

Spreen hit by suit in Lazaros escape

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Oakland County Sheriff Johannes Spreen is caught in another legal entanglement, and this time it could cost him about \$2 million.

Spreen's attorney, retired circuit Judge William Beer, hopes to appeal Oakland Circuit Judge James S. Thorburn's decision requiring Spreen to pay \$1.4 million plus interest to the estate of Paul Valentino.

"We are saying that Judge Thorburn erred in this case and that his judgment was legally and factually wrong," Beer said.

THORBURN's decision came in a 1978 lawsuit in which Spreen and Oakland County were sued by Valentino for allowing a self-described Mafia bag man — the late Peter Lazaros — to escape from police custody in 1978.

Valentino died in a 1979 plane crash. According to court documents, in 1974 Valentino sued Lazaros for slander. When Lazaros failed to appear in court, Thorburn awarded Valentino \$1 million in a default judgment.

During the next four years, Valentino tried unsuccessfully to collect the money from Lazaros. Finally Valentino asked Thorburn to issue a bench warrant against Lazaros. Thorburn did. But when sheriff's deputies set out to arrest Lazaros, they found he was in a Pontiac hospital.

THE ARREST was made against the advice of county lawyers by then-undersheriff John F. Nichols. County sheriff deputies were placed outside

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Lazaros' hospital door until County Prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson ordered them removed several days later.

Lazaros then left the hospital and wasn't seen until 1978 when he was arrested for fraud.

When Lazaros died in jail in April 1978, Valentino turned to the county and Spreen for his money.

The court dismissed the case, saying Valentino couldn't prove damages. But Valentino took the case to the state Court of Appeals, where the dismissal was overruled and a circuit court trial ordered, this time dropping the county as a defendant and allowing Spreen to prove his lack of negligence, because he had no knowledge of the entire incident.

Last month Thorburn heard the case again, found the sheriff negligent and ordered him to pay the \$1.4 million plus interest out of his own pocket. Thorburn ruled that Spreen must be personally responsible for all persons in his department.

County officials say they are appalled by the decision. They directed Spreen to hire a "top notch" attorney for an appeal.

Kids' phones go in recession

By Suzie Rollins Singer
staff writer

Michigan residents don't appear to be talking on the telephone any less these days. But they have cut down on the number of lines to, and extensions within, their homes and businesses.

Bill Hensley, news relations manager for Michigan Bell, said the declining profits are symptoms of the recession and of competition.

"Both businesses and residents are cutting back on the amount of service they have. Business are cutting out extra lines, and we're finding families that used to have children's and adults' phones now have the children talking on the parents' phone," Hensley added.

"We're also serving fewer customers because some have moved to the Sun Belt. We're finding that when a person moves from one city to another (within Michigan),

they may not get as many extensions as they had in their old home," he said.

Michigan Bell's 1981 annual report listed a total of 6.28 million telephones in the state. From 1980 to 1981, service dropped one percent as 23,000 fewer main phones and 38,000 fewer extensions were ordered.

In addition, Michigan Bell ranked just above San Francisco's Pacific Bell as the second worst phone company in terms of profitability.

Although phone service is down, Michigan Bell recorded a net income of \$198.7 million in 1981, a \$19.1 million increase over 1980.

Hensley maintained that telephone service has not priced itself out of the Detroit area market, despite high unemployment. Bell offers its least expensive service at \$4.50 a month, and Hensley said 95 percent of the state population has a telephone. Those who don't, choose not to have a phone, he said.

Jacobs speaks twice Tuesday

Dick Jacobs, Libertarian Party gubernatorial candidate, will speak twice Tuesday in Oakland County.

At noon, he will address students in the Fireside Lounge of Oakland University's Oakland Center on the Rochester campus. The session, part of a series with gubernatorial candidates, is open to the public.

At 7:30 p.m. Jacobs will speak at the monthly meeting of Oakland County Libertarians at the Birmingham Community House, 380 S. Bates.



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