

# Farmington Observer

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## Quick work saves elderly couple from fire

By MARY GNIEWEK

An elderly Farmington Hills couple was rescued from their burning home Tuesday by two men who also called firefighters and an ambulance to the blaze at 20925 Oxford, north of Grand River.

Howard and Ruth Eldrege were pulled from their two-story wood frame home and rushed to Botsford Hospital shortly after the fire broke out at 8:45 a.m.

**In one morning**

## 40 years worth of collecting goes up in smoke

By LISA AWREY

Oxford Street residents are going to miss their neighbor's mysterious collection of paraphernalia which has mounted up over the last 40 years.

In a sudden fire Tuesday morning, Howard Eldrege's collection of books, wheelbarrows, broken chairs and orange crates full of who knows what were destroyed along with his Farmington Hills home.

Fortunately, Eldrege and his 75-year-old wife, Ruth, were rescued by alert neighbors.

Eldrege had become something of a legend in his community because of that collection.

"He's an eccentric," said a 72-year-old neighbor and friend. "But he never bothered anybody. He liked to collect things, that's all."

But the collection had become so immense that workers from the Farmington Hills Parks and Recreation Department had been helping Eldrege clear out the board of belongings.

"The city's already carted two truckloads away," said one volunteer. Mounds of waterlogged books and cardboard boxes were stacked across the lawn the morning of the fire.

"There's a 20-foot-tall pile of books covered with a tarp around back," said one volunteer, as he motioned to Eldrege's backyard.



Neighbors on Oxford street said Howard Eldrege always had a variety of odds and ends for sale. The charred debris, intertwined with firefighters' hoses is scattered around the house.

Mrs. Eldrege, 75, an amputee confined to a wheelchair, was treated for smoke inhalation and released Tuesday. Her husband, 81, was admitted to the coronary care unit. He was in stable condition Tuesday.

Farmington Hills firefighter Paul Cusac was also treated at Botsford for wrist burns and a thumb injury. One of the rescuers, John Caswell, 32, of Walled Lake, was treated for smoke inhalation.

Both Farmington and Farmington

Hills firefighters fought the fire.

According to Caswell and neighbor Tom Cherry, 28, the two were driving past the Eldrege home when they saw smoke and flames.

Both men ran in the front door and carried Mrs. Eldrege to the front lawn in her wheelchair. Cherry stayed at the house to search for Mr. Eldrege while Caswell ran next door and asked neighbors to call the fire department.

He also went to Botsford Hospital, which abuts Oxford Street, and notified

hospital officials to send an ambulance.

**CASWELL WENT BACK** to the Eldrege home and helped firefighters and neighbors pull the elderly fire victim out of his basement, which was engulfed in smoke and flames.

According to Farmington Hills Fire Marshall William Gearhart, Eldrege was trying to light a fire in a basement coal furnace when the blaze started. He said there will be an investigation. Firefighters from Farmington Hills

stations two and three and from the city of Farmington fought the blaze, which gutted the entire home. One firefighter said the blaze was difficult to battle because of box loads of books stored throughout the house.

The couple's pet mongrel dog, Dolly, walked through the front yard debris while firefighters were inside the house.

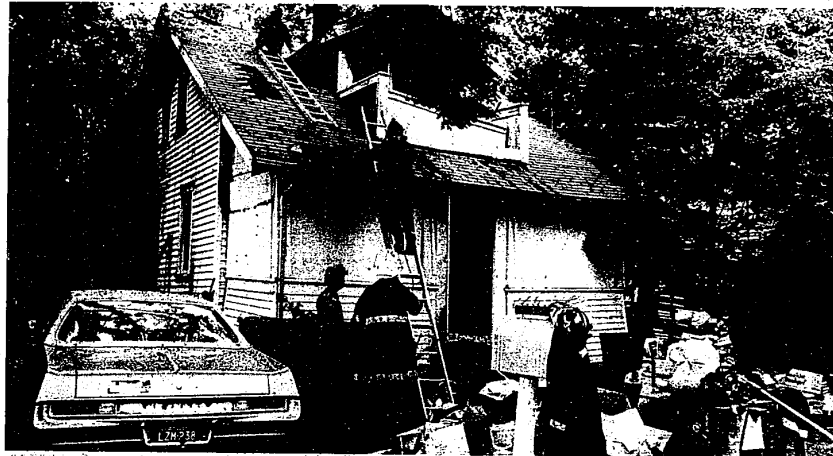
"Mrs. Eldrege told us her husband was down in the basement," said neighbor George Herle, who called the fire department.

