

Farmington Observer

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Glass Onion arson case is a baffler

By Craig Pechura staff writer

As arson fires go, the one at the Glass Onion restaurant on June 15, 1981 is a real whodunit.

More than a year has passed since the blaze but the once-busy restaurant at 32435 Grand River, west of Power, remains boarded-up with posters promising a reward for arson information still tacked up outside, curled by rain.

At the time of the fire, Norman Maddison, Farmington fire marshal, termed the blaze "suspicious" pending lab tests by the Michigan State Police in an arson investigation.

Lab technicians analyzed a quart container found inside the apparently uninsured restaurant in a test for traces of gasoline or another flammable liquid. Test results were negative, Maddison said, but he states unequivocally the fire was arson.

"The lab results came back negative," Maddison said, "meaning no trace of flammable liquid (was found) in the samples we took from a particular scene."

Many fires are determined to be arson, Maddison said, without actual physical evidence of a flammable liquid. The way fires burn can provide evidence of arson. Samples taken in fires often don't show traces of a flammable agent because the substance is burned away by flames or washed away by water, he says.

Gallant says. The attorney for the two partners describes the venture as a tax shelter that went sour.

Gallant and Valentini, in turn, sublet the business to David A. Sinacola of Farmington Hills, owner of the now-defunct David A. Sinacola Enterprises Inc.

FIRE INVESTIGATORS note that Sinacola was sued before the fire by Gallant and Valentini for allegedly failing to make regular payments on a bank loan and owed rent, city taxes and water on the property. The lawsuit attempted to have Sinacola removed from operating the restaurant and sought to render a lease purchase agreement between the two parties null and void.

The issue was resolved, after the fire, with Circuit Court Judge Robert C. Anderson awarding Valentini and Gallant more than \$65,000 to be paid by David A. Sinacola Enterprises Inc. The money has never been paid.

Two days before the fire Sinacola told police two former employees fired in January 1981 came to the restaurant threatening retaliation if back wages weren't paid to them.

Employees have been interviewed, Maddison said, but no firm leads developed. Sinacola reportedly refused a police request asking him to take a lie detector test, which is his right.

The building can be renovated and reopened, according to Gallant. Two offers to purchase the restaurant fell through since the fire, he adds.

"**WE HATE** to see that building just sitting there boarded-up as much as anyone else," Gallant said from his office in the engineering department at General Motors Tech Center.

Attempts to sell the building are "close to resolution," Gallant says, but he stops short of saying how soon the building will reopen under new management.

Further lawsuits continue today over the insurance company's claim that Sinacola cancelled the restaurant's insurance policy two weeks before the fire.

"We're saying the insurance company didn't have the right to cancel (insurance on the restaurant) without adequate notice to the other parties," says Richards, attorney for Gallant and Valentini.

Attempts to reach Sinacola for comment on the proceedings have been unsuccessful. Attorneys for two of the parties involved and the insurance company say they've had no luck locating him either.



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

More than just a road, Howard has been a quiet country trail for the residents living around it like Rob Benda. Now the road has been designated as a beauty road and will be preserved as is.

Residents win 5-year battle Score one for beauty road

By M.B. Dillon Ward staff writer

A drive Marty Graff of Farmington Hills took down Echo Road in West Bloomfield Township five years ago led to the passage late week of a natural beauty road ordinance by the Farmington Hills City Council.

Graff, who lives on Howard Road between Drake and Halsted roads, considered his wooded scenic street worthy of the natural beauty road designation given to Echo Road by the Oakland County Road Commission.

"I thought it (obtaining a natural beauty road designation) for Howard Road would be a nice thing to do — a preservation method enabling part of the city to retain its rural character as opposed to the city-type life," said Graff.

The idea resulted in a 1½ year-long project. Graff discovered the

process that his was the fourth attempt to officially preserve Howard Road in its natural state.

"There were three unsuccessful attempts to have it designated a natural beauty road because the state act (under which Echo Road was given its specification) applies only to county-controlled roads. It doesn't apply to city roads.

"The City Council didn't know how to carry through a designation with a firm legal definition or ordinance, but gave informal recognition by resolution.

