

WZZM's award-winning investigators Mark Lagerkvist and Jim Riekse have broken a string of sensational stories over the past year and a half that set a fast pace for local reporters and pull in big rating points for TV 13 to boot.

By John Brosky



KINGS OF MUCKRAKING

“HELLO. FOR WHAT city please?”

“Newaygo.”

“Yes.”

“Could I have the number of a Calvin Deitz? D-I-E-T-Z.”

“One moment please.”

“Thank you.”

“Are you talking about that man Cal Dietz?”

"Yes I am."
"He was in real estate or something, right?"
"That's right."
"I think he spells his name another way. I remember him, he was on the news."
"Yes he was."
"He spells it D-E-I-T-Z. His telephone number is . . ."

"Hello, Brock and Jensen Real Estate. Can I help you?"
"Yes. I'm looking for Cal Deitz. Is he there?"
"He's no longer with the firm. He sold out his interest to Brock and Jensen. Is there something I can help you with?"

As it turned out, the woman at Brock & Jensen Real Estate in Newaygo was kind enough to give Deitz's home phone number. She said that he probably wouldn't be there, though. He wasn't.

In an interview the day before, Mark Lagerkvist, a reporter with WZZM, said that Deitz had recently bought the controlling interest in Boyd Acres, a treatment center for alcoholics in northern Ottawa County. A year earlier, Lagerkvist broke the sensational 10-part series, "The King of Newaygo" that brought about Deitz's downfall.

"Boyd Acres."
"Is Mr. Cal Deitz there please?"
"Who should I say is calling?"
"John Brosky. B-R-O-S-K-Y."
"One moment please."

Exactly one moment later, Cal Deitz came on the line. His voice surprised me. Though I had watched almost an hour of video tapes about Deitz just two days before, I realized now that I had never heard his voice.

I checked it. About four seconds of his voice was heard on the "King of Newaygo" series.

Jim Riekse, WZZM public affairs director: "Mr. Deitz, can I ask you a few questions?"

Deitz: "No you can't."

Riekse: "Why is that sir?"

Deitz: "Because."

Riekse: "Because why? We'd like to ask you, do you buy off public officials?"

Deitz, speaking to his brother Larry Deitz who, in a rage, was beating up Lagerkvist and a WZZM cameraman, Rick Kamel, in the parking lot of the restaurant: "Larry, let's have lunch."

His brother's yelling at the stunned and bleeding Lagerkvist is inaudible. But Deitz called to his brother two more times, and after saying "Isn't that a shame" to Lagerkvist, went into the restaurant. True to his word, he was never interviewed by WZZM.

Now, here on the phone Deitz was talking. For more than half an hour Deitz explained why he had quit the real estate business after the series was broadcast; he detailed the "lies, innuendo and insinuation" in the stories; and slandered Lagerkvist, Riekse, WZZM and a state trooper.

"They destroyed me."

"How?"

"Well, I had the largest real estate brokerage firm in the county. And through lies, innuendo

and insinuation they made it appear I was a bandit. I was forced to get out of business.

" . . . I've spent in excess of \$40,000 as a result of these sick-in-the-head reporters. . . . Lt. [Donald] Pederson, they've blackened his name to where I question where he will ever be effective.

" . . . Anyone who watched that series knows that they didn't prove anything. . . . Those sons of bitches are supposed to report news, not make it. . . . Both those sick sons of bitches should be shot. And you can quote me on that. I'd like to see it. . . . They've got some serious problems that they don't know about. I'll take care of my problems. . . . I don't care if it costs me \$100,000 or \$200,000. I'll sue them till their socks fall off."

The "King of Newaygo" series, which aired Nov. 3 through 14, 1980, was phenomenally successful, winning several hundred thousand viewers, state and regional prizes and one national award.

"King of Newaygo" charged that Deitz, through gifts and special favors, had bought influence and control over a former prosecutor, a judge and the Michigan State Police Post Commander, Lt. Pederson.

Riekse and Lagerkvist, formally acting as a team, followed up in February with another series of stories on Deitz and his business partners entitled "Charity For Profit" a five-part report focusing on the conflicts of interest between the Muskegon Council on Alcoholism and Boyd Acres.

In July, Riekse and Lagerkvist again collaborated on a double-header, "A Place To Die," a five-part study of alleged abuse and fatal neglect at the English Hills Nursing Home, and "A Place To Profit" a five-part accounting of the Medicaid excesses and alleged fraud of the Como Corporation of Wisconsin, owners of English Hills.

This past November, Riekse and Lagerkvist broke "The Great Medicaid Ripoff," a compelling and condemning five-part series detailing over \$4 million in alleged Medicaid fraud by the Como Corporation.