"We couldn't go in the front door because the flames were too high."

Herle said he thought the couple had lived in the home for about 40 years.

Cherry and Caswell knew the couple and said they had purchased an antique Cadillac from Mr. Eldrege recently.

"We've done work for them — pulling cars off their property," Cherry said. "Mrs. Eldrege just got out of the hospital. Her husband was going there all the time to visit her."



Firefighters from Farmington Hills and Farmington fought a blaze Tuesday morning that destroyed this two story wooden frame house in southeast Farmington Hills. An elderly couple was rescued from the house. (Staff photos by Randy Bors)

## Troubled students get second crack at finishing education

By LISA AWREY

Troubled students may have a second crack at school with the help of an alternative education center opening in Farmington.

The program, which is in conjunction with the Farmington Public Schools and Oakland University, is designed to help drop-outs re-adjust in returning to the school system.

"Lack of motivation and poor attendance are among the major problems students who drop out face," says Lynn Nutter, assistant superintendent of instruction for Farmington Schools.

"The school system tries to encourage drop-outs to give it (school) another chance," according to Nutter. But the biggest problem, it seems, is not getting those students back in school, but keeping them there once they decide to return, Nutter adds.

"In Farmington, the drop-out rate is small compared to other school dis-



RICHARD RUTTER

tricts (less than 3 percent). However, the number of students who return and subsequently drop out again is high —

almost 100 percent," explains Nutter.

Through a survey conducted among area troubled students, the alternative education center discovered why these students find returning to school a problem.

**RESPONDING STUDENTS** said they regretted dropping out, and all showed interest in giving school another try. But most of the students said they just couldn't "fit."

"There are a thousand reasons why kids feel they don't fit," says Richard Rutter, a former Farmington elementary school principal and administrator of the new education center.

"They are in with a crowd of students whose attitudes about school conflict with their own, or those with academic problems feel they can't find help from teachers," he says. "Some kids call the school system a 'big machine' they feel that no one is interested in them as individuals."

The alternative education program has been designed to fit the special needs of students with these kinds of problems, says Rutter. The program focuses on a one-to-one relationship between student and their instructors where student in-pair is stressed and counselors are trained "to listen, as well as, to advise," adds Rutter.

This summer in Farmington the program will begin by identifying troubled students in the area and determining their interest in returning to school in the fall through the help of the education center.

**FARMINGTON HIGH SCHOOL** is opening an education center in the building this fall, says Rutter. "We will be working directly with troubled students' teachers to help establish better staff-student communications. The center will also be a place where kids can turn to when they're having problems."

## State law changed

### Stations sell gas by half gallons

The price on the gas pump will read 50 cents after a recent change in state law.

But unlike the old days, the pump price will be measured in one half gallons.

Emergency rules were adopted last week to permit gas stations to price by the half gallon. The action was taken by the Michigan Department of Agriculture after premium no-lead topped the \$1 mark.

The majority of pumps in the state are incapable of computing a per gallon price higher than 99.9 cents.

State law requires that gas pumps display the unit price of gas and be capable of computing and indicating the total price of the sale.

"Since most pumps can't compute a price of more than 99.9 cents per gallon, it will be illegal for stations to use these pumps when gasoline reaches \$1 or more," said State Rep. Sandy Brotherton (R-Farmington).

"Gasoline is already in short supply and closing down illegal pumps would mean that some areas of the state would be prevented from buying any gas at all.

"If prices continue to rise, and there is little indication to assume otherwise, these pumps will need converters installed to reflect the accurate price per gallon and the total price," he said.

There are more than one million pumps in the United States that will have to be converted and manufacturers can produce only 400,000 converters a year.

Under the emergency rules, which are in effect for 180 days, service station owners will have to modify their pumps through conversion gear boxes or computers to indicate the full price and compute the total sale.

The emergency rules may be extended for an additional 180 days.

If stations do compute a half gallon price, the cents per half gallon and the term "one half total sale" must be displayed on the pump. Also a notice will be posted saying, "This dispenser is temporarily computing total sale by one half gallons price. The price represented on the dispenser is one-half the total price of the sale."

About 70 percent of the pumps in the state can reflect prices of \$10 or more

and pricing by the half-gallon will be permitted as long as gasoline and diesel fuel are priced in even tenths of a cent.

The rules were first approved by the

Agricultural Commission and then were approved by the director of the department, the Legislative Service Bureau, the attorney general, the governor and the secretary of state.

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