

Estate of Hills council watcher is divided

By Joanne Maliszewski
staff writer

The nearly \$200,000 estate of Liston Shepard — the congenial, soft-spoken city hall watcher who died last October — will be divided equally among his heirs, including a daughter from a common-law marriage, according to

Elbert Hatchett, attorney for the estate.
In an out-of-court settlement reached several months ago, it was decided Shepard's estate would be split between his daughter, Marcela J. Calto of Euclid, and other heirs including a sister and a niece, the Pontiac-based attorney said.

Shepard died Oct. 27, 1984 at the age of 74. His estimated \$197,000 estate became the center of a court battle before Oakland Probate Judge Eugene Moore. In his will, dated Jan. 7, 1950, Shepard left his assets to his wife, Teresa R. Shepard. But she died approximately two years before Shepard. Controversy over Shepard's estate

began when a petition was filed in probate court to determine Shepard's heirs. Calto was not included as an heir in the original petition.
While few in the community suspected Shepard was worth almost \$200,000, even fewer realized he had a daughter. Calto's petition, however, included an Ohio birth certificate listing her birth

date as Aug. 16, 1933. Her parents were listed as Liston Shepard and Margaret Adele Spisak. The birth certificate also listed Shepard's residence as "unknown."
PROBATE JUDGE Eugene Moore last week also entered a judgment against Shepard's niece, Marguerite

Balsick of West Bloomfield Township, to return \$19,000 to the estate, Hatchett said.
According to a court petition filed in May, Shepard's sister, Margaret Barr of Ferret, maintained that she learned that Balsick and her husband, John, removed cash and other assets from Shepard's home the day he died.
The petition stated the Balsicks "removed from the residence of the deceased cash estimated to be at least \$50,000, together with jewelry, including diamonds and other items." It stated Balsick "turned over time certificates and like items she could not cash, otherwise she has not turned over the cash, jewelry and other items."
Barr's petition also listed Shepard's assets as \$162,000 in personal property, and \$35,000 in real estate — for a total value of \$197,000.

House fire in Hills was arson, police say

By Bob Sklar
staff writer

The fire that caused about \$200,000 in damage to a Farmington Hills house on Oct. 14 was maliciously set. The 50-year-old resident whose body was found following the blaze died of a

heart attack before the fire, investigators said.
"We've ruled out all accidental causes. And we've determined the fire was arson," Farmington Hills Police Detective Daniel Krause said Monday.
"It was an extremely rapid fire," he added. "The entire south end of the

house went up almost at the same time."
Firefighters found the body of Marlene F. Edwards after extinguishing a fire in her two-story, frame house on Rhonswood Drive, near Eight Mile and Halsted.
Who set the fire hasn't been determined, Krause said.

KRAUSE, in collaboration with investigators from the Michigan State Police Fire Marshal's Division and the Farmington Hills Fire Department, determined the fire was maliciously set based on such factors as:
• The fire's intensity.
• The fire's burn patterns.

• The extent of burns on Mrs. Edwards' body.
To illustrate the fire's intensity, Krause pointed to the burning through of a solid-core exterior door.
The fire is believed to have started on the first floor — in the area of the family room near the back of the house. The back of the house is where Mrs. Edwards' body was found, Krause said.

PICTURES TAKEN by a free-lance photographer during the fire showed that the cement floor of the screened rear porch appeared to be burning — signaling an accelerant. The pictures showed that flames along the back of the house were particularly intense and white hot — also signaling an accelerant, Krause said.
"Flames were blasting out from the family room rather than curling up the side of the house. And there was nothing that flammable in the room to create that kind of an effect," Krause said.
Michigan State Police laboratory analysis of fire samples disclosed that the accelerant was lighter-burning than gasoline — a substance like paint thinner, lighter fluid or high-grade kerosene, Krause said.
The fire started shortly before 6 p.m. Oct. 14. When firefighters arrived about 6:15 p.m., heavy smoke was pouring from the arches along the front of the house. Flames were visible along the rear lower level, Farmington Hills Fire Lt. Peter Baldwin said. He said the fire was extinguished within 35 minutes.
Investigators said Mrs. Edwards arrived home from her secretarial job at a Troy Insurance company shortly before 5 p.m.

police/fire calls

Listed below are highlights of Farmington-area police and fire calls received during the past week:

● **SMASH AND GRAB**
Someone threw a large rock through the plate-glass window at Gene's Coin Shop, 3128 Grand River, early Saturday and fled with a display case containing \$170 worth of costume jewelry, according to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report.
The display case, on a shelf just inside the front window, included rings,

bracelets and a man's watch. Most of the stolen material was costume quality.
● **SUSPECTED MARIJUANA**
Farmington Hills Police ticketed three people for possession of suspected marijuana in violation of the controlled substance act.
According to police reports:
• Friday, a 28-year-old Farmington man, stopped for speeding on Orchard Lake Road about 5:40 p.m., was ticketed for possession of several suspected

marijuana cigarettes and one baggie of suspected marijuana.
• Saturday, a motorist on Orchard Lake Road was stopped about 7:55 p.m. for defective equipment and both he and the passenger — both 18-year-olds, one from Farmington Hills, the other from Pontiac — were ticketed for possession of seven suspected marijuana cigarettes.
● **SCHOOL VANDALIZED**
Two windows were found smashed

outside Power Middle School, 34740 Rhonswood, about 9 p.m. Saturday, according to a Farmington Hills police report.
Damage was estimated at \$150.
● **ATTEMPTED STICKUP**
Two men attempted to rob a clerk at the Farmington Cleaners, 32725 Grand River, at gunpoint Saturday afternoon, according to a Farmington Department of Public Safety report.
According to the report, a car pulled up to the east drive-up window. The driver pointed a revolver at the clerk and demanded money. The clerk then closed the window, pulled in the extending shelf and ducked. After pounding on the window, the suspects fled south on Grand River in their 1974 red Mercury.

● **WOOD STOLEN**
Thirty wood panel sheets were reported taken from a house under construction on Lancaster sometime Oct. 19-21, according to a Farmington Hills police report.
The sheets were valued at \$750.

Farmington Observer
(USPS 187-840)
Published every Monday and Thursday by Observer & Economic Newspapers, 30251 Schoolcraft, Livonia, MI 48150. Second-class postage paid at Livonia, MI 48151. Address all mail (subscription, change of address, Form 3589) to P.O. Box 2428, Livonia, MI 48151. Telephone 591-4500.
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World's police chiefs share views

The Farmington area was well represented at the 92nd-annual International Association of Chiefs of Police conference Oct. 12-17 in the Astro Hall in Houston.

Chief William Dwyer and Inspector Richard Niemisto represented the Farmington Hills Police Department. Director Frank Lauboff represented the Farmington Department of Public Safety.

Representatives came many non-Communist countries.

"It was most beneficial as far as the variety of workshops, the caliber of the exhibits and the sharing of ideas and information," Dwyer said.

Workshop topics included legal issues, human relations, organized crime, employee management, homicide investigations, crime prevention and youth programs. Exhibits displayed the newest in law enforcement equipment.

"You don't otherwise have the chance to sit down with such a mix of people from other areas and agencies to share ideas and experiences," Lauboff said.

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