

CITY

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BREAKING LOCAL NEWS AT OTTAWACITIZEN.COM

THE OTTAWA CITIZEN, SECTION F

Ottawa man charged in Bank Street fire

Suspect, 31, arrested over Sept. 15 blaze

BY JESSE MCLEAN

A 31-year-old Ottawa man has been charged with arson in a Sept. 15 fire that tore through a commercial building on Bank Street, causing an

estimated \$4 million in damage.

Ottawa police arrested Robert Patrick Gill just blocks away from 275 Bank St. at around 3:30 p.m. Wednesday — the same day a second fire

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OTTAWACITIZEN.COM /features/blotter

broke out in the downtown building.

Arson was also the cause of that fire, but police said Mr. Gill

is charged only in the Sept. 15 blaze.

Mr. Gill is known to police, said Sgt. Leo Janveau.

The first fire started just before 2 a.m. and quickly took over the building's second and fourth floors. Police say several break-ins had taken place within the building.

The building housed about 300 employees of several different businesses, including an administrative office for the

U.S. Defense Contract Management Agency, the High Commission of Bangladesh and the Canadian Co-operative Association.

At this point, there is no evidence suggesting the building was targeted because of its tenants, police said.

The investigation is ongoing, said Sgt. Janveau. He would not say whether there are other suspects.

"We've got a long way to go

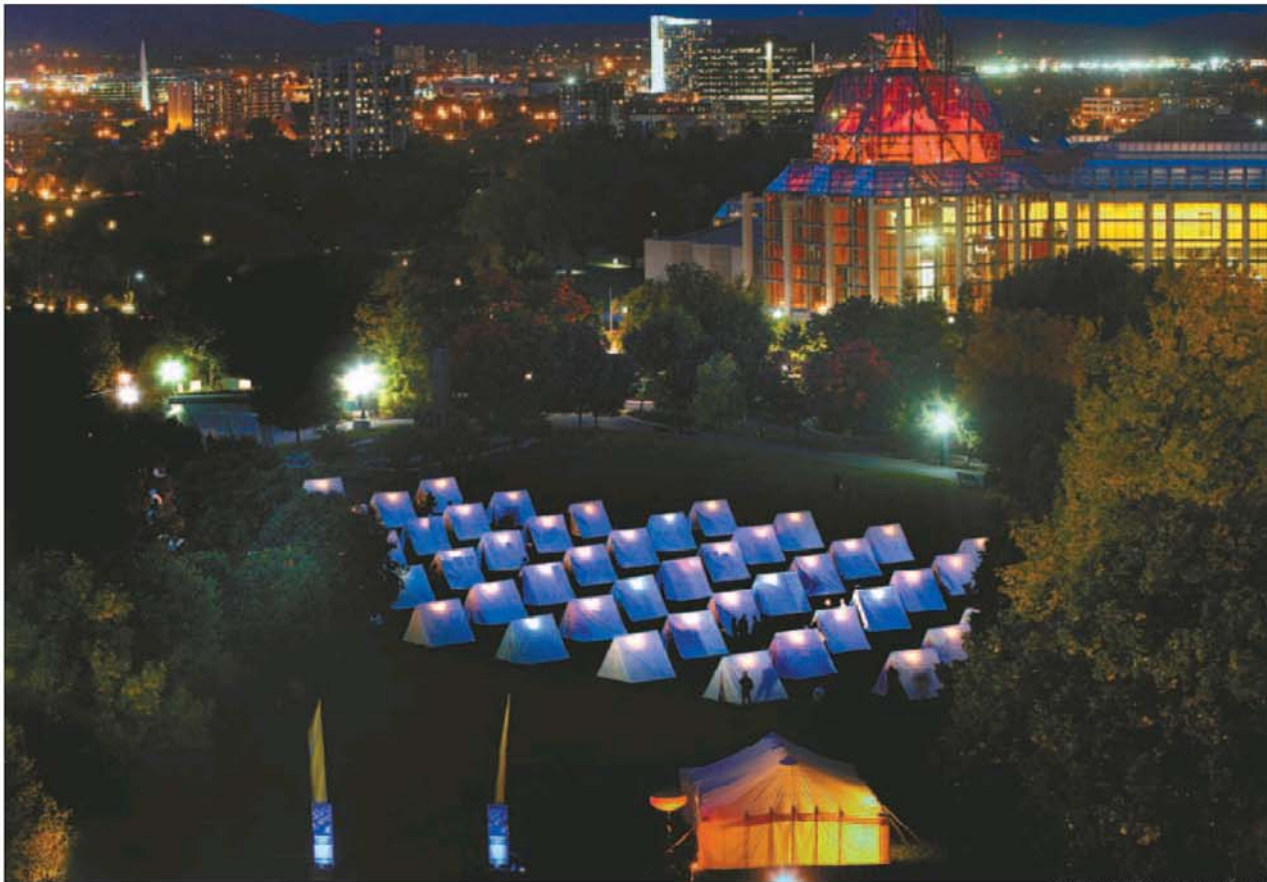
in this investigation, and we're not eliminating anything," he said.

