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Detroit Free Press

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SECOND FRONT PAGE

Sunday, February 11, 1979

Today's Chuckle

Husband's complaint:
 "My wife loves to buy anything that's marked down. Yesterday she came home from the store with two dresses and an escalator."

Big plans backfired on Willetts

By BILLY BOWLES
Free Press Staff Writer

To those who knew him casually, Guy Willetts was a well-to-do Grosse Pointe businessman. He was president of two companies, drove a Thunderbird, played tennis at the Country Club of Detroit, traveled to Cairo for business and Majorca for pleasure and swam in his backyard pool. But closer acquaintances knew better. "He couldn't honestly go down and buy himself a bowl of chili most days," said a former secretary.

WILLETTS, 51, WAS MURDERED Feb. 1. Police said it was probably a hit man who shot him twice in the head as he sat in a car outside the Soup Kitchen Saloon on Detroit's near east side.

It was discovered later that there was a \$2.5 million insurance policy on his life. His business partners were the beneficiaries. The partners were under investigation for fraud and Willetts was cooperating with authorities, it was learned.

It sounds like a movie script. A friend said it sounds as if Willetts wrote it.

Movie scripts were Willetts' business. As president of Willetts Films Inc., he produced travelogues and other motion picture documentaries, although that business was all but dormant at the time he was killed.

Murder exposes his deals — and debts

The second company he was president of was OTAC — Oceanic Trade Alliance Council International Inc. — a business promotion firm.

It is Willetts' OTAC partners — Richard D. French, John G. Kiley, Mat Alfei and others — who are under investigation by the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office and the State of Michigan.

MUCH OF WILLETTS' life resembled a motion picture script because he engineered it that way. A born promoter, full of ideas but with a poor track record for carrying them out, he courted headlines joyfully the way most businessmen shrink from them.

Willetts boasted he would reverse the U.S. balance of trade deficit with the Middle East through the business venture for which he organized OTAC more than three years ago.

He told a Chicago Tribune reporter last year that OTAC would generate \$20 billion in sales to those oil-producing nations.

HIS PROPOSAL WAS to lease a cruise ship, put industrial exhibits from the largest U.S. corpora-

tions aboard, and sail into port in eight Middle East countries as a floating trade fair.

Princes, sheikhs and Arab heads of state would come aboard, Willetts assured financial backers and prospective exhibitors, to hear the American sales pitches. The cost to the 100 exhibitors he expected to sign up would be \$100,000 each.

"He always thought big," said a former employee.

"He came on very strong," said Gary Harrer, a friend and admirer of Willetts and owner of the bar and restaurant in the Executive Plaza Building in near downtown Detroit where Willetts spent a lot of time. "You didn't know how much to believe sometimes."

The Willetts trade fair venture sank last fall when OTAC could not come up with \$1.4 million needed to lease the ship for 30 days. OTAC lost its \$125,000 deposit.

WILLETTS CONFIDED a lot in Harrer. He informed Harrer of the \$2.5 million insurance policy after it was taken out in December 1977. He

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Guy Willetts in 1978 photo: "He came on very strong," a friend said of him. "You didn't know how much to believe sometimes."

Jackson escapee killed in West

By GERALD VOLGENAU
Free Press Staff Writer

Robert E. Taylor, who killed a woman motel clerk in Port Huron in 1975 and later became only the fourth man to escape Jackson Prison, was stabbed to death during an inmate fight at the Washington State Penitentiary at Walla Walla, corrections officials confirmed Saturday.

Taylor, 34, of Port Huron, was stabbed six times Friday night and died in the prison hospital, officials said.

He was serving four 60-year sentences in Washington after being convicted last July of kidnapping and robbing two exotic dancers in Seattle.

TAYLOR WAS tried in Port Huron in October 1976, and convicted of first-degree murder based on testimony given by his three brothers.

The brothers turned him in for a reward.

Taylor was given a life sentence for shooting to death 21-year-old night clerk Valerie Lee Mills, who worked at the Port Huron Howard Johnson Motor Lodge.

Testimony indicated that during the killing of Miss Mills, Taylor shot himself in the foot. This later helped lead to his conviction.

While awaiting trial in Port Huron County Jail, he escaped once, but was recaptured. Later, in a notorious escape from Jackson Prison, Taylor walked out of the gates dressed like a guard.

HE WAS NOT seen by authorities again until January 1978. Then Taylor was arrested in Washington state when he was shot in the stomach with his own gun during a struggle with two exotic dancers he was trying to kidnap.

