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Former dispatcher sues police department

By M.B. Dillon Ward
staff writer

Former Farmington Hills Police Department dispatcher Gayna Willing is suing the department for \$750,000 after being acquitted of larceny over \$100 by Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Richard Kuhn in October 1980.

Willing, 22, is claiming she was falsely arrested and imprisoned in violation of her constitutional rights and that she suffered damages in the amount of \$250,000.

She also is seeking \$500,000 in punitive damages. Thus far, she has spent \$12,000 for legal expenses.

Named in the law suit are Police Chief John Nichols, attorney Richard Beemer and Al Haver and John Kohns of the Farmington Hills Police Department.

Willing, a Farmington High School graduate and a member of the U.S. Army Reserves, was studying criminal justice at Oakland Community College and working as a police dispatcher when she was accused of stealing \$900

from the purse of co-worker Kathy Brills.

She was arrested at work Dec. 23 and charged with larceny over \$100, a felony carrying a four-year prison term.

Her parents, Joseph and Velma Willing, who lived in Farmington Hills for eight years before retiring to Mt. Clemens, bailed Willing out of Oakland County Jail on Christmas Eve.

The incident has devastated the Willing family, and the facts of the case warrant the damages asked, said Willing's attorney, Dick Amberg.

"When police officers bring a young lady in, arrest her, strip search her,

take her clothes away and make her stay in jail when she's absolutely innocent, then lie about trying to contact her attorney she's entitled to something," Amberg said.

"There's not one shred of evidence linking her to the crime, which leads me to believe there's some sort of personal vendetta involved."

"Her career is ruined. She can't get a job with her record the way it is. She's a truthful person and puts down where she was employed. Farmington Hills had months her."

Willing said the terrible reference she got from the Farmington Hills Police Department forced her to "block a

whole year out of my life. I haven't had any luck in the criminal justice field."

"That's one of the reasons I applied to Macomb Community College's computer technology program," said Willing, who received an associate degree in criminal justice from OCC last August.

Nichols denied that Willing's career in law enforcement is ruined and that his department has had-mouthed her.

"An arrest without conviction is not included in an employment record. I know of no request for any job reference concerning Ms. Willing," Nichols said.

Nichols refused to comment further,

saying "we've been advised by our attorney (city attorney Paul Bibeau) that it would be unethical, improper and stupid to talk about the details of the case."

Repeated attempts to reach Bibeau were unsuccessful. The Observer was told by his office that Bibeau "apparently has nothing to say."

THE DEPOSITIONS Of Nichols, Haver (the officer who arrested Willing), Kohns and Beemer were taken Feb. 11.

Amberg highlighted the testimony, saying Haver claimed he called Mr. Beemer's office on Willing's behalf after a warrant was issued for her arrest. Beemer testified there was no record of any phone call from the police department received by his office that day, he said.

An employee of the Farmington Hills personnel office testified that prior to the trial in Oakland County Circuit Court, Haver told her he didn't think Willing was guilty, Amberg added.

Asked to outline Nichols' deposition,

Amberg said, "Nichols' policy is that his officers can do no wrong."

THE WHOLE CASE could have been avoided had the investigation been handled properly by the police department, Willing said.

"If they would have asked a few other officers a few more simple questions, they could have verified if I was never in the room alone, so I never even had the opportunity to steal any money."

"I don't think there was a wallet. Brills bought a car the day after the money was supposedly stolen and shortly after that went to California for two weeks."

The Department of Labor recently informed the Farmington Hills Police Department it thought Willing was wrongfully terminated, and ordered the department to reimburse her with back pay, Amberg said.

"The police would be very smart to settle this out of court. But if it goes to trial, we have an excellent chance of winning."

Ambulance vandalized in Hills

For the third time within a year, a Farmington Hills Am-Care vehicle has been vandalized.

Ambulance driver Les Kowalski was about to make a run last Wednesday night when he discovered someone had broken into the vehicle. About \$1,000 worth of damage was done to the ambulance's side panel and wiring system, he said.

Crossed wires caused a fire which ignited when Kowalski started the engine.

"They tried the wires and totally messed up the electrical system," said Kowalski, a road supervisor. "There's extensive damage to the body work."

"Our sub station is located right down the street from McFrock's bar and there's a strong indication that after people have a few drinks they like to try to take the side of an ambulance out."

The Am-Care station neighbors McFrock's, located at Twelve Mile and Orchard Lake.

"Luckily it wasn't an emergency run or someone could have died," said Kowalski.

Am-Care's station at Seven Mile and Beech Daly in Redford Township filled in for Kowalski and transferred a patient from one hospital to another after a five to ten minute delay.

Novi Ambulance was alerted and covered the Hills' area for half an hour until another Am-Care vehicle was obtained.

Police have no suspects but Am-Care personnel strongly suspect McFrock's patrons are to blame for this incident as well as the theft of a \$5,000 radio from an ambulance a year ago and \$250 worth of damage to an ambulance side panel four months ago.

"McFrock's is three buildings down and their customers use our private parking lot. We've pleaded with the Farmington Hills Police Department numerous times, asking them to ticket or tow illegally parked vehicles," Kowalski said.

"We've had no luck. The first time it happened we were informed by the department that as long as the cars were parked on private property, they could be ticketed. The word never filtered down, apparently."

"Cops seem reluctant to ticket them. We've called them three or four times and can't seem to get any response. I have no idea why."

Am-Care serves the community but can't do so without vehicles, he said. "I hate to see anything happen to anyone's family."

"People don't seem to think about it when they try to destroy an emergency vehicle that saves lives, but a 10 or 15 minute delay in response time can easily allow someone to die needlessly."

