

Lost gifts returned to owner

ANDERSON, S.C. (AP) — Beverly Toddes says a man who found a box full of her Christmas presents and returned them has restored her faith in people.

The gifts, which included a bird house, sweaters and candy cane reindeer worth nearly \$200, apparently fell from the back of a truck driven by one of Toddes' friends, who was transporting them to her family in Patton, Pa.

"We thought it was fantastic that someone turned it in," Toddes said in a telephone interview. "Both my husband and I said we just can't imagine this nowadays."

She said she was surprised someone would make an effort to find the owner of the gifts.

That someone was Ray Spearman, who took the box home and called the Anderson County Sheriff's Office. Deputies used a credit card receipt in the box to trace it to Toddes, a medical assistant in San Antonio.

Witnesses: Man wasn't drunk on day that bus crash killed 27

CARROLLTON, Ky. (AP) — A man charged with murdering 27 people in a bus crash hadn't been drinking heavily the day of the accident, relatives and a friend testified Monday as the defense opened its case.

Also testifying was Kentucky Fire Marshal John William Martin, who said a smoky fire that engulfed the church bus still would have occurred if the vehicle had been equipped with a protective cage around its gas tank.

The defense maintains that Larry Mahoney was not drunk when his pickup slammed into the bus on May 14, 1988, and that the 27 victims were killed because the bus was unsafe.

Mahoney admits drinking the day of the crash, driving on the wrong side of Interstate 71 and striking the loaded church bus. He is charged with 27 counts of murder, 42 counts of wanton endangerment, 12 counts of assault and a count of drunken driving.

Defense attorney William Summers asked Martin if a protective cage around the gas tank might have prevented the fire that followed the crash. Police say the gas tank was punctured by a piece of the bus' front suspension after the collision.

"It's my opinion it would not have prevented the puncture in this case," Martin said.

The fire marshal also testified that plastic seat covers and cushions in the bus were combustible, but later added that the smoke that filled the bus might have come from the burning gasoline alone.

The former school bus, built in 1977 before more stringent federal safety standards went into effect, had been sold as surplus to the First Assembly of God church.

Following the crash, Martin issued a report recommending that new school buses be designed with diesel engines, additional emergency escape doors and windows, and with gas tanks in the center, rather than on the side.

The defendant's mother, son and best friend followed Martin to the witness stand, all testifying that Mahoney was not drunk when they saw him the day of the accident, which occurred just before 11 p.m.

Anthony Mahoney, 17, testified that he didn't see his father drink, nor did he seem intoxicated when he left their trailer at about 1 p.m.

Mary Mahoney said her son wasn't drunk, and didn't consume any alcohol, when he visited her at about 4:30 p.m.

Mahoney's best friend, Dennis Mefford, testified that he thought Mahoney had been drinking but was not intoxicated when he visited Mefford's house at about 6:30 p.m.

Mefford described Mahoney as a moderate drinker who finds that hard liquor bothers his stomach. He said Mahoney drank one can of beer while eating pizza, and then left with another can.

The defense is expected to complete its phase of the trial by Friday. It remained uncertain whether Mahoney would testify.

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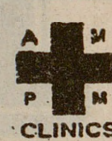
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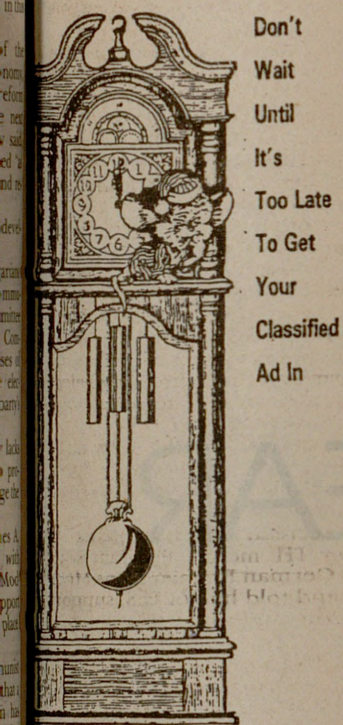
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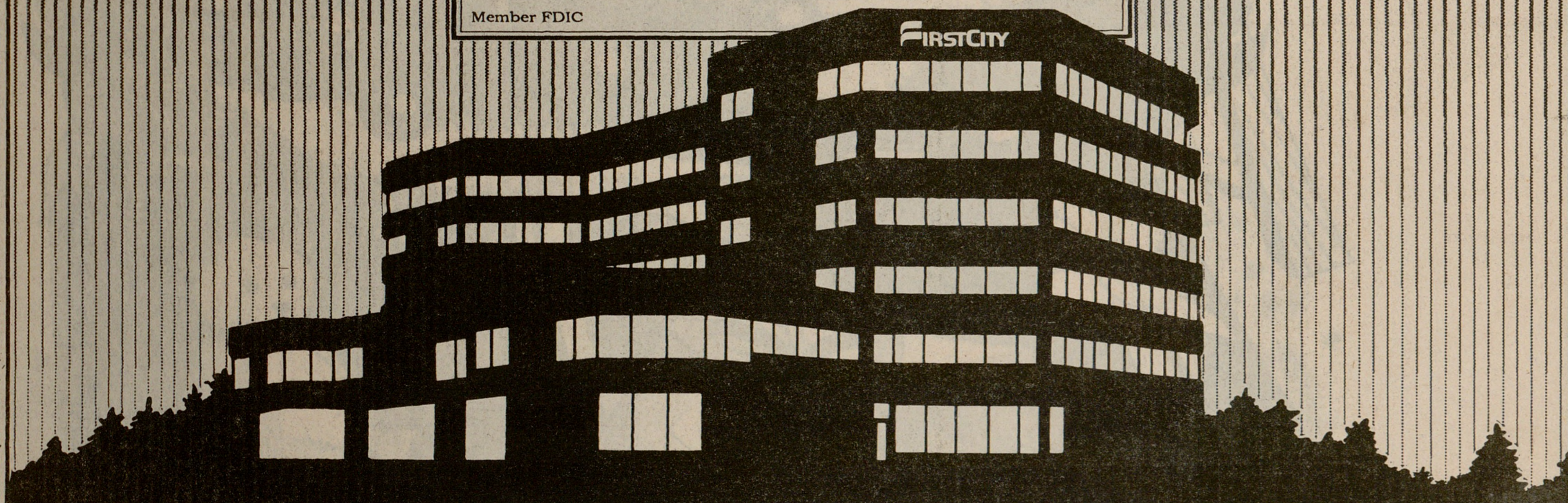
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