Taylor was picked up later when he sought medical help for his wound at a hospital in Edmonds, Wash.

The convicted murderer was not extradited to Michigan for the remainder of his life term, but instead was held in Washington to serve the four 60-year terms for armed robbery, assault and kidnapping.

Mayor Young done in oils: Artful politics

By SANDY McCLURE
Free Press Staff Writer

It is customary for political figures to have their portraits prominently displayed. It may help politically, and perhaps it provides a momentary sense of immortality.

The latest is a three-by-five-foot oil painting of Mayor Coleman Young by Detroit artist Carl Owens, which was unveiled Friday night at a fund raising reception for the mayor at Cobo Hall.

June Ridgeway, a city assessor who also manages the mayor's political funds, said the \$150-per-ticket affair netted more than \$350,000 for Young's political account.

Owens' portrait will hang in the Manooagian Mansion as a companion piece to the three-by-five-foot portrait that another Detroit artist, Patricia Burnett, did of Joyce Garrett, the mayor's longtime friend and new director of the city's Department of Public Information.

There are other oil paintings and photographs of the mayor throughout the Manooagian, the mayor's official residence, but the portrait unveiled Friday night has special significance.

IT WAS THE CONCEPTION of the late Robert Millender, the political kingmaker who helped propel Young into office as Detroit's first black mayor.

"He decided it was important to do, and raised the money for it privately," according to Tina Bassett, Ms. Garrett's close friend and deputy director.

"Bob watched the project develop over the last two years and saw the portrait almost completed before he died last fall," Ms. Bassett said Saturday.

Young did not pose for the portrait but picked a favorite photograph — one which Ms. Garrett has in her City-County Building office — as a model for Owens to follow in his painting. Owens used it along with a stack of other photos, Ms. Bassett said.

Was the mayor pleased? He commented Friday night that it flattered him, but added, "I like what I see."

"That's art." And, some might add, that's politics.



Carl Owens' portrait of Mayor Young, who commented, "I like what I see. That's art."

Cops Finger 3 Partners in Arrest Death

By BOB CALVERLEY
Free Press Staff Writer

Several Detroit police officers testified Friday and Saturday that last May they saw three fellow officers assault a handcuffed and unconscious prisoner who later died. One officer said some of the police involved held a quick meeting immediately afterward to get their stories together.

At the three officers' preliminary examination Saturday, Recorder's Court Judge Henry Heading delayed until March 2 his decision on whether Officers Charles Springer, 30, Jay Hammer, 30, and James Pigeon, 32, should stand trial on involuntary manslaughter charges for the death of Leslie Wayne Armstrong, 27, who died after he was arrested on May 19.

Heading said he would give the officers' defense attorney, Al Varga, time to prepare a brief arguing for dismissal and Assistant Wayne County Prosecutor Robert Pearl a chance to reply. The briefs will probably center on the complex testimony of Wayne County Medical Examiner Dr. Werner Spitz.

SPITZ originally said Armstrong died of a "suspected drug ingestion." Later, after hearing accusations of police reservist Donald Johnson that Hammer had dragged Armstrong around with a flashlight under the neck, Spitz decided Armstrong had died of strangulation.

At the preliminary examination Friday, Spitz again said that Arm-

strong died of strangulation and that the alleged assaults and Armstrong's high blood-alcohol level could have been contributing factors.

Spitz also stated that if Armstrong had been dragged by a flashlight across his neck, marks would have been left. No such marks were found on the body, he said.

THE INCIDENT began about 11:15 p.m. last May 19 when Springer and his partner, Sherry Butler, encountered Armstrong in his car parked beside a fire hydrant on Kercheval near Dickerson. After Armstrong refused to move the vehicle, the two officers discovered that he was wanted for past traffic violations and had improper tags on his car.

Armstrong ran when threatened with arrest, police said.

Officers Springer and Butler called for help and then chased Armstrong until they caught him in a vacant lot about two blocks away. With help from Hammer, they handcuffed Armstrong's hands behind him.

OFFICER BUTLER testified that Hammer put his knee on Armstrong's neck as he lay face down in the field. She said she saw Springer hit Armstrong in the abdomen with his flashlight at least once.

But she said that she didn't see Armstrong dragged by the flashlight under his chin and that she tried to stop Springer when he jabbed Armstrong.

Johnson repeated his story on the stand: That Hammer picked up Armstrong with the flashlight, dropped him once, and then dragged him 10 or 12 feet using the flashlight. When asked if officer Butler could see this, Johnson said:

"It would have been impossible for her not to have seen unless she had her eyes closed."

