

Zeglin takes command of county emergency services

By JACK HILSHER
Post Correspondent

Richard Zeglin of Dallas has been promoted to the rank of Captain in the Luzerne County Sheriff's Department, but its hardly the first time he's held such responsibility. Zeglin will head up the newly reorganized Emergency Services Division, consisting of a Dive Team, a K-9 unit and a Special Support Unit.

According to Luzerne County Sheriff Frank J. Jagodinski, the division's main responsibility will be rapid deployment for local, state and federal law enforcement agencies and to provide search and rescue capabilities for Luzerne County. The Special Support Group will be responsible for public safety and security at major events throughout the county.

The Sheriff said Rich Zeglin was a natural to oversee the new streamlined division. "With his background, personality and attention to detail, Rich is exactly what we needed. Plus, like me, he dislikes red tape!" he said.

Zeglin, a personable, modest, 50-something, in real life is Manager of Security and Health for Nabisco's Finance Division in Hanover Industrial Park, a position he has held for 12 years, and which he jokingly refers to as being a "Cookie Cop." His wife, Barbara, is the Dallas Ambulance Chief and a member of the National Registry of Emergency Medical Technicians. They have a 17-year-old daughter, Renee, a few dogs they saved from SPCA extermination, and an unknown number of exceedingly friendly cats.

Zeglin spent 20 years in the military as a warrant officer in the Criminal Investigation Division, has two tours in Vietnam and holds two bronze stars and the Vietnam "Cross of Gallantry." Upon his retirement he became a chief of police in Maryland, a post which, while it sharpened his investigative skills, was also frustrating, because he now says, "I wanted this inscribed on my tombstone - 'I just catch. I don't prosecute.'"

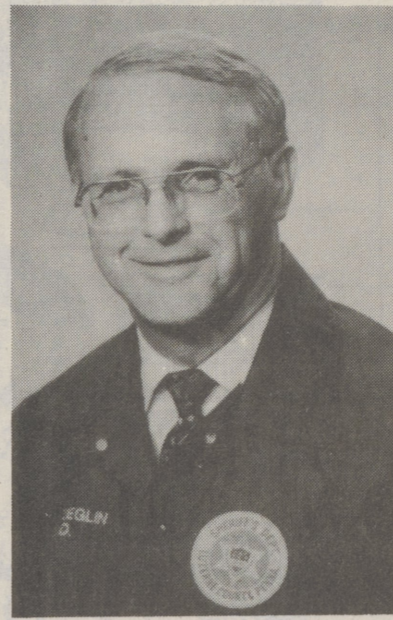
Captain Zeglin might have his hands full in his new position but the all-volunteer crew he will coordinate has one thing in common - training, and more training, thorough and continuous. They have passed every test known to their specialty. They have certification wherever it is necessary, and in today's regulation-filled society, that's a lot of certifying.

The background of all units in his new division is rich and varied. A mounted detail was formed in 1978 by a group of horsemen in Berwick; an underwater dive team

for water-related rescues started at Harveys Lake; there was a "cycle" unit formed by Harley-Davidson owners (mostly to act as couriers in event of radio black-outs) and finally, the K-9 unit composed of private owners of trained search dogs. By 1992 there were two divisions, all volunteers, all deputized, all trained and dedicated. They bought their own equipment and paid their own expenses. There were never, then or now, any donations or solicitations.

The time these men spend during emergencies is their own. Often members take some of their vacation days to help out; if they cannot leave work during the day, they show up after work and form second shifts to continue search or rescue work.

Rich Zeglin, peacock-proud of his many charges, points out: "None of these guys are after glory. Their motivation is simple. They will go anywhere and do anything to save a life...that's their reward." He tells of what happened several years ago after a plane crash near a South Carolina air base. The terrain was swampy and there was little chance of survivors. Someone on the scene said, "Call Luzerne County in Pennsylvania...they have dive specialists who could help us." So the call was made and a unit



RICHARD ZEGLIN

stood by, waiting to be flown to the air base. After an hour it was "stand down" for locals had solved their own problem and no help was needed.

"Well," said Rich. "Don't think that wasn't a big high for that team. Recognition...that gave them immense satisfaction to think that they were known that far away."

