

# Mayor supports attorney

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lated. If he's going to use these type of legal tactics, I don't want any part of the guy," council watcher John Murphy said.

Twelve Mile resident Masha Silver agreed. "What he did was legal, but as far as I'm concerned, it wasn't ethical. What will happen with his ethics when something more serious happens."

Larson's firm, Larson, Harms & Wright, became the city's legal representative last year when long-time city attorney Paul Bibau disbanded his firm, Brennan, Bibau & Pochman, and joined Larson's.

The tree ordinance, which Larson's firm wrote, was enacted by the council Jan. 23. It was drafted to save what trees remain, particularly in undeveloped areas. A permit, which doesn't require a fee, is required to remove or destroy trees. A survey of trees is required in most cases.

"We believed that in taking the action we did, we have remained sensitive to the spirit of the tree ordinance," Larson wrote in his letter. "The constraints placed on the cutting leaves stands of trees of the various species throughout the property in a dense and healthy condition."

When the issue was first publicized Feb. 20, Larson said the tree cutting began about two weeks before the ordinance went into effect and was completed a week before the Feb. 13 effective date.

"Profitability is not an issue here," Larson wrote. "Compared with the great number of trees on the acreage and the few that were cut, we sincerely believed that rather than creating any negative impact, we were in fact assuring the future health and vitality of the woods."

EVEN WITH the removal of 19 landmark trees, the property still contains hundreds of trees, including 30-50 landmark trees, 200 Norway spruce and 30 white pines.

Landmark trees are those that are notable because of size, form or species. They also are those larger than 24 inches in diameter. Many of the trees cut were 36-42 inches in diameter, with one about 46 inches.

The removed trees "had entered the late portion of their life cycle because they were stressed or dying as evidenced by the cores, a condition observed by others," Larson wrote.

That fact was confirmed by R.D. Woods, Brighton, who cut the trees for Larson. "These trees, anybody can see that the stumps on most of them were cut and rotten and hollow with the tops being in even the same shape or even worse," Woods wrote.

Haisted resident Bernard Ludwig, who informed city officials of the tree cuttings and lives next to the vacant acreage, contradicted Larson's letter. He said Larson failed to mention the two large clearings of about two acres where trees also had been cut.

Larson said the two clearings are where the former house, in which he and his family lived about 20 years ago, used to be, including a detached garage, the yard, chicken coop and septic and drain field. Another cleared area is near the rear of the property. "In that open area, there might have been one of the trees cut from that general area," he said.



At the Cass Community Methodist Church, Underwood, who spends nights at the Detroit Darlene Feldman stops to talk with Marlon Homeless Union.

## 6,000 blankets later, the need still persists

By Diane Gale  
Staff writer

Street people know the "blanket lady" and her boyfriend — whom she jokingly calls her chauffeur — by name.

So do Detroit police.

"They stop us all the time," said Darlene Feldman, also known as the blanket lady. "They stop and ask us for blankets to pass out."

But that's not surprising, considering the couple regularly drives up and down the worst streets of Detroit looking for homeless people.

That's quite a switch for the suburban couple who avoided downtown Detroit when at all possible.

"Years ago you could never get me to go downtown unless I was going out on an outing like Tiger Stadium or Bob-lo," Ron Stasinski said. "Then we started this."

Now they know the streets with no trouble.

"A big city breeds all types of people," said Stasinski, who worked in the grocery business for 22 years and is between careers now.

THEIR TRAVELING mission began January 1988. It resulted in Feldman starting an organization called Detroit Cover-Up.

"Initially the entire thing was an accident," Feldman said.

"Ron and I were supposed to go out on a date and I asked him if we could drop some things off at the Detroit Rescue Mission."

It struck her that they were taking blankets to people comforted by a heated building when there were people dying on the streets, said Feldman, who in late February was named Volunteer of the Week by the National Enquirer.

Since their first night, they've delivered 6,000 blankets.

"When I first started I thought why don't they do something, but I learned there is no they, it's me and you," Feldman said. "It's so easy for us to become a they with very little effort. It's just setting up the machinery to welcome people in and say this is how you can help."

AND THAT'S just what happened. Cub Scout troops collect goods, senior citizens knit blankets and volunteers call and ask how they can help.

"A woman from Plymouth called and said she heard me on the radio and said she did nothing all day and if we provided the yarn she would get a group (together)," said Feldman, who operates a day care facility in her home.

With that kind of support, Detroit Cover-Up has gotten charity status, a warehouse on Cass and four Chrysler employees working with them through a job share program.

Besides Feldman and Stasinski, two other teams deliver blankets, clothes and food.

FELDMAN SAID her goal is to transform the warehouse into a Transient Living Center (TLC), providing child care and transportation to and from job training, and to meet the needs that aren't being met.

One time when she was passing out blankets, Feldman said, there was a man who was an obvious bag person.

"He was pitiful. I asked the man what I could do for him. He said he would love to brush his teeth."

"With TLC someone could walk in and take a shower and walk out feeling better about themselves. It's a little thing, but something that needs to happen," she said.

No one knows exactly how many homeless people there are in metro Detroit, but a reasonable figure is 30,000 during the year, said Kathy Murphy Castillo, director of Detroit/Wayne County Homeless Strategy Coalition, based at the Detroit Urban League.

Only 500 beds are available, she said.

She talks to homeless people to get an idea of who the homeless are and to develop a program, she said.

"Anyone who had spent any time outside had gotten a blanket from the blanket lady," she said, referring to Feldman.

Their goal is to get people to know how extreme the situation is, Feldman said.

"I'm trying to tell people what I'm seeing in the streets," she said.



Illustration by MARVIN TEEPLES

Within the aura of affluence in metro Detroit exists a pocket of poverty. Many people are walking a fine line between a safe, secure home and the spectre of homelessness. Shelter workers say there are 900 homeless people in Oakland County alone on any given night.

## Blankets warm hearts of pair

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Feldman reassures him by placing a striped blanket in his large arms. He smiles, folds it neatly, and walks away.

Feldman hurries to open the car door as three people stride toward them.

"Ron we're in trouble." Then a pause. "Oh, it's you Al, I didn't know who it was."

They talk for a minute and a woman in her 20s walks up. "Is this where they're passing out blankets?"

Feldman rummages through the trunk. "Do you have any little ones at home?"

"Yes," the woman says. "Well, she's 6," she adds.

Feldman finds another blanket.

BACK IN the car at Selden and Cass, Feldman points to a boarded-up dilapidated building. "Last year we had a family there."

During the coldest days in 1987, Stasinski explains, they drove through the alleys and put blankets near garbage bins. They returned less than an hour later and the blankets were gone.

"It makes you feel real good inside," Stasinski says. "No one else is doing it."

He circles Grand Circus Park as Feldman looks for Rodrick, a Vietnam veteran who makes his residence on a bench. "It's too early," Feldman says.

Some of their best dates have been cruising the streets looking for homeless.

"We do have a good time," she says. "We laugh and joke and look at the hookers. I can't say that I'm sacrificing."

THAT ATTITUDE keeps them from going crazy, she admits, when they see women with children living on the streets.

"I've met some of the nicest people I would want to call friends," Feldman says. "They're not superficial. . . They're just real people."

"But after all I'm not the initiator. I honest to God feel this was meant to be. I feel I've been carried by these huge hands."

"Wouldn't you want to take a friend and say, 'Did you know this was happening?'" she asks.



After accepting blankets from Feldman, a homeless woman and her daughter walk south on Cass Avenue.

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