

LAW

Farrell Fritz expands eastward through merger

By **CLAUDE SOLNIK**

Continuing its expansion into the East End, law firm Farrell Fritz is merging East Hampton-based Edwards & Duggan into its operations as of Feb. 1.

William H. Duggan Jr. will join Farrell Fritz as counsel. He is being joined by his four-person staff of three paralegals and one administrator.

Farrell Fritz already maintains a Bridgehampton office, but Duggan and his staff will continue to operate out of East Hampton.

Founded in 1971, Edwards & Duggan represents East End companies and individuals in real estate, corporate, and trust and estate matters.

"We are delighted to add one of the finest and most highly respected practitioners in eastern Long Island to the firm," said Farrell Fritz Managing Partner Charles M. Strain.

He added that Duggan's "reputation for excellence and active involvement in the community will be a tremendous asset as we expand our presence on the East End."

It was Duggan that broached the idea of combining forces.

"Bill approached us," said Lorraine Sullivan, a spokeswoman for the firm. "He's one of the premiere practitioners on the East End, so you could imagine that we were delighted to have him join our firm at this stage in his career."

Duggan has served on the boards of Guild Hall, the performing arts center in East Hampton, Southampton Hospital and Peconic Health Corp.

Farrell Fritz got a foothold on Long Island's East End in 2001 when it acquired Melville-based Payne Wood & Littlejohn, which operated a Bridgehampton office.

"We think there are good opportunities out there," said Sullivan, citing trust

and estate and real estate law in particular on the East End. "We look to grow where there are opportunities."

Senators question Simon

Two local state senators are calling for an investigation of certain fees charged by Simon Property Group gift cards.

Sen. Charles J. Fuschillo, R-Freeport, chairman of the consumer protection committee, and Sen. Dean Skelos, R-Rockville Centre, are calling for the state attorney general office to look into whether the fees violate New York State law.

The \$2.50 fee, charged to cards that are not used for six months, they say, may violate regulation that ban such charges for at least 13 months. The fees are commonly known as "dormancy fees."

New York State also has laws regarding disclosure of fees on gift cards and certificates.

Simon sells the cards online and locally at Roosevelt Field, the Source, Walt Whitman and Smithaven malls.

County comptroller faults jail

An audit by the Nassau County Comptroller of the Nassau County Correctional Center has found a pattern of "uncontrolled costs" due to poor supervision of overtime and leave.

The audit, spanning from 2002 to April 2004, found that overtime for corrections officers almost doubled from \$10.3 million in 2000 to \$20 million in 2003.

According to the review, overtime was granted without being properly authorized or verified.

"Employees are entitled to overtime that is legitimately earned," said Comptroller Howard Weitzman. "Our

audit, however, raises serious doubts about the legitimacy of many of the jail's overtime practices."

Weitzman's audit found one person in the transportation unit in 2003 racked up \$118,000 in overtime and that 32 correctional officers earned more than \$50,000 in overtime. Six of the top 10 overtime earners were in the transportation unit.

"Lax supervision has led to soaring personnel costs and widespread abuse of time and leave," Weitzman said.

The jail's personnel unit had three different supervisors in one year, he said, and "does not routinely review and verify overtime claims before entering them into the county payroll."

Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi said that the sheriff had corrected problems "related to excessive use of force and dangerous conditions in the jail," but that overtime hadn't been monitored carefully closely.

"I have directed my staff to assist the sheriff in correcting the problems at the jail regarding personnel," Suozzi said in a written statement.

Helmet law takes effect

Wearing a helmet while skateboarding has always been a good idea. It's now the law.

As of Jan. 1, all skateboarders 14 years old or younger in the state are required by law to wear an approved safety helmet while operating a skateboard.

"This new law applies the same safety regulations required of bicycle riders and in-line skaters to skateboarders," said state Sen. Kenneth P. LaValle, R-Selden.

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