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One man's neighbor is another man's bank

DALLAS — Ninety-year-old Ramon Rodriguez thought a stubborn "No!" and a stern look might discourage construction of a bank where his modest little house stands.

So much for the little man standing in the way of progress.

The bank decided to go ahead with the project anyway, without the old man's land, and simply wrap the building, horseshoe-style, around the house Rodriguez shares with his scruffy dog, Baby.

When Overton Bank and Trust Dallas opens in mid-August, an automated teller machine will dispense cash 15 feet from where Rodriguez sleeps. (He does not have an account at Overton and doesn't plan to get one, either.) Drive-through customers will idle in front of his kitchen window. If he wants to know the time or temperature, he can poke his head out and check the 20-foot sign.

"I've lived here for 50 years, so why do they think I'd move now?" Rodriguez said as he rested in a rickety rocking chair on his front porch, less than 50 yards from the busy Dallas Tollway. "I don't care what they're building — I'm not going anywhere."

Suburban sprawl and expanding business districts are forcing more people, often elderly, to choose between staying in the family homestead and getting out of progress' way. In Atlantic City, N.J., an elderly widow is fighting to keep her home from Donald Trump, who wants to build a casino on her land.

In Rodriguez's case, more than memories stand in the way of his decision to leave the home where he and his late wife raised four children.

"They just haven't offered me enough money," said the former chauffeur. He said the bank's best offer was \$68,000 — "a joke."

"I know the house may not be worth much, but I know that the land, being right off this big road, must be worth a lot," he said.

The home, on one-tenth of an acre, was appraised at \$86,350 in 1996.

Jim Johnston, president and division manager of Overton, said the bank offered more than \$68,000, but he would not say

STRANGER THAN FICTION

how much more.

He said the bank even offered to let Rodriguez live there for the rest of his life and pay his taxes, too, if he agreed to sell the land and let the bank have it upon his death.

"We knew before the blueprints were done that he might not move. We're not losing any money because of this and we hope to be good neighbors," Johnston said. "He'll be at the top of our guest list for the ribbon-cutting ceremony."

Do you think they'll cremate the pilot?

SAN ANDREAS, Calif. — The body of a pilot who vanished 2 1/2 weeks ago, leaving behind 5,000 boxes of cremated remains that he was supposed to have scattered at sea, was found in the Sierra foothills with a suicide note that read: "I'm sorry."

A gun was found next to the body, and police believe Vieira used it to shoot himself in the temple.

Authorities used dental records Wednesday to confirm that the body found about 150 miles east of San Francisco on Tuesday was Vieira's. An autopsy also was conducted Wednesday, but the coroner wasn't sure when results would be made public.

Vieira, 52, was last seen June 5, the day authorities investigating an overcrowded storage locker in a San Francisco Bay area suburb found it crammed with thousands of boxes of human ashes.

More searches of storage space rented by Vieira eventually yielded about 5,000 boxes of cremated remains.

Vieira had contracted with mortuaries beginning in the 1980s to scatter the remains at \$50 to \$100 a box. After he disappeared, it was learned that since 1985, he had not even been qualified to fly solo.

Max Poehnelt, who believes Vieira failed to scatter ashes of his wife and son west of the Golden Gate, said he had wanted to ask Vieira why.

"Can't ask him that now," Poehnelt said.

"It's kind of a shock to all of us," said Arnold Laub, a lawyer who has filed a class-action suit on behalf of the loved ones who had arranged the scatterings at sea. "That a man that was so insensitive to fail to distribute these ashes would feel that it's of such significance when it was discovered to take his own life — there must have been two sides to this man."

Vieira's body was found 200 yards from his girlfriend's station wagon. It was face-down on a pine-covered ridge in Calaveras County. He appeared to have died about two weeks ago, coroner's deputy Kevin Raggio said.

A suicide note signed by Vieira found in the car read in part, "I'm sorry for the pain I've caused."

Eleven boxes of cremated remains also were found in the station wagon.

Vieira's girlfriend, Denise Hembree, surrendered to police earlier this month. Hembree, who signed many of the certificates claiming ashes had been scattered properly, was released pending further investigation.

No charges filed in lunch line mishap

ARLINGTON, Va. — Prosecutors have dropped sex charges against a 9-year-old boy who allegedly rubbed himself against a girl in the lunch line.

"We said, 'Whoa'" Assistant Commonwealth's Attorney Evie Lair said Wednesday. "We never had any intention of prosecuting this case."

Police and school officials had said the boy deliberately rubbed his crotch against the buttocks of a 9-year-old girl on March 11 at Glebe Elementary School. The boy's family said he accidentally brushed against her.

"I dare say I've done worse in an elevator when I wasn't looking where I put my feet," said the boy's lawyer, Kenneth H. Rosenau.

The boy, whose identity was withheld because of his age, was charged with aggravated sexual battery and could have been held in a youth home until age 21.

The case had been scheduled for trial July 8, but prosecutors dropped the charges Tuesday.

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