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Victimized by fire, couple seek a home

By MARY GNIEWEK

A home is needed for an elderly Farmington Hills couple whose two-story wood frame house was destroyed by fire last week.

Howard and Ruth Eldrege, of 20925 Oxford, had no insurance coverage for the house, which has since been boarded by city officials and slated for demolition.

Mr. and Mrs. Eldrege were rescued by neighbors after the blaze broke out about 9 a.m. last Thursday. Mrs. Eldrege, 75, who is an amputee confined to a wheelchair, was treated for smoke inhalation at Botsford Hospital.

She is staying with neighbors until her 81-year-old husband is released from Botsford Hospital. The couple has no children.

Eldrege spent several minutes in his fiery basement before rescuers pulled him out. Investigators believe he was trying to light a fire in a coal furnace when the blaze started.

He was removed from the hospital's intensive care unit on Tuesday and is

reported to be in good condition. A hospital spokesman said he will remain at Botsford at least through the weekend.

When he is released, the Eldreges hope to find another home in Farmington Hills.

"I HOPE WE can find a place for them to live before Howard gets out of the hospital," said Mrs. Ginger Herle.

Mrs. Herle and her husband, George, who lived next door to the Eldreges, have been providing a home for Mrs. Eldrege since the fire.

"Ruth is no problem, but with three young children, we really can't accommodate both of them," Mrs. Herle said.

The Herle children, who range in age from 11 months to 9 years, call the Eldreges "grandma and grandpa."

"We adopted them a long time ago," Mrs. Herle said of the elderly couple.

She has phoned various social welfare agencies in hopes of finding the couple a home.

"I'm sure we can find ways to furnish a home and cloth them, but to obtain housing is out of everyone's

balliwick," said Maggie Lorida, home chore program coordinator at Mercy Center.

The government-funded program provides funds for workers to perform household chores for the elderly and handicapped living in Farmington and Farmington Hills.

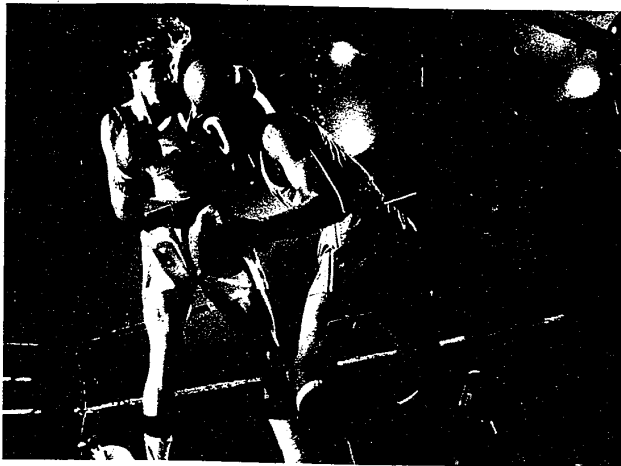
"My official function is just the home chore program," Mrs. Lorida said. "But we're spending time and effort to find someplace for them to live."

"Senior housing has a tremendous waiting list, but we're keeping our eyes and ears open. They want to stay near their neighbors."

FARMINGTON HILLS ZONING inspectors, who plan to demolish the charred house on Oxford, are also aware of the plight of the Eldreges.

"We're working with the commission on aging and social services to see if they can help out," said zoning inspector Rick Lampi.

Lampi explained that legal wheels have been set in motion for demolition (Continued on page 10A)



Swinging for charity

Brenner Bonnene, in white trunks, squares off event turn to the sports section. (Staff photo by Randy against John Johnson in a charity boxing match Borst) which took place earlier this week. To read about the

Rights crusader tells of struggle for equality

By MARY GNIEWEK

"If you don't exercise your rights, they will become obsolete."

That's how Bonnie Swadling justified her sex discrimination fight with the Farmington Hills Police Department, which ended last April with a \$75,000 out-of-court settlement for Ms. Swadling, 29.

She and local civil rights attorney Judith Doran, who represented her in court, addressed an Oakland Community College Womencenter conference on job equality for women Tuesday night.

The former Hills community service officer (CSO), who charged that she was denied a job as a police officer because of her sex, described as grueling the year and a half she worked in the police department while her case was pending. Ms. Swadling resigned from

the department in April in accordance with the settlement.

"Once the commitment was made, there was no turning back," she told the mostly female audience. "The attitude necessary for filing the case was a priestly dedication 24 hours a day."

Ms. Swadling said she was the victim of subtle and blatant discrimination by supervisors in an effort to get her to drop charges.

