



JOHN STORVAND/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

Fresh start: After many years in private industry, Rochester Hills resident Paul Funk (at right) joined Oakland County government as computer services director in January. Part of the team he enjoys working with are office automation division co-leaders Jim Taylor and Pam Armstrong.

Falling buttons, crashing cardinals don't faze him

This is another in a series on L. Brooks Patterson's opinions and the jobs they perform for Oakland County residents.

BY RALPH R. ECHTINAW
STAFF WRITER

Paul Funk works so hard that he hardly notices when the buttons fall off his shirt and the cardinals crash into the window of his office.

Taking over on Jan. 1, Oakland County's new computer services director has "done work every day of the year except three or four Sundays" even to the extent of working on Easter Sunday and having a meeting on Mother's Day.

"You've got to be crazy nuts in love with what you do, or who you are, or what you stand for," he said.

Sitting for an interview Tuesday morning, Funk, 39, got more than halfway through before noticing the button missing from his cuff. He already knew about the other missing button, the one that fell off in the car that morning.

As for the cardinals, Funk has noticed, over time, that several mates residing in the vicinity of the computer service center frequently crash into the window of his office.

"Those are my attack cardinals," he joked, theorizing that they see themselves reflected in the glass and attempt to run off the "other" bird.

Funk didn't have to run off his predecessor, Shan Topiwala, who was let go by Executive L. Brooks Patterson after assuming office Jan. 1.

Funk doesn't criticize Topiwala directly, but says the computer services department was in sorry shape when he took over.

Morale 'terrible'

Department morale was "terrible," and "most of the people who asked for personal computers

were either denied flat out, or it took years to get it approved."

The function of Funk's department is to work with all other county departments to see that they get the right computers and that the computers are functioning within normal parameters. "We're a lot like the lifeline of the county in terms of information," he said.

Although Funk knew there was a tremendous amount of catching up to do, the extent of it surprised him. "I'm appalled at some of the archaic approaches to management that we're finding in Oakland County (government)," he said. "You can only do so much with 3-by-5 cards."

A Rochester Hills resident, Funk served on the planning commission and city council there from March 1990 until his resignation last December.

Council president Jon Buller remembers Funk fondly. "The city's loss was the county's gain," he said. "He brought a certain balance to the council. I don't think you'll find a harder working individual. I'd be happy to serve with him again."

And he might. "Someday I'll run for office again," Funk said, noting that folks have been asking him to shoot for the Rochester Hills council again.

He only quit the first time because he thought there might be a conflict with the county job, but has since discovered there isn't, at least not legally.

The job offer from Patterson came as a surprise, said Funk, who had happily been plying his trade for the GTE Corp. and doing his thing on the city council.

It didn't hurt that Funk ran Patterson's campaign machine in the Rochester area. One day during the campaign Funk got a call from Patterson, asking him to lunch. "I showed up with all my

campaign stuff, thinking that's what he wanted to talk about," Funk said. "And out of the blue (Patterson said), 'Would you consider leaving your position to come to work for Oakland County?'"

Takes pay cut

Funk took a pay cut to take the job, which pays \$84,000 a year, and said that six weeks ago he turned down the chance to get a job paying even more than he made at GTE.

Part of the Oakland County benefit package, as far as Funk is concerned, is the exemplary work environment, which is akin to "what we read about, what people want work environments to be like."

The 100 employees of the computer services department generally work very hard, Funk said, but "they've got to see me doing it to. If I'm out golfing, coming in late, what kind of example is that? I'm proud of these people."

Funk grew up in Redford Township, where his Republican father tried twice and failed twice to win a seat on the board of trustees in the heavily Democratic community. That experience was perhaps the genesis of the son's political ambitions. "I'm politically astute, but I'm not real political."

Graduating from the University of Detroit High School in 1972, Funk went on to get two engineering degrees from the University of Michigan-Dearborn in 1978. No stranger to work, Funk earned tuition money as a humble Ford janitor at the engineering center in Dearborn.

With college behind him, Funk went to work full time for the John Deere company in Iowa, then Avco Lycoming in Connecticut, then General Dynamics in Warren and finally GTE.

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