

# Fire department will provide refrigerated storage space

*Orlando Sentinel*  
**SNAKES** from K-1

in establishing the bank. 4/23/95

"This is breaking new ground for fire emergency services," Sargent said. "The incidents are rare but the need is critical when a bite does happen."

George Van Horn, curator of Reptile World in Osceola County concurred. "It's a great idea and much needed."

There is always a scramble to find an antidote whenever there is an exotic snake bite, Hill said. The 400 licensed snake collectors in Florida are not required to have antivenin. Hospitals generally stock the serum, but for local venomous snakes such as rattlesnakes and water moccasins.

Zoos and serpentariums stock only enough antivenin for their staff and other animals. Most snake-bite victims have several hours to get treatment before the venom kills them.

"It's nice to have a source of an antivenin — there are an awful lot of these [exotic] snakes in the

state that are owned in private collections," said Dr. L.H.S. Van Mierop, a graduate research professor at Shands Teaching Hospital in Gainesville.

The antivenin bank ran into a number of roadblocks. Legal liability, transportation problems and a shortage of money — antivenin can cost as much as \$2,000 a dose — "just paralyzed us in the past," Hill said.

Hill said the antivenin will be purchased from laboratories around the world. Winter Park will not incur any costs or legal liability. The initial cost to stock the bank will be paid from donations and by members of the herpetological society.

The fire department will provide the refrigerated storage space and the city's emergency dispatchers will handle the calls. Transportation within 100 miles will be provided by the department, but paid for by the caller, Sargent said.

The antidote will be sent to a doctor or hospital only, and not directly to the victim. Antivenin is administered intravenously.

snakes in Florida each year. The bank will open later this summer, and will ship the antivenin anywhere in Florida — or throughout the country — as long as transportation is provided by the group requesting the serum.

"I applaud the city officials there. They made the right and courageous decision to do this," Hill said in a recent telephone interview from his Winter Haven home.

Winter Park was chosen as the site because of Fire Chief Dennis Sargent's involvement with the herpetological — or reptile — society. He also had a strong interest

Please see **SNAKES, K-4**

## Herpetologists group establishes antivenin bank

By Ines Davis Parrish

OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

4/23/95  
1,600-member Central Florida Herpetological Society.

Winter Park officials agree.

They recently gave the nod to Hill's proposal to open a \$10,000 antivenin bank in the city's fire department. The bank would stock up to 15 types of antivenin — the serum given to victims of poisonous snake bites.

Winter Park will be the first city in the nation to establish such a bank. The resource will be for bites from exotic snakes only, such as the African Mamba and Australian tiger snake.

There are about five bites from exotic

**WINTER PARK** — Exotic snake bites are so rare here, establishing an antivenin bank might seem about as useful as a snowblower in Miami.

But L. Wayne Hill, who has sought to open such a bank for a decade, says people would feel differently if a loved one were bitten.

It "would be the most intelligent decision ever if it were your child's or your life at risk," said Hill, who is president of the