

Garage afire! Fire victim Catheryn Hatfield is comforted by Peter Baldwin, Farmington Hills deputy fire chief, and neighbor Jenny Mihajlovski.



A ladder up: Farmington Hills firefighters wrap up their efforts at saving the Jerry Hatfield house on River Bend Drive.

Garage gutted, couple safe

BY TOM BARR
AND BILL COUTANT
STAFF WRITERS

Their garage is a gutted goner and two expensive autos are history, but Jerry Hatfield and his wife, Catheryn, are counting their blessings these days on River Bend Drive in Farmington Hills. A fire, probably started when gasoline vapors were ignited by a kerosene heater or a lamp, destroyed the Hatfields' garage and its contents — a 1972 Porsche 911 and a 1992 Cadillac — Wednesday afternoon.

However, the attached house was relatively undamaged, and the Hatfields escaped the blaze uninjured.

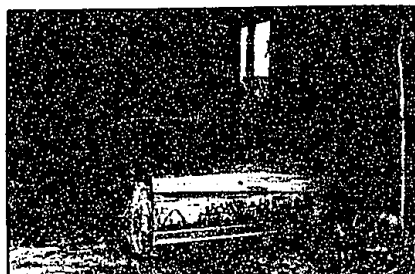
"The property you can replace, but not the people," said Jenny Mihajlovski, a River Bend neighbor who comforted the Hatfields after the fire.

Fire officials said the blaze might have been started as Jerry Hatfield, a retired auto executive who enjoys working on his own cars, was draining the fuel from the Porsche while a kerosene heater and a halogen lamp burned nearby.

The garage was quickly ablaze, but Farmington Hills firefighters managed to save the house — and earn the Hatfields' praise.

"The fire department did an outstanding job," said Jerry Hatfield, 57, as he watched workmen clean the soot from his home.

"We called the 911, and it seemed like they (firefighters) were there right away. They were very cooperative and very comforting to my wife and I. They also saved the house. The garage



Cooked Caddy: A 1992 Cadillac was one of two autos destroyed in a garage fire on River Bend Drive in Farmington Hills.

was ruined, but it looked like the whole house would go."

Added Catheryn Hatfield, "I thought it (the house) was going to be flattened. It could have been so much worse."

Deputy Fire Chief Pete Baldwin, one of the first firefighters on the scene, praised firefighters from Stations 1 and 3, especially considering that several of them were from the fall class of new recruits.

"It was a very good stop," Baldwin said. "We critique our firefighters after and they did an excellent job."

By "a good stop," Baldwin explained that firefighters knew the garage was completely engulfed in flame. Keeping the rest of the

house from being destroyed became the department's goal.

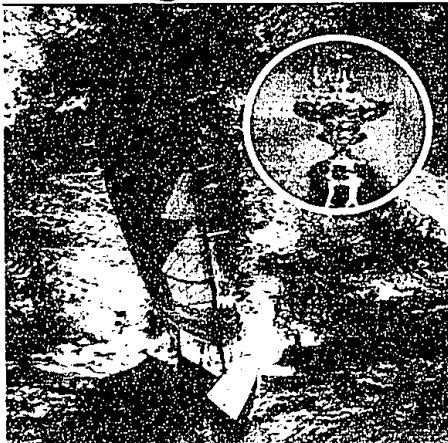
"There was heavy smoke damage," he said. "But they called in right away and were very cooperative."

The fire caused an estimated \$100,000 to the house and garage, which are valued at \$280,000, and an estimated \$90,000 in damage to contents.

Jerry Hatfield, retired after 36 years in management at Cadillac Division of General Motors, especially regretted losing the red '72 Porsche. "It had been completely restored . . . all new tires and trim."

The Hatfields, who've lived eight years in the house, estimate repairs will be complete in three months.

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