That series was broadcast just a week before the state completed its own investigation of Como, which resulted in the arrests of Como executives on 102 felony counts of fraud. Wisconsin brought 42 similar counts against Como the same day. While those arrests were not directly attributable to the "Medicaid Ripoff" series, Riekse said he wonders if justice would have been as swift without the public exposure.

A SENSATIONAL AND accurate investigative story is the dream of any editor who ever picked up a pencil. But it is a kind of reporting that demands weeks of slow, careful research. And five stories can end up in the wastebasket for every one that is aired or ever sees ink.

For that reason, in the fast-paced, one-call-does-it-all business of daily news reporting, the investigative story is considered overtime, a "special report" that is expensive, time-consuming and fragile. Perhaps that is why there is no such thing as an investigative story on page four.

Traditionally, an investigative story has come about when a news reporter—usually someone assigned to city hall, medicine, education or

sports—picks up a tip on their "beat" and follows it between daily assignments.

The results of this kind of effort were seen in the *Press'* Grand Center series that showed improper contracting and questionable accounting; its undercover investigation of an alleged prostitution ring, Dial-A-Massage; its reports on conflicts of interest with the Grand Rapids Board of Education; and its stories on preferential treatment by judges of certain citizens.

WOTV, *Newscenter 8* reporters developed stories on organized crime ties to the F&A Cheese Company; "The Cocaine Connection" in western Michigan; "Bungle in the Boondocks," a follow-up report on misspent federal funds for construction of a township hall; and a detailed, though not exclusive, report on the financial shell games of a tractor leasing firm.

However, journalism has its fashion, distinct from its fads, and a recent trend among television stations and some newspapers in larger cities, has been to form "investigative teams" expressly for the purpose of turning up sensational scams and turning out crooks. It is an aggressive posture that exercises the First Amendment rights and the power of the press to the fullest extent.

In January, 1980, WZZM was the first news operation in western Michigan to formally organize an "I-Team." This past November Henry Erb, a veteran reporter for WOTV, was named as that station's full-time investigator.

By intensifying its own efforts and demonstrating the potential for team investigations in the region, WZZM had effectively challenged other area media to similarly abandon the unpredictable tradition of relying on beat reporters for occasional investigations and instead aggressively sniff out and dig up stories regularly.

The WZZM move was obviously prompted by the success of the "King of Newaygo" series, which was credited with bringing their *Eyewitness News* up from an 18 percent share of viewers to 20 and 21 percent during November, 1980. Following the ratings announcement and with another project already underway, Lagerkvist was invited to join the organization and formalize his role, which had been on a temporary and free-lance basis.

Working with—and loosely under—Riekse, Lagerkvist was given free reign to "practice investigative journalism the way I think it was meant to be practiced, which is aggressively and no sacred cows. I've got a good amount of freedom to explore anything that needs to be explored. And I really don't work from a point of previous prejudices. In other words, my job is not to investigate George Lyons' [WZZM general manager] enemies or anybody's pet peeves.

"It's a different kind of arrangement," said Lagerkvist. "It's not typical of television stations at all, the job we are doing here. At least the types of things we look at are unusual for television. And it's unique in Michigan, because we don't just pick off some easy, sexy issue. We really get to the meat of things. We do all the hard public documents research. We research the heck out of things. We're not just taking leaks and getting other official investigations and pawing them off as our own.

We're out there breaking new ground.

"We're after substance. Something that is going to make a difference. You can do all the stories you want about prostitution on South Division, but it's not going to amount to anything. There will still be prostitution there. [Or] you can take an issue like people being neglected, abused at a nursing home, which develops into fraud, and it affects everybody. Now that's important.

"And we've gotten results from things that we have done and [which] have resulted in action. . . . Our exposing of Cal Deitz's empire has certainly crumbled that empire and swayed his influence. [And] we did a thing on Medicaid fraud and all of a sudden we have 142 felony charges." [Readers are reminded that the state attorney general's office based those charges on its own simultaneous and independent investigation].

"I think the whole concept of investigative reporting is very important to our image," said Riekse. "I think we've had that image for a long time now and nobody else has. And then Mark came along and he made that image even better. We've improved upon that image."

Riekse was a major contributor to any image WZZM has for investigative reporting, breaking an impressive string of reports over his 10 years with the station. Among the highlights were stories on a car dealer rolling back odometers; fraudulent practices at an investments firm; insurance adjusters paying kickbacks to insurance contractors; and "tokenism" in minority contracting at the Grand Center.

In 1978 Riekse became the public affairs director at WZZM, a move he calls "an opportunity to get into management. George gave me an opportunity to write my own job description, to do the things I wanted to do . . . I pretty much determined what the responsibilities of the department would be, which was a great opportunity to continue on in investigative reporting."