Financial aid talk is set

A second series of financial aid night sessions will be offered at Macomb Community College and Oakland Community College April 6 and 14. Topics for discussion include Federal and State Aid programs, future funding, application forms, and private funding sources. Sessions are free and open to the public. No reservations are necessary.

The April 6 meeting will be held in the auditorium of S-Building at Ma-



Erhard Dahm surveys his marketing area which demonstrates why he is moving to neighboring Southfield.

Foreign car dealer is leaving downtown

By Craig Plechura
staff writer

A car dealership specializing in expensive imports is leaving downtown Farmington after 11 years and moving to larger accommodations in Southfield.

Erhard Dahm, owner of Erhard BMW, says lack of room for expansion and additional parking at the Farmington facility, plus the distance most of his customers must travel for service convinced him to move the dealership to 24130 Telegraph Road, one-half mile north of Nine Mile Road. The building was formerly the home of Page Toyota, which moved one mile south on Telegraph to 21262 Telegraph Road in May of 1981.

Explaining the reasoning behind the relocation, Dahm, 52, of West Bloomfield, pointed to a Detroit area map hanging on the wall of his office.

The map resembled a war map with different colored pins poked in the area of the city BMW customers live. The biggest cluster of pins are in Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills.

"We move more to the center of our clientele with a move to Southfield," Dahm said.

He said he leaves the business district of Farmington with a little sadness because "Farmington is one of my favorite cities" and adds that "the city government has been very fair to us."

The dealership is expected to move by May 1.

IN TERMS of size, the difference between the two buildings is 30,000 square foot of space, Dahm said, with room for new construction in Southfield.

The size of the new facility will allow him to add a line of BMW Motorcycles, Dahm said. The motorcycles,

like the cars, are high-priced luxury vehicles. The cycles sell for a price range of \$4,000 to \$8,000 while the cars prices range from a low of \$14,000 to a high of about \$38,000.

Dahm learned the trade of auto mechanics in his homeland of Germany before coming to the Detroit area in 1958 to work for a short time for Falvey Motors.

By 1963 he had his own gas station in Detroit which led to a dealership in Old Redford. He moved to the Farmington site in 1971 after Chevrolet and Oldsmobile moved out.

Dahm is trying to find a buyer for the Farmington business site.

Negotiations with Tamaroff Buick of Southfield, he said, fell through because Nissan representatives (formerly Datsun) didn't like the site.

The West Bloomfield businessman is married to Gretchen Dahm and the couple have three adult children.

White Motor falls to economic plight; Cummins moves in

By Craig Plechura
staff writer

The \$4.5 million sale of White Motor Corp.'s former corporate headquarters in Farmington Hills to Cummins Engine Co., the nation's third largest heavy truck engine manufacturer, is final.

The sale was approved last month by the U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Cleveland where judges are overseeing the divestiture of White's few remaining real estate holdings.

The 83,000-square-foot building was built and financed in 1974 with tax-exempt industrial development bonds issued by the city of Farmington Hills with approval from the Michigan Municipal Finance Commission.

Approximately \$2 million owed on the bonds held by the city were paid off by Cummins in January during the purchase process, said City Clerk Floyd Cairns.

The building sits on a 20-acre parcel at 34500 Grand River, behind a man-made pond and next to the Farmington-Farmington Hills border.

Cummins officials have already petitioned the Economic Development Corp. (EDC) of Farmington Hills with a request for up to \$5 million in tax-free revenue bonds to finance a planned renovation and addition on the site, Cairns said. A public hearing on the firm's bond request will be scheduled at a later date.

The building will be used by Cummins Tech for research and technical work, says Ann Smith, manager of public information at the Columbus, Ind., headquarters of the company.

Questions about the reopening date, what kind of work will be done at the facility and whether new employees will be sought are premature, Ms. Smith said.

"I'M NOT being evasive," she said. "We're still looking at options."

Cummins Engine is regarded by industry observers as one of the few healthy heavy truck operations in the United States. The firm is currently listed as 217 on the Fortune 500, an annual ranking of the financial assets of publicly-owned companies that is compiled by Fortune magazine.

White Motor Corp., which incorporated in 1915, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in September 1980 in an unsuccessful effort to stave off corporate collapse from creditors.

The company's farm equipment division was sold to TIC Investment Corp. of Dallas. Canadian and Australian truck operations were sold to consortiums in those countries. The U.S. line of White Autocar trucks is now owned by Volvo-Truck Co., a wholly-owned subsidiary of AB Volvo of Gothenburg, Sweden. Familiar trademarks such as Western and Autocar continue under new ownership.

Many engineers at other White facilities were retained by their new employers. While few employees who worked for White in Farmington Hills were kept on, Gary Fudala is one who remains at the site.

Fudala was at work Wednesday supervising renovation at the Farmington Hills building, but he referred all questions about Cummins' plans for the facility to a company spokesman in Indiana.

"IT'S MY understanding that Cummins will — when they get the facility remodeled and refurbished — have as large a work force as we did," said John Grigsby, chief financial officer for White Motor. "In terms of net jobs, Farmington Hills probably won't lose."

Terms of the sale to Cummins included payment of back taxes owed to the city, school district, county and intermediate school district. The total was close to \$1 million.

A total of \$35,729.92 in personal property tax was paid, said Chuck Rosch, director of finances for Farmington Hills. Real property tax from 1980 amounted to \$39,100.38, he said.

The Board of Review exempted the firm from paying 1981 real property tax in 1981 during bankruptcy proceedings, Rosch said. But Cummins had to pay off 1981 personal property tax for equipment that came to \$15,571.40 plus a late fee.

Because of the financial uncertainty still surrounding the site, city officials asked Cummins for an early 1982 payment of city taxes on the site which came to \$10,272, the finance director noted.

what's inside

