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## Police chase ends in crash; gas explosion guts businesses

BY MARK LOWERY  
Free Press Staff Writer

Two Detroit men fleeing in a stolen car broadsided another vehicle in downtown Ferndale early Saturday, injuring themselves and the other driver and sparking a fire that gutted several Woodward Avenue businesses, police said.

"The gas tank from the car that was broadsided spun into the store like a frisbee and the store went up in flames like a bomb went off," Ferndale Police Capt. Joseph Sullivan said. "Anyone who saw the fire and the car that was ripped in two would think it was a miracle that no one was killed."

The three injured people were treated for minor injuries at William Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak and released, police said.

Sullivan said that shortly before 1 a.m., a Ferndale officer spotted a 1982 four-door Buick, traveling north on Woodward just past Eight Mile. When the officer attempted to stop the car, the driver cut through an alley on the east side of Woodward, Sullivan said.

The car made its way back to Woodward and ran three red lights before hitting a car heading east on Nine Mile, ripping the car in two and propelling its gas tank through the window of Discount Fabric Merchants at 22800 Woodward, Sullivan said.

Police said the stolen car was traveling about 60 m.p.h. when the accident occurred.

The fire destroyed the fabric shop, a barbershop, an attorney's office and seven or eight offices on the building's second floor, said Sgt. Tim Crane of the Ferndale Fire Department.

The driver of the stolen car, Ernest Davis, 25, was arraigned on charges of possessing stolen property worth more than \$100 and fleeing police and is being held on \$75,000 cash bond. His passenger, Rayford Gamble, 34, was charged with possessing stolen property worth more than \$100 and is being held on \$25,000 bond.

The other injured person was a Ferndale resident who was on his way to a pharmacy.

## Hot car pursuit sparks a hot time in Ferndale

By John Dyke  
Tribune Correspondent

FERNDALE — A car chase ignited one of downtown Ferndale's worst building fires early Saturday morning.

Police said the stolen car struck another, splitting that car in two and sending a flaming gas tank into a two-story office-retail building on the northeast corner of Nine-Mile and Woodward.

The building was destroyed despite efforts of 47 firefighters from four fire departments.

Among the offices destroyed was the office of Ferndale's city attorney, Robert J. Turner Jr. He said today that all records were damaged but most are replaceable.

Ferndale police said the chase began on northbound Woodward near Marshall, when an officer spotted a 1982 Buick he believed was stolen. He began to stop it when the car speeded up. Police said it entered the Nine-Mile intersection at an estimated 60 mph and struck the second car.

Two occupants in the fleeing car suffered minor injuries. The driver of the second car was treated for injuries.

The city attorney's father, District Judge Robert J. Turner Sr. of Madison Heights' 43rd District Court, helped recover records from his son's office and later arraigned the two suspects.

Turner set bond for Ernest Davis, 25, driver of the car, at \$25,000 for each of three charges, and a passenger, Rayford Gamble, 34, at \$25,000 on each of two charges.

Davis was charged with car theft, possession of stolen property valued at more than \$100 and fleeing and eluding police. Gamble was arraigned on the first two charges. The two were taken to Oakland County Jail.

Turner scheduled preliminary examination for the pair before 43rd District Judge Douglas J.M. Voss, in Ferndale District Court, at 8:30 a.m. July 28.

More than half the firefighting force was provided by three other cities — Royal Oak, Southfield and Madison Heights — in a six-city mutual aid pact.

Birmingham, a fourth member, manned one of Ferndale's two empty fire stations after all Ferndale personnel and equipment responded to the 1 a.m. alarm.

"It was one of the finest examples of cooperation between fire departments I have ever seen," said Lt. Royal Russell, a 23-year veteran who responded with a pumper.

Russell Sunday said Madison Heights later sent four more firefighters to fight the fire.

Ferndale Fire Lt. Don Furze Sunday said 21 city firefighters and 26 firefighters from three other members of the six-city Southeast Oakland Fire Protection Agreement, known as Oakway, contained the fire within two hours, and had it "knocked down" about four hours later at 5 a.m.

Furze praised the efforts of his colleagues who fought the fire, and Birmingham for its backup support at the headquarters station on Livernois.

Royal Oak responded with two units, a pumper and an aerial ladder.

The driver of the impacted vehicle, Randy Lemons, 23, of Ferndale, sustained cuts and bruises and was treated and released from William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, Furze said.

Another injury was sustained by Ferndale firefighter Ronald Spencer who was treated and released from Beaumont with bronchial difficulties, he said.

"Three other firefighters received minor injuries but were treated without hospital assistance," Furze said.

"The cooperation between Oakway cities was fantastic," he said. "And, without it, I am sure the damage would have been far more extensive."

Furze said no estimate of fire damage was available. He said it was likely the building would be demolished.

Oakway's agreement calls for a member city to respond when requested with a pumper and four firefighters, while leaving adequate manpower to protect its city.

Pontiac is the sixth member of the pact. Last week Oakway members assisted Royal Oak firefighters in one of the city's largest blazes, an empty storage warehouse fire at I-696 and Irving.

City Attorney Turner said building owner Geoffrey Eaton, who had just spent \$6,000 remodeling the office area he rented, said the burned-out shell will be demolished and replaced with a new one-story building.

# Weekend fire replayed by Ferndale Council

By John Dyke

Tribune Correspondent

FERNDALE — The city's fire department would have called on its nearest neighbors in Oak Park and Hazel Park to fight a major fire if necessary to save lives, a fire department administrator said Monday.

