

Texas criminals pay back \$52 million in '83 restitution

United Press International
EL PASO — Criminals repaid more than \$52 million last year in Texas as a result of new laws giving them an opportunity to pay back stolen goods, services and money, probation officials said Tuesday.

Typical of the cases is an El Paso man caught fudging on his tax at a public housing project, reporting his income as less than he was actually making.

Aguiar, director of the Housing Authority Project Management's office, said the

man has moved his family out of the city project "and is making restitution for the months in which he lived in the apartment and lied to us about his income."

Convicted criminals serving probation sentences in Texas paid more than \$52 million in restitution, court costs, fines and fees, the Texas Adult Probation Commission reported. That amount is an increase of more than \$11 million over the previous year.

"Sheer volume and growth in the number of probationers ac-

count for the increase in collections," said Dick Lewis, information officer for the commission.

Not all of the restitution is in currency to a crime victim. Much of it is in the form of community service.

"In El Paso the probationers are doing everything from cleaning up Concordia Cemetery to working in the Community Action offices to painting public buildings and cleaning up parks," said Dr. Frank Lozito, chief of the El Paso Adult Probation Department.

"A group of men with carpentry skills recently remodeled a district courtroom at great savings to the county," Lozito said. From December 1982 to February 1984, El Paso adult probationers have worked a total of 220,907 hours, he said. Using the minimum wage as a salary scale, they have repaid \$740,000 in services to the community.

Judges can order offenders to serve time in restitution centers instead of prison, thereby allowing the offender to remain in the community.

Rates may rise anyway

United Press International
AUSTIN — Unhappy with a recommendation from the Public Utility Commission staff, Southwestern Bell Telephone may implement a bonded rate increase on April 22, a utility official said Tuesday.

The full three-member PUC is scheduled to vote April 30 on the staff recommendation that Bell receive \$854.8 million of the \$1.3 billion it is seeking.

Bell spokesman Dale Johnson said the company expects to decide by mid-April whether it will place the higher rates in effect under bond.

If bonded, the money from the increase would be held in an account pending approval of the rate increase. If the full increase isn't granted, refunds would be made from the account.

"I would hope that Bell would not frivolously throw away money by trying to bond rates that in some likelihood may be reduced by the commission itself," he said.

Johnson said Bell's preference would be not to bond.

Union leader lauds hospital decision

United Press International
AUSTIN — Calling Texas' mental hospitals a "combat zone," a state employees union leader Tuesday praised a federal court judge's order that found state hospitals dangerously short of staff.

This ruling confirms what members have been saying for years — state hospitals are grossly understaffed, creating an unsafe environment for workers and clients," Eliseo Medina, organizing coordinator of the Texas State Employees Union, said.

quate treatment programs by the Department of Mental Health-Mental Retardation.

Medina said the TSEU would ask the court to order an audit of the mental health agency's books to determine spending priorities and the agency to comply immediately with court-ordered staffing levels.

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U.S. District Judge Barefoot Sanders of Dallas ruled Monday the state is in violation of a 1981 court order that directed sweeping reforms in its mental health system.

Sanders said the state must hire another 1,200 workers for its violence-prone mental hospitals or face the prospect of a release of more than 1,000 mental patients.

The judge cited growing violence among patients, a severe shortage of staff, and inadequate treatment programs by the Department of Mental Health-Mental Retardation.

"MHMR employees are told that there is no money to hire additional direct care staff, yet MHMR seems to have enough funds available to add more and more levels of bureaucracy at the central office," he said.

With a \$1 billion budget for two years, Medina said, the agency should be able to provide adequate staff.

Meanwhile, mental health officials received a blow Tuesday when the chairman of the House Appropriations committee informed state agencies to prepare "no growth" budgets next year.

Murder-for-hire witness killed in San Antonio

United Press International
SAN ANTONIO — A prosecution witness whose cooperation led to murder-for-hire charges against a local woman was found shot to death Wednesday after failing to attend a meeting with investigators.

The body of Robert Gonzalez, 60, was found in his home about 1:15 p.m. He had been shot five to seven times in the head, said police Sgt. Ralph Lopez. Lopez said Gonzalez was scheduled to meet with police Wednesday. When Gonzalez failed to show up, police began call his relatives and eventually found his body in his home.

Assistant district attorney Karen Amos said Gonzalez was an important witness against Kathleen Burke Freudenmann, who was charged last month with capital murder.

Amos said Gonzalez was a family friend, whom Freudenmann allegedly asked for help having her husband killed. Gonzalez went to the police, and they set up an undercover officer.

Amos declined comment when asked if Gonzalez' death meant the murder-for-hire charges against Freudenmann would be dropped.