ANDREW SIMS and Michael Henderson, two officers who responded to the call for help, said they saw Pigeon sitting on Armstrong in the backseat of a patrol car and bouncing up and down on him.

"He (Pigeon) was clapping up there laughing and slipping his hands and bouncing on the prisoner," said Sims. "I talked to my partner and said, 'Let's get out of here 'cause that's not right.'"

Officer Cheryl James testified that she saw Springer, Hammer and a third unidentified officer kick Armstrong as he lay handcuffed. She said she saw Hammer drag Armstrong with the flashlight against his neck and Springer hit the prisoner in the stomach with his flashlight.

Shelly Foy, Hammer's partner, testified that Springer hit Armstrong with his flashlight, but she said repeatedly that she had not seen anyone drag the victim with a flashlight against his neck.

"I couldn't believe what had happened," she said. "My eyes were on Springer."

PIGEON TOOK the stand See POLICE, Page 19A

GM downplays profits, UAW claims

A top UAW official accused General Motors Corp. Saturday of trying to mask its record 1978 profits in the way it reported them.

UAW Vice-President Irving Bluestone said the \$3.5 billion profit for 1978 announced by GM last week actually is a return of 22.2 percent on investment for the automaker's shareholders. Only once since 1965 has GM had a higher return on investment for shareholders, said Bluestone, head of the union's GM division.

Bluestone also said that President Carter's anti-inflation policies fail to deal with what Bluestone termed "excess profits" by corporations like GM,

but that Carter calls on workers to go slow in wage demands.

BLUESTONE'S REMARKS, made in a letter to the 148 UAW bargaining units at GM, were seen as the start of the rhetoric that always precedes contract bargaining. UAW contracts with the auto industry expire Sept. 14; negotiations are expected to open in mid-July.

GM is expected to be the target firm in the bargaining, and as such would set the contract pattern for the industry. The last time GM was the target company was in 1970, when 400,000 GM workers went on strike for 67 days.

He said that reaction occurs when the elderly feel they have no control over what happens to them.

"They feel they have no control over their own fate and a significant number just sort of give up."

Pastalan said the Washtenaw group was compared with a similar group of residents at a Lapeer nursing home which moved en masse to a new building, and with another group of nursing home residents in Southeastern Michigan who were not moved.

"JUST WITH the physical disruption of moving, we found deaths were over what we expected but not as dramatic an increase as radical relocation," Pastalan said.

In comparison, he said, the death rate for elderly residents who were not moved remained constant. He said he has identified three factors that contribute to relocation problems.

Advanced age — "over 80" — is one of the factors, he said.

Another is a confused mental state. "Not crazy, just confused," he said. "Those who are not sure of the time or the place."

The third factor, he said, is a poor medical prognosis — patients with a number of physical problems.

AS A RESULT of the 1971 study, Pastalan is monitoring the relocation of patients at the Wayne County Walter Reuther Long Term Care Facility, and has for the last few years helped the State of Pennsylvania reduce the trauma of relocating elderly residents when the state closes inadequate nursing homes.

"You can never really neutralize the effects but you can help mitigate some of the consequences," he said.

He said that to help lessen the trauma, family and friends should take the elderly patient to the new home before moving time to acquaint him or her with the physical layout and the staff.

He said elderly persons should be allowed to keep most of their possessions when they move to quell fears that their belongings will be lost or stolen.

Most important, Pastalan said, is convincing the elderly resident that someone still cares about him or her.

"You have to assure them they have not been abandoned," he said. "Assure them that the new place is a good place, too, and that you care very much what happens to them."

When elderly must move, death may come sooner

By SUSAN BROWN
Free Press Staff Writer

Elderly people who are moved to new surroundings face double the death rate of those who are not relocated, according to a study by a University of Michigan professor.

"It looks like the move itself kills, particularly when it's involuntary," said Leon Pastalan, director of environment and aging at the U-M Institute of Gerontology in Ann Arbor.

Pastalan studied for over a year the outcome when moving 61 patients at a Washtenaw County nursing home had to be moved to other nursing homes in the state.

The patients were separated from friends at their former home and from the medical staff who had cared for them. They were forced to deal with new roommates, new social situations, new buildings and medical staffs they had not yet learned to trust, he said.

During the year after the move, about half the patients died — a "dramatic increase" over the 28 percent annual mortality rate at their former nursing home, Pastalan said.

"THERE ARE people who will give up, they will die," said Pastalan, 45. "They just will themselves to die."



Irving Bluestone, whose letter was seen as a prelude to contract negotiations.