The dive team in total consists of about 30 trained divers, all of them certified by the National

Diving Association. They are also members of the National Search and Rescue Organization. In three years they have recovered four bodies in various locations in Luzerne, Columbia and Monroe counties. Seven divers have had "trauma training" and are specialists in evidence recovery, skills which endear them to both the FBI and the State Police.

The county's chief diver is Sgt. Jim Johnson, who in real life is director of the EMS department at LCCC. Jim's motto, followed by all his divers, is "Safety First"...if conditions aren't safe, no dive.

In 1991, dive team member John Shorts of Harveys Lake and an employee of Hillside Farms was working at his home when he heard a police call on the scanner system. A non-swimmer had overturned a canoe and no help was in sight. Shorts knew he was only five minutes away, and when he arrived he sized up the situation and realized there was time for only a "blitz" dive...no ropes, and no standby safety diver. The water was between 25 and 30 feet deep, and John says, "I couldn't see a single thing...visibility was absolute zero." He groped and on the second dive recovered the canoe...when he came up he was surrounded by other divers, police and firemen, and a doctor or two. No big deal...to Shorts it was all in the day's work.

Less glamorous perhaps is the division's K-9 unit; five deputy-owners and five dogs, headed by Sgt. Gerry Van Hoorn, a Hazleton businessman. His group has worked four missions for the FBI, helped apprehend bank robbers at least once, and recently located a wandering and confused patient from the Veterans Hospital, who was found dangerously near the river.

K-9's dogs are very expensive and very highly trained. Kids love them, and they do seem quite lovable, but at only a few words of command they are transformed into - the Captain grins and says - "not a weapon exactly. Let's call it a deterrent!"

Listening to Captain Rich Zeglin talk, there is the feeling that all is right with his world, yet he does have one definite hate...hoaxes. And his teams do encounter them, inexplicable but true. Once a dripping wet "survivor" reported his two friends were trapped in a Volkswagen submerged under water. The weather was zero and miserable but divers were called to the scene and had already entered the water when a phone call from the hospital where the "survivor" had been taken, called the whole thing off. It seems the youth had made the whole thing up! Rich said only, "He must have wanted attention pretty badly."

Middle school students meet *Weekly Reader* author

By GRACE R. DOVE
Post Staff

When Mrs. Cathy Wega's students at the Dallas Middle School read a short play, "The Listener," by Jordan Phillips in their *Weekly Reader* magazine, they enjoyed it so much that Wega called the magazine to share their reactions.

The magazine's switchboard quickly put her in touch with Phillips, whose real name is Cathy Gourley, a Wilkes University graduate who lived in Wyoming Valley for many years.

When Wega invited Gourley to visit the school, she immediately volunteered - and was rescheduled by two snowstorms, finally making her way to the Back Mountain April 25.

Meeting with seventh and eighth grade classes, Gourley described how she researches and writes

stories, then fielded questions from the students.

"How do you get inspired to write a story?" David Parks wanted to know.

Gourley said that often she is assigned a story by *Weekly Reader* or works with her own ideas.

Sometimes people come to her with ideas for stories, such as the book which she is currently working on, *Hunting Neptune's Giants: True Stories of American Whaling*.

"I had to research this one extensively, visiting Old Mystic Seaport several times and reading the journals of sailors on the old whaling ships," she said. "You discover the most wonderful things in your research."

Such as the story of Shuman Gray, the abusive captain of the whaling ship *Hannibal*, as told by 18-year-old Nate Morgan in his journal, carefully preserved in the

Mystic Seaport Museum.

Captain Gray liked to punish people by hanging them up by their thumbs until only the tips of their toes touched the ship's deck.

Then he whipped them. When he died, instead of burying him at sea, the hands (sailors) put him in a barrel of whiskey to preserve him until he could be buried at home on land.

"The abusive captain got what he deserved - he ended up pickled," Gourley joked.

"What do you do when you get writer's block?" asked Nicole Gabel.

Go for a walk. Relax. Do something else, said Gourley.

"Do you get bored? What do you do when you're bored?" Ron Selenski wanted to know.

Nick Bloom wanted to know how Gourley gets paid, by the story or on a salary, while Matt

Gingo wanted to know why she had left teaching.

