

# Farmington Observer

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## Arson charge sticks in group home fire

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

William Ricks Jr. of Detroit was convicted Tuesday of arson in the burning of a Farmington Hills group home Nov. 3, 1980. He will be sentenced March 12 by Oakland County Circuit Judge Gene Schmitt.

Ricks is the former executive director of Group Home Service Inc. which had planned to open and operate a home for mentally retarded adults at 30355 Glenmuir near 14 Mile and Farmington roads.

ing is a felony carrying a maximum prison term of 20 years.

Ricks was arraigned and released in circuit court on 10 percent of \$10,000 bond last July after serving a six-month jail sentence for falsifying a State of Michigan Income Tax return, according to prosecuting attorney Jim Mitchell.

Six retarded adults between 18 and 26 years of age had been awaiting placement in the \$100,000 home owned by attorney Steven Rabinovitz and several other investors. It would have been the Farmington area's first group home for the retarded.

LAST WEEK, FORMER GROUP

Home Service employee Michael Marcinak, 28, testified that he and Ricks set fire to the group home to collect insurance money.

Marcinak was granted immunity from prosecution in exchange for his testimony.

Ricks told Marcinak "there was a large insurance policy on the home and I would receive money after the burning of the house," he testified.

Ricks had insured the home with Fireman's Fund Insurance Company for \$175,000, loss of rent for \$54,000; contents for \$25,000, and the garage for \$12,000.

Although the home belonged to per-

sons other than Ricks, which would have prevented him from collecting on the insurance policy, he had insurance on the property apart from standard insurance, said Jean West of Macomb Oakland Regional Center, sponsor of the defunct Farmington Hills home and an arm of the state Department of Mental Health.

"Ricks had a special arrangement through the lease agreement whereby he would have been able to collect," West said.

ACCORDING TO defense attorney Phillip Seymour, however, no monies have been paid because Fireman's Fund denies that Group Home Service

Inc. had any insurable interest in the property.

Marcinak denied Seymour's contention that a quarrel resulting from the homosexual relationship of Marcinak, Ricks and Richard Crawford, a third Group Home Service employee, was the reason behind the fire. He admitted to having a homosexual relationship with Ricks but said the home was burned because Ricks feared it would never open, Marcinak said.

If the home failed to open, Ricks would have had to repay \$18,000 in start-up funds. Ricks had been leasing the house for \$1,400 monthly, according to Mitchell.

The fire was started when a paper box on top of the stove caught fire and ignited a trail of gasoline-soaked sheets that were trailed throughout the house.

According to Marcinak's testimony, he and Ricks picked up gas cans at Ricks' Detroit residence, and drove to a gas station to fill them.

They then drove to the Glenmuir residence, ripped sheets into strips and trailed them from one room to another. He said they finished trailing the sheets to the stove and left.

Marcinak drove to a group home in Clarkston to work for the night in place of Ricks, who called work saying he wouldn't be in because his child was ill, Marcinak testified.

## Savage defends move on roof installation

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

The recent collapse of the Farmington City Hall roof is now thought by engineers to be the result of a defective concrete column which supported it, City Manager Lawrence Savage told the City Council Monday.

Savage refuted the importance of city officials' failure to order a weight test last year when a second roof was added to correct heat loss and leaking problems.

It would have been impossible to conduct a weight test without vacating City Hall and applying weights to take measurements, he said.

Savage added he has been assured by Bill Covey, an engineer hired by the city to investigate the roof collapse, that the roof's loading capacity was more than adequate.

"The adding of a second roof is a usual way of rehabilitating a structure, Savage said.

"The structure by design was proper," he added. "We've had two structural engineers look at it, and both agree the roof did not fall.

"The trusses comprise the weakest part of the roof, and they held," said Savage. The column that held the I-beam which gave way and brought the joists down with it caused the collapse, added Savage.

"The column contained hollow cinderblocks which were placed upright instead of sideways. It's also possible a portion of the column should have been constructed of steel," he said.

COVEY CONFIRMED the collapse was due to the failure of the column but refused to offer specific information on the roof's loading capacity. He said he outlined that information in a letter to Savage and needed his approval to release it.

It is impossible to check the builder's original specifications to determine whether there was improper inspection or construction when City Hall was built because "some records aren't with us," Savage said.

Council member Jan Dolan found it hard to believe that "records just 10 or 12 years old can't be looked at."

But according to City Clerk Floyd Cairns, the specifications were de-

stroyed when Earl Teeples, Farmington Hills Township supervisor in 1970, burned some old records.

"It wasn't any kind of cover-up," Cairns said. "In my opinion the reason he destroyed the records is because he felt they weren't needed any more and they were cluttering up the files."

Teeples was uninvolved with the committee of private citizens which designed and supervised the construction of city hall, Cairns added.

SAVAGE'S REPORT on the roof was offered in response to council member Charlie Williams' inquiry regarding a recent Farmington Observer story which said city officials waived a weight check during last year's construction of a second roof.

Farmington Hills resident Aldo Vagnozzi was unconvinced by Savage's report.

"It seems kind of strange the records disappeared. I don't want to place the blame on anyone, but this seems like a cover-up. I realize the insurance company may not pay," he told the council.

In the late '60s, during construction of City Hall, there was concern about the building plans, Vagnozzi added.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Structural engineers now claim a defective supporting column caused the collapse of the Farmington Hills City Hall roof Feb. 5.