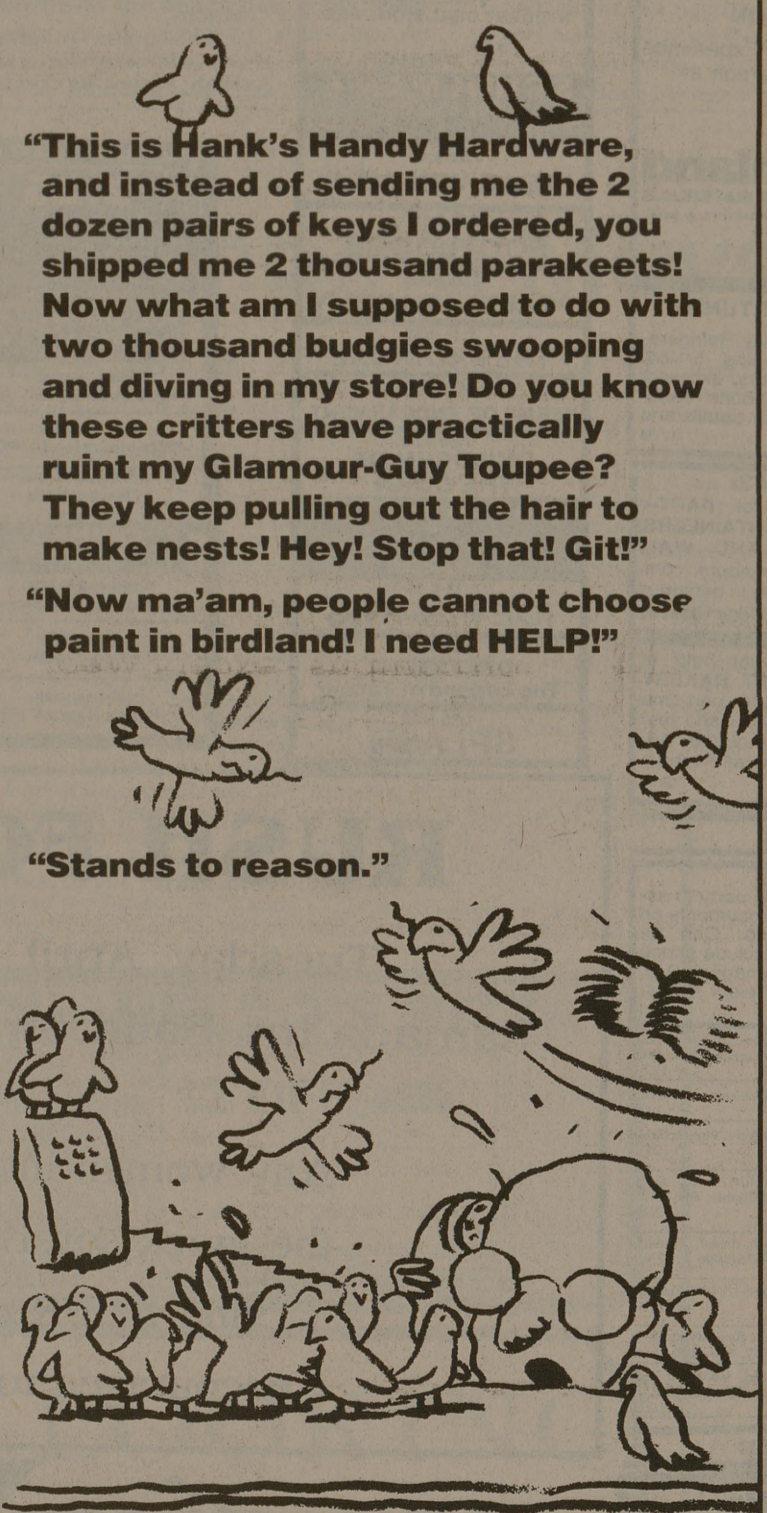
Amos said that the undercover officer made tape recordings in which Freudenmann, 50, offered \$12,000 for the death of her husband, Bernard Freudenmann, and suggested the "hit" take place on Sept. 15, 1983.

The tapes disclosed discussions of various ways to dispose of Freudenmann's body, including planting drugs on him and making the killing look like "a drug deal gone sour," Amos said.

Freudenmann, who surrendered to authorities March 14, is free on \$100,000 bond.

The Freudenmanns, who are undergoing divorce proceedings, pleaded guilty last year to federal charges of wire fraud and failure to file income tax documents in a restaurant franchise scheme.

They received probation terms, were ordered to pay \$21,000 in fines and make \$222,000 in restitution to people who invested in the nonexistent franchises.



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