Those cities' departments are not members of Oakway, the six-city mutual aid organization which sent firefighters to back up Ferndale's department in a downtown blaze early Saturday morning.

The fire destroyed a building housing several shops and second-floor offices on the northeast corner of Nine-Mile and Woodward.

Madison Heights, Royal Oak and Southfield sent trucks and firefighters to assist Ferndale.

Birmingham firefighters stationed a truck and more firefighters in a Ferndale station as backup.

Those cities plus Pontiac are members of Oakway.

City council members thanked the four cities, then engaged in a little Monday night quarterbacking.

Mayor Albert G. Gertley raised the question of calling on Hazel Park and Oak Park.

"... if that had been the Bermuda apartments filled with people — my con-

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cern is — why you would not take advantage of Hazel Park or Oak Park? They had manpower available."

"Sometimes we let contracts get in the way to blank our vision," said Gertley.

Fire Capt. David LaPrairie told Gertley, "I think I would have reacted differently if it had been a life-threatening situation."

LaPrairie said Southfield was called "as a last resort to relieve men on the line."

Royal Oak, Madison Heights and Southfield provided 26 of the 47 firefighters who fought the 1 a.m. fire.

The suspects car traveling an estimated 60 mph struck a second car at the Nine-Mile/Woodward intersection, splitting it into two parts and sending a flaming gas tank into a fabric store.

LaPrairie later said seven of Ferndale's eight firefighters responded to the fire. Police requested an ambulance which transported Randy Lemons, the driver of the car struck by the fleeing car, to

William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak. Lemons was treated and released for cuts and bruises. A firefighter was also injured.

LaPrairie said six Ferndale firefighters were left to start fighting the fire.

"The heat from the fire itself had already melted the plastic across Nine-Mile on the Ferndale Pharmacy, and appears to have broken glass as we were spanning our hoses preparing to fight it."

"It was a tremendous effort by our guys," said LaPrairie. "We took a tremendous beating the first five minutes we were there."

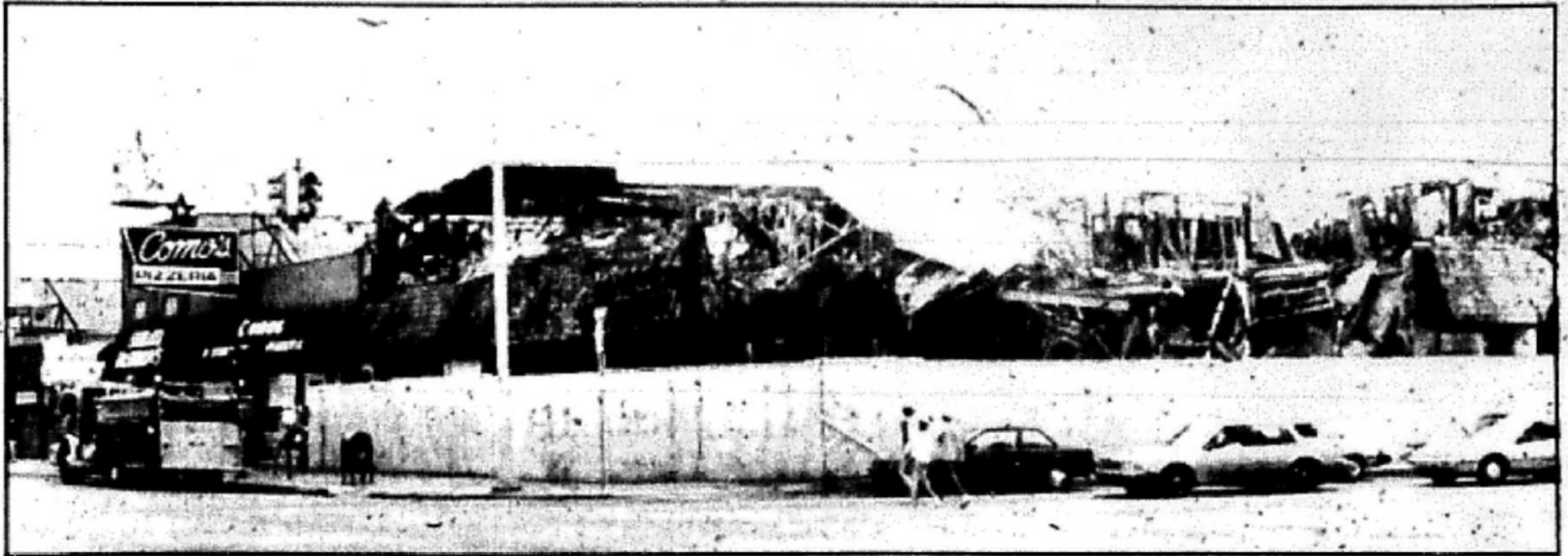
The fire destroyed several longtime city businesses, and offices of City Attorney Robert J. Turner, Jr.

In Hazel Park today, Fire Marshal Wayne McPherson said he had conferred with Chief Donald J. McVeigh regarding assistance to Ferndale.

"He said we definitely would have responded if Ferndale had initiated a call regardless if the fire had involved lives or not.

Hazel Park was dropped from Oakway in 1986 for failure to maintain adequate staff levels.

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*Dick Hunt Daily Tribune*

**City work crews have placed a protective barrier around the scene of Saturday's early morning fire in Ferndale.**