## Taxpayers' Oh Thit Pink slip inspires invention

By Marie McGee  
staff writer

An ingenious Livonia woman laid off from her job has a couple of choice words for the area's gloomy economic conditions.

"Oh Thit," says JoAnn Carter with a grin.

The "Oh Thit" that Mrs. Carter speaks of is really "The Taxpayers' Oh Thit," a card game which allows the players to "get back at the government."

Object of the game, which utilizes rolls of the dice, is to become "tax ex-

empt" at the expense of the other players.

REPRESENTING the national deficit, the "Oh Thit" card is the most important card of the game. Because "Oh Thit" cards can't be discarded, part of the fun and suspense of the game comes when the holder of that all-important card watches for the opportunity to drop the bombshell on his fellow players. More fun comes with the use of the wild veto card that changes suits. "Oh Thit" messages also appear on the dice.

Scores are kept on a "tax record"

and the person with the lowest score wins.

No penalties for shouting and laughter which are encouraged especially when involving the name of the game.

Departing from the usual King-queen-jack designations, the 71-card deck uses president, first lady, senators and congressmen as face cards.

"The game is very different from the other tax relief game, "Reaganomics," she said.

"It came out when my game was in the process of being copyrighted. Needless to say, I panicked," said Mrs. Carter. "I was certain that my game would appear to have been copied from that one. However, there is no similarity."

THE IDEA FOR the game came after she was laid off from a receptionist job she had held for several years with a Redford manufacturing firm.

"The plant closed after 40 or 50 years of being in business. It was a traumatic experience for me. Then I thought about all the other people who were laid off through no fault of their own. It also became apparent to me

that inflation and the lack of money coming into many households prevented people from going out as often as in the past.

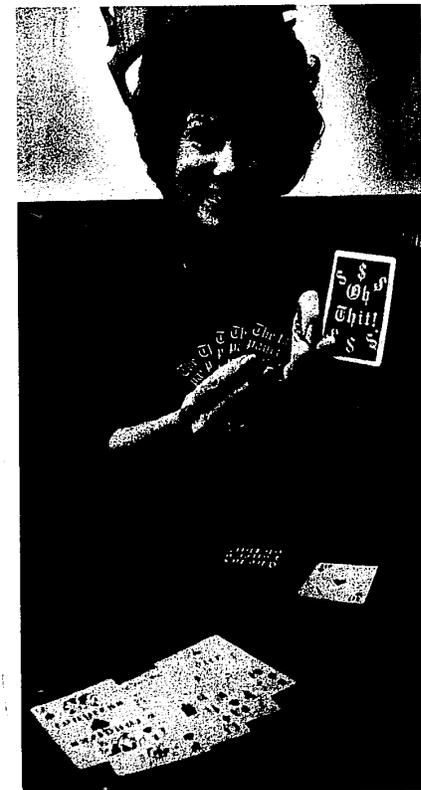
"It seemed that the thing to do was to create something a little out of the ordinary which people could enjoy at home with their friends," she added.

It took about a year "and many test rounds" to complete, she said. She has about \$4,000 invested in it and now has it for sale in three area game stores, Gags and Gifts with outlets in Livonia and Birmingham, Misty's Gifts and Art in Taylor.

BESIDES BEING the inventor, the comely brunette handles all phases of the fledgling business. First thing she did was form her own company, Carter Creations. Then she re-arranged her basement into a stock room/shipping department.

The most frustrating thing about setting up the game was finding companies to manufacture the elements in small lots, she said. The worst case was the decks of cards.

It was enough to make a person want to say "Oh Thit."



BILL BRASLER/staff photographer

JoAnn Carter thinks her game "The Taxpayers' Oh Thit" will relieve a lot of frustrations because it's a fun way to get even with the government.

## Council tackles weighty political etiquette issue

By M.B. Dillon Ward  
staff writer

Monday's City Council meeting did little to narrow the political rift that arose when Farmington Hills Mayor Jack Burwell failed to notify zoning board vice chairman John Tesner he would be replaced.

Tesner, a real estate broker, recently was replaced by zoning board alternate Kathy Egypt, a strong political supporter of both Burwell and former mayor Donn Wolf.

Under past administrations, board and commission members whose terms were expiring received phone calls or letters from the mayor asking whether they wished to be reappointed. Burwell did not extend the courtesy to Tesner.

Tesner said he never heard from the new mayor Burwell or Wolf. I never heard from a soul: A Farmington Hills resident since 1987, Tesner was appointed three years ago to the zoning board.

He did talk with zoning board chairman Jim Ellis about reappointment, indicating he was interested in continuing on the board, he said.

A letter from Ellis notifying the

mayor that Tesner's term was expiring was interpreted to mean Tesner wished to resign, Burwell said.

Councilwoman Jan Dolan told Burwell she called Tesner to inform him that Council had been unaware he was interested in reappointment.

"It was a little embarrassing to find out after the fact that he had not been contacted," said Dolan. "The mayor can appoint whoever he wishes to, but it would help us to know whether or not people want to be reappointed. I think we should operate up front."

"I don't mean to blame council," Burwell said, "but I did give council a few weeks notice (regarding appointments). If they had told me I was making a faux pas I would never have embarrassed the city."

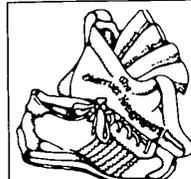
Other members of the Council suggested the mayor adopt a policy whereby board and commission members whose terms are expiring would be notified in writing.

"I don't mean to diminish John Tesner's great contribution to the city, and I would like to honor him in some way," said Burwell. "But I still don't

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