

VIRGINIANA FILE JAN 14 1981

PWC HISTORIC BUILDINGS
(Rockledge)



By Clifford Owen—Potomac News

Richard Elderth shown at the scene of Rockledge fire

Man who reported fire charged with arson

Potomac News
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Prince William Public Library
Manassas, Va.

REFERENCE

By Nanci Sharp

The 19-year-old Woodbridge man who reported the Rockledge fire to the fire department and then sat on the ground watching the historic mansion burn on the night of Jan. 17, has been arrested on arson and breaking and entering charges, said state police Arson Investigator James H. Jessup.

Richard C. Elderth of the 1400 block of Flagship Drive, arrested Friday, was one of the primary suspects in the Rockledge arson from the onset of the investigation, said Jessup.

Jessup said the OWL Fire Department, Prince William Fire Marshal's office and Prince William Police

Department were instrumental in the investigation which led to Elderth's arrest.

Elderth was arrested Feb. 2 by Prince William police and charged with burglary, grand larceny auto and two counts of petty larceny after he allegedly had taken a truck from Cope Ford in Woodbridge, stole gasoline from Taylor's Arco on Gordon Boulevard and stole a license plate found on the truck, said county police.

Prince William police, aware of Elderth's possible involvement in the Rockledge arson, then notified Jessup. After interrogation by the state police in Culpeper, Elderth was charged Friday

and returned to Prince William County.

Elderth was released on \$20,000 bond in the custody of his mother with whom he lives. A preliminary court hearing was set for March 18.

Investigator William Wieland from the criminal investigation division of Prince William police said Elderth is a former employee of Cope Ford. He said Elderth reportedly was drinking the night he was arrested for allegedly stealing a truck from Cope Ford. Wieland said Elderth was last employed as a construction worker.

Wieland, who questioned Elderth about the truck incident, said he "put

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question

and \$1,515,000 in 1978-1979.

• Stafford County's expenditures for Parks and Recreation in 1977-1978 was the seventh largest in Virginia. The association said the current budget calls for a 36 percent increase in this department's budget — "a cause for alarm for all citizens" in view of the tax collection problems noted by the association. The association is against what it calls a "pet projects" list announced recently and the inclusion of funds for restoration of George Washington's boyhood home, Ferry Farm, and the building of a park site there or at Lauck's Island.

• Capital outlays made by Stafford in 1977-1978 were the highest in all Virginia counties.

• The costs to operate the Stafford

Refugee's drive brings react

By Nancy Breedon
and Dave Roman

Louis Dominguez, administrative assistant at the Prince William Hospital, is heading a drive to raise money for a reward to anyone with information leading to the arrest and conviction of the hit-and-run motorists who killed 11-year-old Tran Le Hoa.

Tran Le Hoa, a Vietnamese refugee, was struck by two motorists on Lomond Drive in Westgate Thursday evening in front of Stonewall Middle School.

Dominguez plans to set up the fund at the United Virginia Bank because it has a lot of branches and would make it easier for persons to contribute to the fund. He said he hopes to have \$1,000 by Wednesday.

Dominguez hopes the money will encourage individuals to come forth with any information they have, and in this way, assist the police in their work.

Dominguez said if no one comes forward, he plans to put a trust fund

contract for the sewer project. In addition to new sewer lines, a new pump station adjacent to Bull Run will be constructed.

DEATH

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struck Tran Le Loa of 8103 Porter Ridge Lane, No. 11, Manassas.

Investigator J.H. Collier said the police picked up "bits and pieces" during their interviews over the weekends, including two additional witnesses to the two-car accident.

Miss Tran was leaving an English-as-a-second-language class with her mother, brother and a group of 10 other Vietnamese and Cambodian refugees about 7 p.m. when she stepped from the curb in front of the school into the path of a beige van traveling south on Lomond Drive toward Westgate Shopping Center. She was knocked to the ground.

As Miss Tran attempted to crawl to the curb, she was struck and dragged about 50 feet by a second hit-and-run motorist. Miss Tran was pronounced dead shortly after.

Meanwhile, police have a lead on the beige van that first struck Miss Tran,

taxpayers group is set for Feb. 21 in the old courtroom at Stafford Courthouse.

ARSON

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two and two together" and notified the state police who conducted another interview with Elderth before charging him with arson.

According to Weiland, Elderth gave no reason for allegedly setting the fire.

Weiland said he thought it was "a case of a 19 year old out of work with time on their hands and they're going to get into something."

Weiland said there was "nothing significant" on Elderth's juvenile record and unless the police felt the suspect was a danger to society, they would not object to his release on bond.

Jessup would still not say how the fire was set or how it spread throughout the 1758 historical mansion. The stone walls of Rockledge still remain, sitting ghost-like now among high grassy terraces overlooking the town of Occoquan and the Occoquan River.

If a motive was established, Jessup would not reveal it. "I'd rather not get into that," Jessup said. Jessup did say that there were no other suspects and that Elderth allegedly "acted alone."