"I felt it was necessary to do something that was formal. I got petitions signed and went to the Historical Commission and the Hills Beautification Commission asking them for resolutions of support," Graff said.

Graff then submitted his proposal to City Council, which began drafting an ordinance.

OF THE 149 miles in Michigan and 15 miles in Oakland County of natural beauty roads, only one (the Howard Road section) lies outside a township.

"Townships have had a vehicle, they have had an ordinance. There are miles and miles of county-controlled natural beauty roads in townships. We've been precluded from it by state law," Graff said.

Councilmember and former mayor or Donn Wolf says the new ordinance is "not an empty phrase.

"This puts some teeth into the city's desire to preserve natural beauty roads. Some city planners are not enthused about it, and it could hinder operations for developers but this will help keep the rural atmosphere of the city."

According to the adopted ordinance and guidelines, the designation is intended to highlight and protect in a natural . . . condition . . .

city local roads having unusual or outstanding natural beauty by virtue of native vegetation or other natural features."

The use of herbicides is prohibited, and mowing is limited to one five-foot swath on either side of the road.

The special road designation may be revoked if 51 percent of the property owners whose land abuts the road sign a petition.

In addition, if traffic problems, unsafe conditions or a change in the road's natural characteristics arise, the City Council will hold a public hearing. A majority vote by the council would rescind the natural beauty road designation.

Officials mull sidewalk expansion

By M.B. Dillon Ward staff writer

Although Farmington Hills' sidewalk improvement program is more than five years old, officials still are struggling with methods to finance it.

Inroads were made at last week's City Council meeting, however, with a proposal presented by Director of Public Services Thomas Bisell and the city manager's office.

The presentation addressed proposed sidewalks along the north and south sides of Twelve Mile Road between Orchard Lake and Farmington roads. Bisell was advised by the council to pre-

pare a policy in resolution form to be taken up at its July 12 meeting.

"The idea behind it is to try and assess costs to the people that will use the walk," said Bisell, who has drawn up assessment districts whereby all property owners within a square mile would share in the cost of installing sidewalks along major mile roads.

"You're going to get a lot more use out of a commercial site or multiple base unit than a residential lot. So the lowest assessable unit would be a single-family lot located somewhere in the middle of the section (square mile)," he added.

Assessment will be based on a for-

mula Bisell is in the midst of preparing. City officials are estimating the cost per foot of sidewalk at \$15-\$17.

INCLUDED IN LAST week's presentation was a "network vs. a piecemeal" sidewalk concept, which would require entire square miles of sidewalks (along major roads) be constructed at a time.

"If a whole section is completed, then you have a continuous walk system all the way around, instead of mile-long dead-ends," Bisell said.

At present, Detroit Baptist Manor, a senior citizen housing complex on Thirteen Mile Road, has a sidewalk that extends only the length of its frontage. Residents are forced to walk in the

street enroute to stores and businesses Orchard Lake near Thirteen Mile Road.

The city is considering using community block grant funds recently granted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to construct the portion of sidewalk that would extend the Baptist Manor walk to Orchard Lake.

Bisell considers it "an excellent time" to install sidewalks.

"It's an excellent time to bid anything. We have a depressed situation, and as a result of that, any contractual or construction work is very competitive right now. We can take advantage of excellent bid prices."



RANDY BORST/staff photographer

The Glass Onion, once a popular eatery on the Grand River circuit, has stood for more than a year as a burned, boarded hulk.

Take a picture; save some energy

By M.B. Dillon Ward staff writer

If Farmington Hills officials can show broad neighborhood support for an energy conservation program, the city may receive Community Energy Management state and federal assistance.

The funds would be used to take thermograms of every street in the city in order to pinpoint where heat loss occurs.

Infrared film is used to photograph homes, usually on a cold, clear winter night, to record the temperatures of

various parts of a house. Heat dissipating areas such as windows and doors appear lighter in infrared photographs than do sealed portions of a house.

"It would essentially be an effort to bring about energy conservation consciousness," said Assistant City Manager William Costick.

"The thrust of the program is informational, intended to help homeowners and businesses learn about problems, identify them and find alternatives such as weatherstripping and insulation."

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