

HARRIS

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weekends - all while working during the day and raising two sons with his wife, Elaine.

The Marine colonel worked for the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office, went into private practice and in 1989, became the Farmington area's judge.

At 72, Harris will be slowing his pace a bit as he retires next month. The state constitution does not allow judges over age 70 to run for re-election.

Forty-seventh District Court Magistrate James Brady won the non-partisan election Nov. 5 to take over Harris' duties. Brady will join Judge Marla Parker in the new 47th District Courthouse being built behind the city's police station. It's set to open in January.

Harris said he's pleased Brady will be on bench and said he believes the new courthouse will allow a much safer environment by separating the public and inmates at all time. The much larger courthouse will also make room for a much needed drug court, the judge said.

But Harris does not plan to hang up his robe entirely after the new year starts.

He says he will fill in as a visiting judge at the 47th when he can.

"But I don't plan to make a career out of it," he said, adding he and his wife have a place in California they like to visit when the weather turns cold. Looking back, Harris said he never would have dreamed he would end up a judge.

"Heavens no," he said.

He changed his mind after receiving encouragement from



Meads

his Marine friend and Circuit Court Judge George LaPlata to accept a governor's appointment to the bench in 1989.

"I've enjoyed the 13 plus years I've been here. I have no regrets," he said.

Stephen Meads, attorney for Farmington Hills, has known Harris since he started working with the city 10 years ago.

Meads said working with the judge was a privilege.

"He brought a common sense

approach to the bench," Meads said. "He afforded people fairness and consideration and he was tough when he felt it was necessary. You knew he was going to make a decision that was right for all parties involved."

"We're going to miss him," Meads added. "The citizens had a great judge."

Harris and his wife of nearly 49 years have three grown sons (all graduates of North Farmington High School) and two grandchildren.

Harris said he'll miss the courthouse staff most.

"They are unbelievably profession-

al," he said while seated in his office, which is marked with pictures from his past.

Included among the memorabilia is an old Farmington Observer picture page.

It shows Harris manning a military plane for a flyover during a city parade. He said he will remember his career as a way to help people who sometimes fall off track.

"People have problems," he said. "You have to sometimes help people in spite of themselves. It doesn't always work, but I do what I can to help rehabilitate them."

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MOFFITT

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and Farmington Hills would have a delegate, a sergeant-at-arms came over to tell him to sit down.

"And I wouldn't," Moffitt added. Farmington Hills, which normally has four delegates, was allowed one.

At one point, Moffitt grabbed the microphone and announced there would be a "rump" or smaller, separate convention, which drew those loyal to unseated chair Patterson. Next month, the two factions will battle for ultimate control as the party meets again to elect a permanent chair.

McMillin's public statements indicated he represents the "pro-life, pro-family base" of the party that is opposed to what he termed "the homosexual agenda." McMillin also pointed out those same conservatives are opposed to higher taxes.

Moffitt doesn't believe sexual orientation and rights of the unborn will become issues in the county board room, although they've certainly been thrust to the forefront of county politics.

"The party is the sum of its parts," he said. "Some are staying with Mr. McMillin and some are staying with Mr. Patterson."

The state Republican Party has been asked to rule on the legality of the county convention, based on a request made by Patterson supporters. But judging by the convention itself, which didn't disperse until the wee hours of the morning, the future of Republican politics in Oakland County won't be an easy knot to unravel.

"At one point, someone pulled the fire alarm to get people's attention," Moffitt recalled.

RATES

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Police Chief Chuck Nebus said the county's juvenile crime rate mirrors that in Farmington Hills.

By comparison, total juvenile felony arrests in the city from 1991-1993 were 240; from 1999-2000, the total number was 190, said Nebus. He added that he has also seen other dramatic decreases involving crimes among teens, such as vandalism and underage drinking parties.

"Our highest period was in 1985 when we had special details just sent out to break up parties," Nebus said. "We've never had to do that since."

He also noted drug sales among teens has decreased significantly thanks to drug-free school zone laws. "I think the after-school programs have helped," Nebus added.

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