Bakersfield mill, proximate businesses leveled in blaze

by Cathy Ramey

(top photo) Ruins of an abortion clinic smolder as the Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Bureau of the US government investigates this Bakersfield, California fire.

Bakersfield, CA — An early morning fire utterly destroyed the offices of a California abortion facility on September 20 and resulted in an estimated $1.4 million dollar loss to the abortiuary and other business owners.

The Family Planning Associates mill and several other offices were apparently set ablaze before dawn by an unknown person who had access to the mill's interior. Fire officials were alerted only after police responded to a burglar alarm in the complex where flames were shooting through the roof of the building. Nearby trees and electrical wires may have served to intensify the fire once outside the abortuary walls causing it to spread rapidly into two other buildings which shared the same property.

Firefighters extinguished the blaze in little over two hours in what became a four-alarm call; however sifting through the rubble and determining the cause involved a week long investigation.

Initial reports indicated investigators suspected the fire was intentional, however investigators also speculated that faulty wiring in a flourescent light fixture might have started the inferno.

Law enforcement officials from the FBI and the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) arrived on scene within the first 24 hours, bringing with them chemists and explosive experts. Bakersfield Fire Marshall Larry Toler explained that federal agents had contacted his office to offer assistance in searching for a cause. "Because of the volume of the fire and need for a quick investigation it made sense for them to come in." Initial estimates are that the federal investigation will cost approximately $60,000, said Ed Gleba, who is an information officer with the ATF.

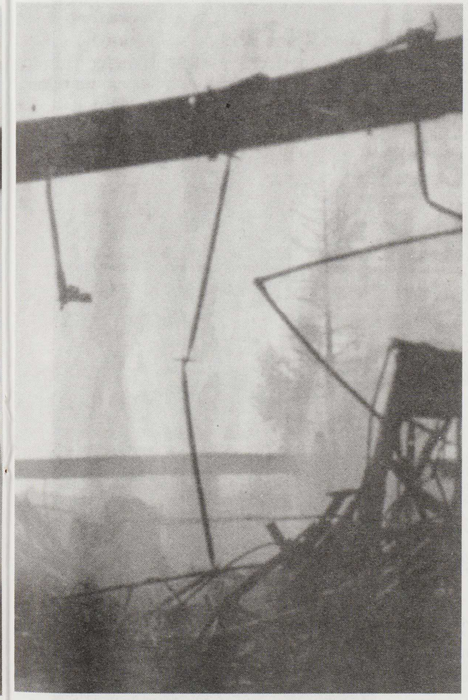
Following the fire, the burned-out rubble known as the Stockdale Highway complex was fenced off with only investigators allowed through the gate. Research into the fire started at the periphery in the least burned region and moved inward to get to the source of the fire. Within 72 hours officials, with the assistance of a Labrador retriever, concluded that whoever set fire to the mill had used a petroleum-based liquid. Petroleum is said to burn hotter than some flammable liquids.

Arson expert Cliff Mitchell recreated what he believes were the movements of the person who may have set fire to the complex. The flammable liquid "was poured walking down the sides of the [east] wall and maybe poured inside through mail slots."

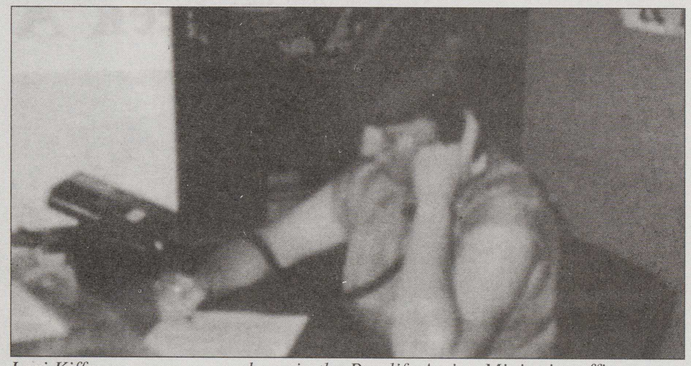
The dog used to sniff out chemicals on-scene located what investigators claim are 20 spots where the liquid was splashed around the building. Investigators also believe that the Bakersfield arsonist is an amatuer. A professional would have been "better at covering their tracks." Fire investigators are not saying if there are other clues to the persons identity.

Although contained within a one-story building, commuters reported being able to see flames from a mile away. FPA is reported to be the only facility involved in killing children within a two hour drive that was taxpayer supported through Medicaid. Bakersfield is located 100 miles north of Los Angeles and has a population of nearly 200,000. ■

A Bakersfield firefighter puts out hot spots after an early morning blaze at an abortion clinic



Pro-lifer sentenced to six months for offering help to pregnant women



Lori Kiffmeyer answers a phone in the Pro-life Action Ministries office.

St. Paul, MN—Lori Driver Kiffmeyer was sentenced May 21 to six months for attempting to give some information on pro-life alternatives to a woman who was scheduled to abort her baby at the Robbinsdale abortion center.

Hennepin County District Judge William Howard claimed that trying to contact the woman by phone twice unsuccessfully and then dropping off a packet of pro-life literature on her doorstep the evening before the abortion constituted harassment. He found Lori in contempt of court for violating his injunction. But his injunction seems to define harassment as subjecting someone to shouting, cursing, and obscenities, none of which Lori did.

"Lori has already served one month of the sentence on house arrest. To avoid having to serve the remaining time, she would have to pay a $300 fine, $300 to the abortion center's attorney, and stay a mile away from the abortion center for a year. The case is currently on appeal."

Lori has been involved in the pro-life movement for several years. She did sidewalk counseling and other volunteer work before becoming the crisis counselor at Pro-Life Action Ministries. She is no stranger to jail, having spent seven months in the North Dakota State Penitentiary with several other pro-lifers for participating in peaceful rescue missions to save children from death at the Fargo abortion center.

Currently, in addition to sidewalk counseling several times a week, Lori saves lives by counseling women in our office and over the phone. ■