

Economist with street savvy wows GOP women

By TIM RICHARD

"We got apples for 10 cents a bushel — that was back in the depression — and sold them to wealthy Anglos around Grand Boulevard for \$1 a bushel. Pretty good, eh? I was the best businessman in the family."

Benjamin Fernandez, son of migrant

Repair shops ready to fight

By TOM LONERGAN

"It'll go to trial," said one of 121 metropolitan area auto repair shop and new-car dealer owners awaiting his arraignment this week on price fixing charges.

They had the charges read to them earlier this week before Circuit Judge Patrick Duggan stationed in the Wayne County Sheriff's patrol headquarters in Westland.

"They (the state) will have the insurance companies and everyone there," the man said to a fellow repair shop owner while both awaited arraignment outside a make-shift courtroom set up for the massive proceeding.

"Then we'll find out who's behind this thing."

That view is shared by more than a few collision shop owners among the 62 businesses accused of restraint of trade by a Wayne County citizens grand jury.

They said the state Attorney General's office has selected the wrong target in the first criminal price-fixing case in Michigan in 50 years. They say they don't fix auto body repair prices — insurance companies do.

A MASS PRELIMINARY exam for the 62 auto dealerships and auto repair shops, plus 123 persons who either own or work for them, has been scheduled for 1:30 p.m. Feb. 19 in Livonia before 16th District Court Judge James Mies.

All but six of those indicted were arraigned Monday in a makeshift courtroom in sheriff's patrol headquarters before Judge Duggan. The defendants entered innocent pleas, and each was released on \$1,000 personal bond.

The price-fixing charge, a high misdemeanor, carries a maximum penalty of two years in prison and/or a \$1,000 fine for each day it is proven the prices were fixed.

Those indicted include four new car dealerships and six collision shops in southern Oakland County and one collision shop in Redford Township.

PRINCIPAL defendant in the case, which the Michigan Attorney General's Economic Crime Division has been investigating for two years, is the Automobile Service Councils (ASC) of Michigan, Inc., 27590 Plymouth Road, Livonia.

ASC is a trade association that represents 200 auto repair shops in the Detroit area. It was a leader in encouraging its members to raise, fix and maintain prices to reduce and eliminate price competition, according to the indictment.

Through its official publication, "The

workers who rose to wealth, is taking a shot at the Republican nomination for the presidency. He is selling a blend of corporate economic sophistication and the savvy of a street peddler.

And while he barely shows up in surveys, Fernandez, 54, charmed an audience of Birmingham Republican Women's Club members into open signs of agreement as he talked about rising from poverty to "a pile of money" by hard work.

"I LEARNED the 'work ethic' here in Michigan," he said.

"I was born in a railroad box car in Kansas City, Kan. We (parents and eight children) would pick sugar beets around Lansing and tomatoes at Holland."

"We saved every nickel so we wouldn't have to go on relief. In fall we went back to East Chicago, Ind. We were a hard-working, hustling family. That was back in the days when hustling doesn't mean what it does now."

As much as he praises hard working and going into business for oneself, Fernandez has other memories of Michigan's farms: "No running water, no electricity, outhouses, a well, the cold at night, insects, cracks in the floor." That came out during an interview afterwards, not during the speech.

HIS SPEECH concentrated on making President Jimmy Carter appear politically inept in dealing with foreign governments, Congress and big American firms.

Club member Barbara Kenton asked Fernandez how he would work with Congress "since you're an outsider."

"I'm not an outsider," said Fernandez, who says he has testified more than 500 times as an expert witness before governmental agencies. "I've worked 20 years with congressmen. I like congressmen. They're my friends."

"Carter said the 'Sequoia' (presidential yacht), I was surprised. That's the president's stinking ship. That's where he should take congressmen on cruises,



Presidential aspirant Benjamin Fernandez works his political charm on Marion Dalton (left), program chairman of the Birmingham Republican Women's Club. (Staff photo by John Stano)

talk about things, have a drink. That's where he should work trade-offs, the quid pro quos.

"Carter has never learned that."

"Carter gave up development of the B-1 bomber. The Soviets never gave up anything in return. Carter gave up the neutron bomb. But the Soviets never gave up anything in return. Carter pulled our troops out of South Korea.

But North Korea never gave up anything in return.

As an Hispanic-American, Fernandez said he would build alliances with western hemisphere nations — particularly Mexico with its oil reserves. "The future lies with the countries of the western hemisphere," he declared, pointing out that even oil from Alaska's Prudhoe Bay must be shipped through

the Panama Canal to refineries in Texas.

FERNANDEZ has more than street smarts at work for him.

Drafted into the Air Force in World War II, he used the GI Bill to earn a degree in economics at the University of the Redlands and later a master of business administration from New York University.

His corporate career was with General Electric (1951-55) and O.A. Sutton (1955-60) in financial management and marketing. In 1960 he formed Fernandez & Associates, his own management consulting company in Los Angeles.

Admittedly rich, he closed down the firm two years ago to run for president of the United States.

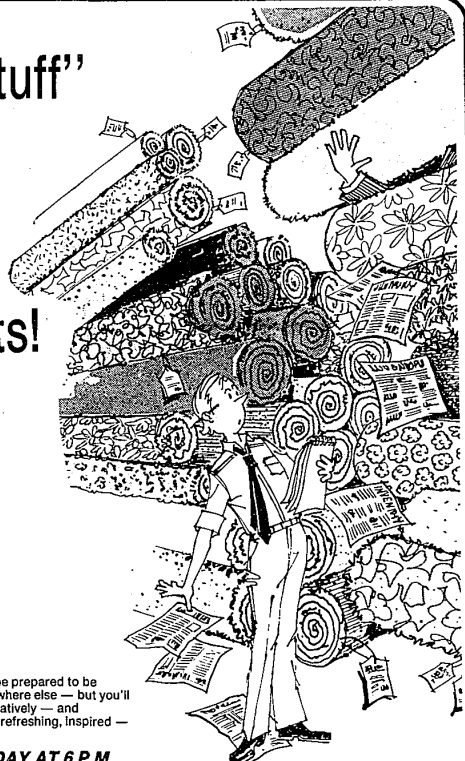
Along the way, he formed a non-profit corporation to help Spanish-speaking Americans get into business and in 1973 was a "special ambassador" to Paraguay. There he represented the United States at an inauguration and worked with Paraguayan financial institutions.

Fernandez worked high up in the Committee to Re-elect the President but was untainted by the Watergate affair.

He was in Michigan Monday to address the Birmingham club and the Oakland County Lincoln Club banquet, but his immediate goal is to become the GOP front runner by carrying Puerto Rico, where caucuses are slated this weekend.

And if anyone wants to compare Benjamin Fernandez to Abraham Lincoln, then Fernandez has the slogan ready: "From box car to the White House in one generation. I want to restore glory to Old Glory."

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