Donald Sonner, who bought the dilapidated 11-room stone house in 1972 had invested about \$250,000 in restoration. Designed by colonial architect William Buckland, Rockledge sits behind double iron gates on about five acres of sloping property.

Sonner was interviewed by the Potomac News three days after the fire. At the time he expressed extreme sadness, frustration and anger at the financial and emotional loss. "It had to be arson," he said at the time. "I don't know who would do this to me. I didn't think anybody - no matter how sick they were - how much they didn't like me, would do that."

Not until 11 days after the fire did Jessup officially term the Rockledge fire "incendiary," which means maliciously set.

Mike Johnson, president of the OWL Fire Department, one of five fire departments which responded to the Rockledge fire, said that it was highly unusual that the fire department received only one call on a fire of that magnitude.

The call had come from Elderth who was treated at the scene for burn injuries to his hand. Elderth had explained at the time that his hand was injured as he tried to open the door to see if anyone was trapped in the burning building.

Yesterday, Sonner said Rockledge had been burning for an hour before the fire department had been called. Sonner said he did not know Elderth or anything about him.

Jessup said an arson conviction on an unoccupied dwelling "would probably carry up to ten years" in the penitentiary.

Sonner did not understand why Rockledge would be called an unoccupied dwelling. "The lights were on. I would go up there and stay once in a while," he said.

When Sonner was asked yesterday about major renovation of the gutted building, he wasn't charmed about the idea.

"I'm thinking of building a fish plant on the hill. I'll bulldoze it down or shut the door and make a freezer out of it. I'm through with the history. I don't need it. I'm not building landmarks for this town."

Water and sewer services present some of the most complex problems that will face the county in the 1980's, the report states.

Some of the problems include: water quality, water supply and cost, extending the services, providing water and sewer services, and the failure of well and septic systems and private utility systems.

The report predicts pressure for consolidation of the sanitary districts may be seen as urbanization continues and disparities in services between the districts continue. Resistance to those efforts will also be felt, the report states.

Using water and sewer lines to channel growth into areas dictated by the county's comprehensive plan is a sensible and legal tool, according to the report. Mandatory connections and the elimination of private well and septic systems are also listed as possible solutions to water and sewer problems facing the county.

Drainage

Three major questions facing the county about drainage that remain unanswered are: Will the county make

Andrews Air Force base Sunday, looking tired and speaking almost in whispers. At Carter's request, he traveled to five nations in Africa to seek support for the president's campaign to boycott the Olympics.

He said the trip was "75 percent successful," and he would do it again "quick" if Carter asked him.

Last week, Ali suggested the administration might have been using him after reporters in Tanzania criticized him for seeking African support when the United States had failed to back black boycotts aimed at South Africa.

Ali was quoted at the time as saying he would tell Carter that "what you want the Africans to do is something you wouldn't do for them."

"Maybe I'm being used to do something that ain't right," he said.

But Sunday, Ali told U.S. reporters "I didn't say the Carter administration was taking advantage of me. I wouldn't say that about my president."

Ali was reported to have told the news conference in Tanzania he would tell Carter: "You got me on the spot. You got on a big spot and then you send me around the world to take the whipping I'm not here to take America's whipping."

Legislative battles seen

RICHMOND (UPI) — Preliminary skirmishes over the Equal Rights Amendment and the proposed repeal of the state's sales tax on food have hit the General Assembly, with floor battles on the two issues looming this week.

Committee votes on the ERA and the food tax repeal came last week as the legislators attempted to dig themselves out from a deluge of bills filed just before last Monday's deadline. More than 1,000 House bills and 500 bills were introduced this session.

A proposal to gradually repeal the state's 3 percent sales tax on food was defeated Friday by the House Finance Committee, which settled instead on a compromise "food" income tax credit.

The idea of repealing the tax is not totally dead, however. A senate bill calling for the elimination of the sales tax on food by 1984 is still before the Senate Finance Committee.

The compromise bill passed by the House Finance Committee was created out of two measures offered by Delegates Norman Sisisky, D-Petersburg, and Richard Cranwell, R-Winton.

Under the provisions of the bill, families with income of \$7,500 a year or less could take \$33 credit per family member for food purchases on their income taxes, starting in 1982.

They want no test tubes

NORFOLK (UPI) — Opponents of the nation's first test tube baby clinic have asked Attorney General Marshall Coleman to block the opening of the project at Norfolk General Hospital.

R. Wayne Nunnally, attorney for the Tidewater chapter for the Virginia Society for Human Life, wrote Coleman over the weekend asking him to seek an injunction barring the lab from opening.

He said State Health Commissioner James D. Kenley violated state regulations when he approved the clinic Jan. 8. It did not allege how. Nunnally also charged that officials of various local and regional review agencies who approved the clinic had interlocking interests.

"Both the letter and the spirit of the law require an application to have independent consideration at each stage of its review and where collusion or interlocking boards occur, this violates the law," Nunnally said.

Nunnally cited only one example of what he said was an interlocking interest. He said a commissioner with the Eastern Virginia Medical School also served on the Eastern Virginia Health Systems Agency. The clinic will be affiliated with the medical school, and the agency reviewed and approved the project.