

Customers unhappy that judge failed to close down bridal shops

BY GREG KOWALSKI
STAFF WRITER

"I'm not at all satisfied. I thought they would put him out of business."

So said a disgruntled Dennis Pater, one of the many customers who ordered, but never received, wedding gowns from the Boulevard Group, which has three bridal salons in Birmingham and others in Troy and Dearborn.

Company representatives were in Oakland County Circuit Court at a show-cause hearing Wednesday to consider extending a temporary restraining order preventing the stores from taking new orders unless the stores have the dresses in stock.

Judge Richard Kuhn decided to continue the restraining order and said he would appoint an independent person to monitor transactions at the stores.

Boulevard Group attorney Arnold Schaffer told the court the company had filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection the previous day, to protect it from creditors.

"That news and the judge's action didn't please Pater."

"Not at all. Chapter 11 allows him to open up somewhere else under a new name," he said. "The system moves too slowly."

For Pater it's now a matter of principle. His son's wedding was Saturday and as of Wednesday the dresses still hadn't arrived. In desperation, the family ordered gowns from a J.C. Penney catalog and got them in time for the wedding.

Pater expressed the anger of numerous other jilted customers.

"If I had to make a thousand appearances to get him (Boulevard Bridal owner Gary Gottschling) in court, I would come down a thousand times."

Pater lost a \$500 deposit on the dresses for his daughter-in-law and six bridesmaids. Some other customers lost thousands of dollars.

Denna Marley of Berkeley lost a \$260 down payment at the Boulevard Bridal Salon on Hunter. And she was just as angry.

"I hope he gets prosecuted. I hope

he goes to jail," she said.

So far the case against Gary and Donna Gottschling is a civil matter. But the prosecutor's office said criminal charges could be filed for the 5,000 orders which weren't filled.

Judge Kuhn called the incident a "tragedy." He cited one instance of a bride who called the court saying she had paid for a dress but could not get into the store.

"We can't have that happen again," said Kuhn.

Kuhn allowed the restraining order to stand. He set a second hearing for 2:30 pm, Oct. 14.

In the interim, he said the company is restrained from selling any display dresses as new. Further, the company was ordered to turn over financial records to the court and is forbidden from altering or destroying any financial records.

Kuhn said he plans to appoint an independent person to monitor transactions. However, he said before that can be done it will have to be determined who will pay for the person's services.

He suggested the recently created Michigan Bridal Association might be interested in covering the cost.

That organization of 10 bridal salons was formed about four months ago when complaints against The Boulevard Group first arose.

Ed Grace, owner of Ge-Ge's Bridal and Boutique in Farmington Hills, said, "I don't know what's going to happen. Nobody knows."

He said the incident has thrown a shadow over the local bridal shop industry, but his store has been working to help brides get their dresses on time.

"I've had three instant brides. We've gotten dresses overnight," Grace said.

Regardless of the outcome of the case against The Boulevard Group, Grace said the new organization will continue.

"There is some good coming out of this," he said.

But, "It's really created havoc throughout the industry," said Dorothy Rogers, owner of Dorothy's Bridal Creations in Warren.

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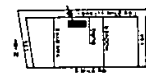
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