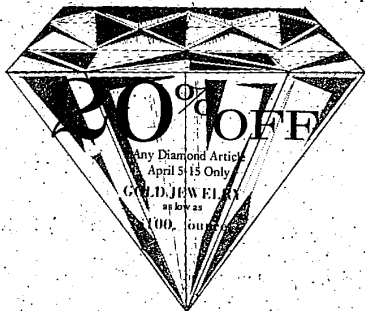


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Ally for consumers OK'd in Wayne County

Consumers in Wayne County are expected to soon have a strong ally when they fall victim to deceptive business practices.

Plans for a new Consumer Protection Unit were among five major law enforcement-related applications for federal funds approved by the county board of commissioners March 21.

They include applications for more than \$3.2 million in federal and state funds for the Wayne County Juvenile Facility Network, an anti-delinquency program established by the commissioners. Target date for the start of the county-wide consumer program is July 1.

Mediation of consumer complaints and a large-scale consumer education campaign will be provided for the first time. The program will include prosecution when a consumer complaint turns up evidence of a legal violation.

Commissioners approved an application for \$415,134 in federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) funds and earmarked \$23,053 as the local share to finance the first year of the program. The state also will contribute \$23,053 for a total one-year funding of \$461,250.

County officials expressed hope for early approval of the application by the Michigan Office of Criminal Justice Programs (OCJP) because that office encouraged planning of the program.

Mediation and consumer education will be handled by the Legal Aid and Defenders Association of Detroit. Investigation and prosecution of criminal violations will be conducted by the prosecutor's office.

The program is designed to educate consumers and businessmen

through the news media, printed materials and direct contacts, with regard to the laws designed to protect consumers; provide investigation, mediation, reconciliation and litigation of consumer disputes; and prosecute in those instances where criminality exists in consumer disputes.

Complaint-taking facilities will be established at police agencies, city and township halls and governmental buildings throughout Wayne County. A "one-stop" office will be centrally located in Detroit to receive and resolve consumer complaints.

The program is designed to provide full services for a case volume of 500 per month or 6,000 a year. George Matish, chief counsel for Legal Aid, said his office received 10,000 consumer-related complaints last year, but was able to handle only a fraction of them due to a lack of staff.

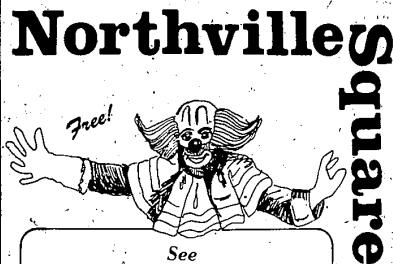
The new program will have a staff of 45 persons, including: six attorneys, two of them prosecutors; five investigators; two public education specialists; and 15 part-time students.

The OCJP, which controls LEAA funding in Michigan, had turned down an earlier application by Prosecuting Attorney William L. Cahalan for an \$85,000 grant. OCJP Director Don P. LeDuc said the application was "deficient" because it didn't provide for mediation and an "adequate" consumer education program.

Cahalan argued that the "awesome power" of the prosecutor's office shouldn't be used in such mediations. However, he agreed to the compromise program approved by the board of commissioners. Several commissioners were strongly critical of Cahalan, pointing out that several other

prosecutors in Michigan are providing mediation services.

The compromise plan originally would have placed the county-wide consumer education program under the City of Detroit. However, that was amended by the commissioners' public safety and judiciary committee after several commissioners argued responsibility should not be fragmented among so many agencies. The committee told Matish he could subcontract for consumer education services from the city.



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Ethnic center aims for community ties

The Ethnic Organizations Committee of the South East Michigan Regional Ethnic Heritage Studies Center has recently begun an effort aimed at establishing strong ties among the estimated 1,200-1,500 ethnic organizations in southeast Michigan.

Chaired by Kazimierz J. Olejarczyk, the committee is attempting to bring together leaders of various ethnic organizations to advise the center and promote the effectiveness of each individual ethnic community.

A regular newsletter and a series of radio broadcasts will be used by the ethnic groups to educate themselves as well as other ethnic communities.

The South East Michigan Regional Ethnic Heritage Studies Center, organized in 1972 after a successful three years of ethnic conferences at Wayne State University, has played an important part in creating the resurgence of interest in ethnic heritage and ethnic-oriented cultural activities in Michigan.

To create a revival of interest in ethnic identity, the six committees of the center are attempting to update

and evaluate its current file of existing ethnic organizations in southeastern Michigan.

It plans to list the achievements of ethnic communities in this part of Michigan among the accomplishments of the general area during the 1976 American Bicentennial observances.

Organizations interested in joining the center in its work may contact it at 163 Madison Ave., Detroit.

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