Gourley said that she had left 10 years of teaching English at Coughlin and Meyers high schools because she wanted to write.

"My students felt that the characters in 'The Listener' were very believable," Mrs. Wega said. "In our discussions, I learned that a number of them have had to deal with cancer, like the boy in the play, or other catastrophic illnesses. The students said that the play was very realistic."

The winner of the National Education Press Association's coveted first prize for fiction, Gourley is the author of *The Courtship of Joanna*, set in the Pennsylvania coal fields, *Pandora's Box*, the story of nurses who served in the Vietnam war, many short stories and plays.



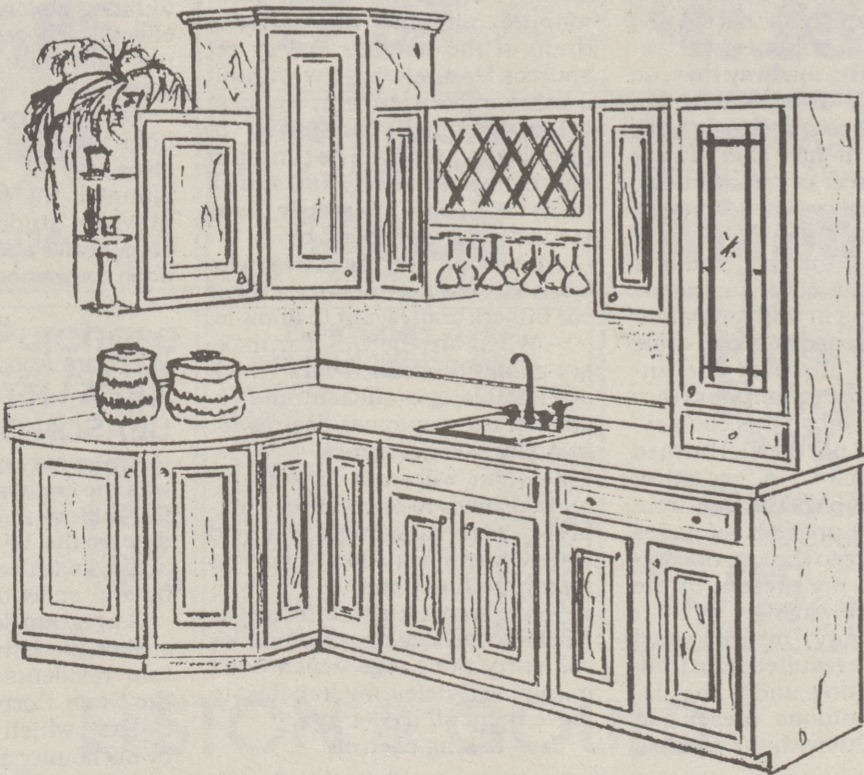
POST PHOTO/GRACE R. DOVE

MEETING AN AUTHOR - Dallas Middle School students had an opportunity to meet author Catherine Gourley, who took time from her job with *Weekly Reader* magazine to discuss writing with them.

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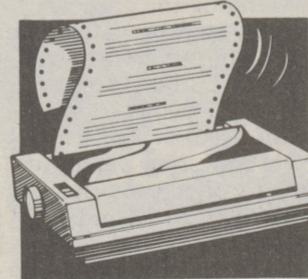
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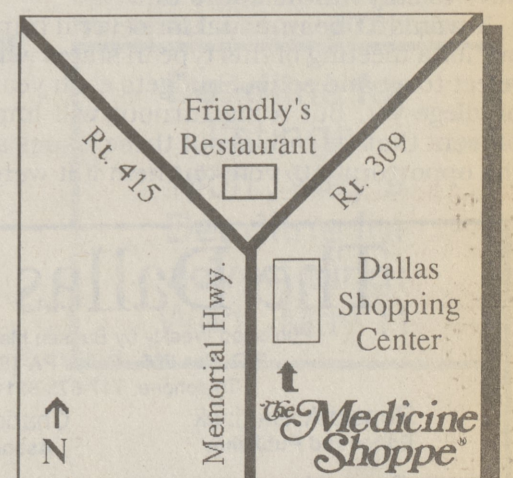
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