"I was made to look bad in the eyes of coworkers. I was overloaded with work. Promises were made that if I dropped the case, they would do what they could for me."

She said she was ready to quit her job following a two-week leave of absence but was convinced to return by Ms. Doran.

"I WAS SET-UP several times. You

'Once the commitment was made, there was no turning back. The attitude necessary for filing the case was a priestly dedication 24 hours a day.'

— Bonnie Swadling

have to swing back, outdo them with their own special orders. There were probably three other women employees who helped me get through, smuggling out documents, going through wastebaskets.

"I wanted to change them, change the system. I hoped by hitting them in the pocketbook, they would realize they would have to hire more women."

Ms. Swadling was hired by the department in October 1975 as a CSO of-

ficer under the federal Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA). Three male police cadets transferred into the CSO division at the same time were hired into the police department without further testing.

When Ms. Swadling's turn came, she was told the department was not hiring CETA-funded CSOs as police officers.

"They had 56 white male officers, and only one female juvenile officer with a desk job," she recalled.

In April 1977, she filed a complaint with Oakland County's Office of Manpower, which oversees the CETA program. On July 1, 1977, she filed complaints with the Michigan Civil Rights Commission and the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Ms. Swadling said her complaints got lost in the swell of bureaucratic red tape.

"I got a horrible response from the agencies I dealt with. They were all really backlogged."

WITH HELP from the National Organization for Women (NOW), she found civil rights attorney Doran and filed her suit in federal District Court on March 13, 1978. The settlement was reached before Judge Patricia Boyle.

"A lawsuit is just common sense. It's believing in yourself. In those two

years, I couldn't separate my personal life from political aspects.

"I wanted to make an imprint, to change the system somehow. I wanted more women on the police force."

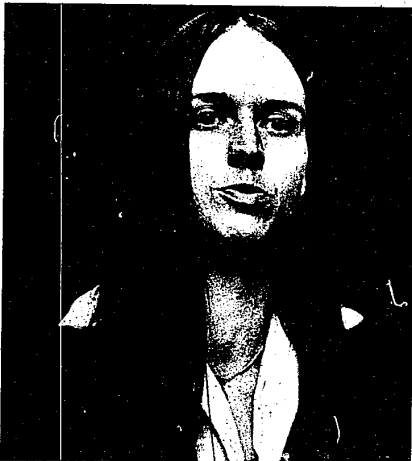
Ms. Swadling said that since her case was filed, two women have been added to the Hills police force.

"I like to think I had something to do with that," she said.

Asked about her future career plans, Ms. Swadling said she is not sure what direction she will take. She is near the 30-year-old limitation for police officer trainees.

"I'm labeled now. I don't think I could go to another police department. There's no way you get everything you ask for. I'm sorting through it all now, trying to find peace."

"If I come up against something like this again, I'm going to fight it again."



Bonnie Swadling spoke of the developments of her sex discrimination suit against the city of Farmington Hills and how she hopes her struggle will aid others in the future. (Staff photos by Randy Borst)

Move over, Sonny

Farmington grad hits weather beat

By MARY GNIEWEK

Chris Orr was hoping for thunderstorms on Monday.

Orr is not a pessimist. He's a forecaster with the Great Lakes Weather Service in Green Bay, Wis. By all reports, rain is in the air on Monday.

A 1977 graduate of Farmington High School, Orr, 20, dropped out of Michigan Technological University midway through his sophomore year to form a private weather service in Houghton.

When financial problems became too overbearing, Orr folded his independent

company and headed to Green Bay last week.

Now instead of broadcasting live reports on Houghton radio station WOCY three times a day, he tapes weather reports by phone to be aired on 11 radio stations in the Great Lakes region. Michigan's Upper Peninsula is his current forecasting territory.

Orr was a physics major at Michigan Tech until weather reporting got the best of him.

"I've been interested in this all my life. Meteorology is the physics of the atmosphere," Orr said in a telephone

interview this week.

What it takes to predict weather accurately, he says, is some basic equipment and lots of brain work.

"We look at the weather as it progresses — at pictures, atmospheric conditions to 30,000 feet, and short range radar reports."

ORR LANDED his new job where he works with a staff of four meteorologists after two years experience. He began with volunteer weather reporting for the state of Michigan and also attended several meetings of the

American Meteorological Society.

With another student, Scott Davis, acting as a partner on the business end, Orr peddled his weather forecasting service to 50 radio stations earlier this year. He received a single reply: from WJPD in Lansing.

Last February, Orr became a regular feature on WJPD and its affiliate, WKBN in Iron River.

"They wanted our service because a competing radio station had a weather forecasting service," Orr said.

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