

Senate majority leader named in slander suit

By SANDRA ARMBRUSTER

Senate Majority Leader William Faust, recently honored as one of the outstanding legislators in the country, has been charged with slander in a suit filed in Wayne County Circuit Court.

State Sen. Faust, D-Westland, is accused of making slanderous statements in an interview with a local newspaper.

Faust said he "categorically" denies all allegations in the suit.

The suit was filed Sept. 12 by attorneys for Dennis Dettmer, who represented two Westland residents in a recent suit which had charged four city council members with violating the state's open meetings statute. Faust said he was served with the suit Oct. 6.

The suit says that Faust made slanderous statements last July to the Westland Eagle after Circuit Judge Charles Farmer ruled that the four city council members had violated the open meetings act.

Dettmer told the Observer that although Faust's statement doesn't name him specifically, he believes he is "identifiable" and that the statement has "no factual basis."

According to the suit, the Eagle quoted Faust as saying: "I think the reason for the decision is the fraternity between lawyers and judges. To find councilmen in violation of the act was the only way to get the litigants' attorney paid."

Dettmer is the litigants' attorney.

ALTHOUGH A specific figure isn't mentioned, the suit asks for "exemplary and punitive damages," interest, costs and attorney fees be paid by Faust. The suit does say that the "amount in the controversy" amounts to more than \$10,000.

By including that statement in the

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— William Faust

suit, Dettmer could file his charges in circuit court rather than Westland's 18th District Court.

Dettmer is being represented by a Traverse City law firm of Robb, Dettmer and Phillips, which includes his brother, Michael. Dean Robb will actually be representing Dettmer. Faust said he has yet to appoint an attorney to represent him.

The suit claims that Faust's statement inferred a "conspiracy" between Judge Farmer and Dettmer. It adds that Faust made his statements "maliciously," knowing that they were untrue. In doing so, the suit charges that Faust "injured" Dettmer's name and professional reputation.

According to the suit, Faust's statements will result in a "loss of clients" for Dettmer. Dettmer said that he hadn't lost any clients yet.

Both the suit and Faust say that Dettmer and his attorneys have asked for retractions of the statements. Faust said he has refused to issue a retraction. Dettmer said that Faust didn't "respond" to the request.

"Sen. Faust has had every opportunity to respond. Under Michigan statute, there is a procedure giving an opportunity to retract slanderous statements on demand. If the statements aren't retracted, then punitive damages can be awarded," said Dettmer.

A court date for a hearing on the case is still unscheduled.

FAUST LABELED the conspiracy

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St. Louis University alumni, parents of students and friends will hold a dinner party, Sunday, Nov. 11, in the Troy Room of Somerset Inn, 2601 W. Big Beaver, Troy.

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"My personal reaction is that I'm entitled to the same rights under the first amendment as anyone else," said Faust. "And as such, I intend to speak my mind. I find it ironic that to be sued now for libel and slander when I never was as a newspaperman."

"I think that right (first amendment) to speak is sacred, and I'll pursue it all the way in the courts," Faust added. Dettmer said that Faust is "a public

official in a responsible position making these statements. In order to protect the judiciary, Faust must be called to task."

Faust, whose district includes Garden City and Canton Township, was recently chosen as one of 1979's 10 outstanding state legislators in the United States by the Assembly of Governmental Employees.

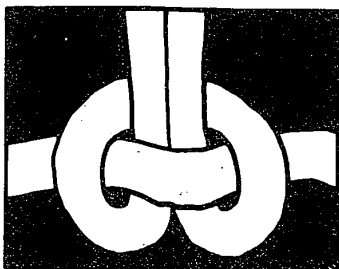
The legislators were honored for "distinguished achievements in promo-

tion of good government and efficient public service."

The assembly is composed of 50 state and local organizations representing more than \$10,000 public employees in 35 states. Faust was nominated for the award by the Michigan State Employees Association, which is a member of the assembly.

First elected to the Senate in 1966, Faust has been reelected for three successive terms.

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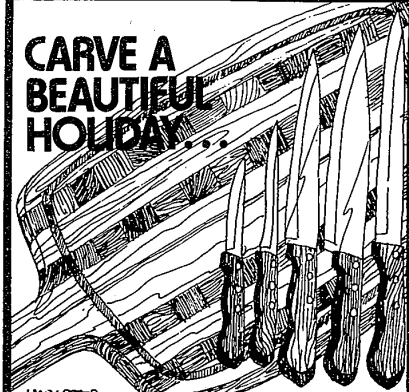
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