski shows off the phony clock tower he erected in front of his historic home in Farmington. Lyczkowski is one of many residents who oppose a real clock tower for the Masonic Temple corner.

Architect from page 1A

chitecture from the University of Detroit, said he has been unable to find a position in his field.

"Because of the economy, it's difficult to find a job in architecture," he said. "It's probably the worst position to be in right now. I've sent out tons of resumes. A lot of architects

have given up and gone into other things."

Lyczkowski and McWilliams keep busy with a renovation of their house, home of Dr. Ezekiel Webb, Farmington's first physician, which dates to 1825. Dr. Webb was appointed Farmington's first postmaster in 1828,

and the house was the post office.

McWilliams is a regional coordinator for Blue Cross-Blue Shield.

The DDA Board and other city officials have remained strong in their support of the clock tower, despite protests from residents.

2 men bound over in motel robbery

Two Detroit men charged with robbing the Comfort Inn on 12 Mile and Orchard Lake Road will be arraigned in circuit court on March 10.

Rodney Delterro Lynn, 21, and Jason Wells Washington, 20, were charged with armed robbery following the holdup of the motel Feb. 10. They were arraigned in 47th District Court on Feb. 12.

Lynn, who had been working at the hotel at the time of the robbery, stood mute and a plea of not guilty was entered by Judge Fred Harris. He was bound over to circuit court after a preliminary exam on Feb. 24. Washington waived his exam.

A not guilty plea was entered for Washington at his arraignment Thursday on a separate

armed robbery charge for a Jan. 19 robbery of the same motel. His preliminary exam on that robbery charge will be March 15 at 8:30 a.m. in 47th District Court.

Both men face up to life in prison. Lynn is free on a \$5,000 corporate surety bond. Washington's bond was set at \$10,000 cash. He remains in the Oakland County jail.

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