This week's fire damaged part of the fourth floor of the building at Bank and Somerset streets.

Officials from the Ontario Fire Marshal's office yesterday deemed that fire was a result of arson.

"Part of the investigation is to now see if they were connected," Sgt. Janveau said.

TENT CITY



BRUNO SCHLUMBERGER, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

The Encampment, an outdoor public participatory art installation from creative director Thom Sokoloski, lights up the sky last night at Major's Hill Park. The exhibit, which features 70 19th-century expeditionary white tents with their interiors illuminated from 7 p.m. until midnight, runs until Saturday and admission is free.

Dewar, Mills tried to end Crichton school fight

Dance school, community centre in ownership dispute

BY PATRICK DARE

Russell Mills and the late Marion Dewar tried to bring peace to the unravelling relationship between the Ottawa School of Dance and the Crichton Cultural Community Centre, but their efforts could not prevent a legal dispute that has stretched to seven years.

A civil trial involving the School of Dance, the Crichton Cultural Community Centre and the City of Ottawa heard yesterday that Mr. Mills — now chairman of the National Capital Commission and an Algonquin College dean, but then chairman of the board at the School of Dance and publisher of the *Citizen* — joined with Ms. Dewar, a nationally prominent social democrat and former mayor of Ottawa, to try to smooth the waters with the Crichton centre.

Both organizations wanted to preserve and use the historic Crichton Street Public School. In the end, the School of Dance ended up buying the building at 200 Crichton St. in New Edinburgh for \$500,000 in 2000, but \$250,000 of the money came from the City of Ottawa — money that was to ensure that the Crichton Cultural Community Centre, known as the Four Cs, would have access to the building and be able to rent out space to artists.

The trial is over what ownership stake the Four Cs has in the building. The School of Dance argues that the community centre is only a tenant, and says now that the relationship has broken down completely, the building should be sold and \$250,000 returned to the city.

Mr. Mills testified yesterday that he originally thought the deal would be a model for handling other old schools in Canadian cities: It would save a heritage building and create space for the arts. He thought it was such a good idea that he contributed a \$45,000 grant from a community-relations fund at the *Citizen* as a down payment.

"It was my expectation that this agreement would last for a very long time," said Mr. Mills, who is also chairman of the board of Opera Lyra. "It was to be a harmonious partnership. I was wrong in that."

CONCERN COST THIS CITIZEN



KELLY EGAN

It was December 1999, Richard Bendall remembers. He was safely home.

Up the driveway came a court official serving notice of a lawsuit claiming damages of \$4.2 million. Merry Christmas.

Mr. Bendall, now 68, was about to embark on a seven-year legal odyssey that has left him \$40,000 poorer, disillusioned at the City of Ottawa, his sense of the responsible citizen in tatters.

"It just turned our lives upside down," said Mr. Bendall.

It is a long, complicated story, and it began with the best of intentions: Mr. Bendall — a former real estate agent, a grandfather, a one-time church elder, a seasoned volunteer — only



CHRIS MIKULA, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN

Richard Bendall was the target of a lawsuit after he was part of a public committee looking into Munster Hamlet's sewage system.

wanted to help.

He lives on the outskirts of Munster Hamlet on a rural property bordered by fields of corn and soybean.

In the mid-1990s, Munster was trying to replace its communal sewage system, which was inadequate. Several options were on the table, with

pricetags in the millions — a major decision in the life of 450 households.

In 1998, a public liaison committee was struck and Mr. Bendall, an area resident for 20-plus years, was named to it with about 10 others.

See EGAN on PAGE F2

Committee OKs plan for board to oversee public health

Councillors, private citizens would direct unit

BY JAKE RUPERT

City council's community services committee has unanimously endorsed a plan to carve the public health department out of the city bureaucracy and have it governed by an independent board.

City council currently acts as Ottawa's board of health with final control over spending and services in the public health unit, which runs everything from healthy-baby programs to flu-shot clinics to the system that keeps tabs on communicable diseases such as West Nile Virus.

But the system has produced spats between public health doctors and politicians on touchy matters such as drug harm-reduction policies like the programs that distribute clean crack pipes and needles

to drug addicts. The city's government has also long hoped the provincial government will take the whole department over to save it some money.

The new idea, along the lines of the semi-independent board that oversees the police force, is to set up a board of health in the city with councillors and private citizens directing matters. The committee recommended a mix of six councillors and five citizens with public health experience. The private citizens would be appointed by city council at first, and then the board itself would take over the choices when it had vacancies.

The city used to take this approach to public health and many other cities, including Toronto, use the model.

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See FIGHT on PAGE F5

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