Determination enables officer to reach his goal

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■ 'Helping people. That's the bottom line. There's nothing more rewarding, truly, than to help people and earn people's trust.'

Robert Fortney, officer
--Farmington Public Safety

Even a broken kneecap couldn't stop Robert Fortney from becoming a Farmington cop.

Fortney, who suffered the injury this past summer but has since recovered, was sworn in Tuesday morning as the 16th and newest patrol officer in the city's Public Safety Department.

"To persevere as he did shows his determination to become an officer," said Farmington Director of Public Safety Gary Goss, who administered the oath to Fortney.

"Helping people. That's the bottom line," said Fortney, who started with Farmington as a reserve officer in August 1997 and before that served in the Michigan Army National Guard military police.

"There's nothing more rewarding, truly, than to help people and earn people's trust."

As a police reservist, Fortney came to public attention when he spotted and helped capture the man who stabbed a teenager in the heart with a knife during an outdoor altercation.

Fortney spotted the man lying in the median strip along Grand River M-5 Highway, but gives credit for the capture to team effort.

The teen survived but his attacker was sentenced last year to life in prison.

"It's a great opportunity to be here in Farmington," said Fortney, noting that such opportunities "don't always exist."

"It wasn't my intent when I signed on as a reserve" to become a full-time public safety officer, said Fortney, who had been a quality technician for Lear Corp. in Rochester Hills.

But by doing more of the three jobs all Farmington public safety officers are trained for – patrol officer, firefighter and medical first-responder – "it became more and more comfortable and natural.

One thing led to another," he continued.

Fortney, a native of Livonia who lives there with Janice, his wife of almost 12 years, and sons Robert, 9, and Bryan, 8, grew up in Redford Township.

At Redford Thurston High School, he graduated as captain of the swim team. A state-ranked swimmer, he won a four-year athletic scholarship to Ferris State University, where he earned a degree in business/industrial relations and captained the swim team his senior year.

He joined the Michigan Army National Guard military police in 1992 and earned a commission as second lieutenant two years later.

He now serves as a first lieutenant with the inactive reserves.

Though he had to wear an immobilizer brace and use crutches while recuperating, Fortney only missed a day and a half of classes at Wayne County Regional Police Academy and graduated Nov. 12.

Attending Tuesday's swearing-in ceremony were Fortney's wife, the couple's sons and Fortney's current commander, Maria Putt.

Fortney says it was the "unbelievable support" of wife Janice, a nurse with the home health care unit of Providence Hospital, and his family that helped him reach his goal.

"None of this would have come to pass" without them, he said.

STAFF PHOTO BY BILL BRESSLER

Full time now: *Farmington Public Safety Department Director Gary Goss administers the oath to new officer Robert Fortney. Fortney is accompanied by his wife Janice and sons Bryan (left) and Robert. The Fortney family lives in Livonia.*

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