Riekse graduated South High School, Grand Rapids Junior College and the University of Michigan. He returned to Grand Rapids after college to work on *The Interpreter*, a short-lived attempt at starting a second newspaper in Grand Rapids in the late 1960s. After quitting the foundering *Interpreter*, he "started pumping Jack Hogan [WZZM news director] for a job, telling him he needed me." He began at WZZM in 1971 processing film for the noon show and eventually hustled his way into reporting.

LAGERKVIST LITERALLY "CAME along" for WZZM. One afternoon in late August, 1980, he walked into Riekse's office and threw the completed "King of Newaygo" story into his lap.

After several conferences, WZZM bought



Lagerkvist and Riekse pose with WZZM General Manager George Lyons and a file full of lawsuits.

the story and signed Lagerkvist to a contract to help complete certain portions and to turn the newspaper-style stories into a television script.

Lagerkvist, after five years in the newspaper business, and almost a year of free-lance investigative reporting, had found a home.

"We gave him honest employment," said Riekse. "He finally got a regular paycheck."

After graduating the University of Detroit, Lagerkvist began reporting as an intern for the *Grand Rapids Press* in 1974. When that internship ended, the *Muskegon Chronicle* picked him up as a full-time reporter, assigning him to cover news and general features in Newaygo County where it had recently formed a reporting bureau.

During that time, Lagerkvist said he often heard stories about real estate broker Cal Deitz and learned of Deitz's reputation for being the most powerful man in the county. But since he was unable to find anything to substantiate the rumors, Lagerkvist, like all the reporters who have worked in Newaygo, dismissed the stories.

In May, 1978 he turned over the Newaygo beat to Alan Higbie, another *Chronicle* reporter. A little over a year later, after working out of the Muskegon office on general assignment, Lagerkvist left the *Chronicle* to take a job across Lake Michigan at the *Milwaukee Sentinel* as an investigative reporter.

In Milwaukee, Lagerkvist got wind of another batch of stories, these about a circuit court judge who was supposedly misappropriating court funds, was famous for courtroom antics and was reported to be involved in unseemly behavior. Before he could develop that story, however, Lagerkvist and several editors at the *Sentinel* had a falling out and he was fired in December for insubordination.

By February Lagerkvist found another job and crossed the lake again, this time for a city hall beat with the *Traverse City Record-Eagle*. However the work didn't suit him, according to

city editor Jim Herman. "Mark really wanted to be an investigative reporter and we didn't have the wherewithal to support that exclusively," he said. After four months Lagerkvist quit the paper to strike out on his own as a free-lance reporter.

In a little more than a year of free-lancing, Lagerkvist produced two major stories. The first, published by the Madison, Wis., *Capital Times* was about Milwaukee judge Christ Seraphim and his improprieties. The series won a Wisconsin United Press International award for investigative reporting and the judge was suspended from the bench for three years without pay.

Back in Michigan that same year, Lagerkvist turned his attentions toward Cal Deitz and his dealings in Newaygo County.

"What piqued my interest in it again was that I was sitting at a cocktail hour with a couple of colleagues, who were working for the Muskegon paper, and they suggested it to me. They said, 'You're looking for something now that you're done with the judge in Milwaukee, so why don't you take a look at this?'"

"It was just idle talk at the time, but the idea began to make sense and I checked around with a few old sources. And some information that had not been available was developing. There were certainly a good number of leads.

"One thing, a small weekly paper up in Newaygo, the *Newaygo [County] Sun*, which is now defunct, had written about Deitz's Makowski estate dealings. It was a small thing based on something filed in court. And Deitz decided he was going to get even with the people responsible for this small article in the weekly paper. So he sued the *Newaygo County Sun*. He sued the *Grand Rapids Press*, which picked up a rewrite of it, and he also sued a Newaygo attorney who had helped the *Sun* with some of its research.

"In some of the suits he had there were

depositions and things that had to be filed. And all of a sudden a good amount of material that had not been previously available on Cal Deitz was now available on court records. And that gave direction as to what places to start looking into.

"I started working on it initially, I think, in February, 1980. But on a very part-time basis. In other words, a Freedom of Information request here, a loose piece of information there. It accelerated as it went along, so I really didn't get heavily involved until sometime in the summer.

"... I had known generally of Deitz's reputation and of many alleged things that he supposedly did. But I had never seen any fire beneath all that smoke. But then there were certain things where the fire first popped up.

"I think the initial thing that I saw that made me feel I had a handle on it was getting ahold of documents that showed the state police ordered a state police post commander, Lt. Pederson, to quit working as a real estate salesman for Cal Deitz. That told me there had been an investigation, that the investigation had produced some results.

"I [had] filed a Freedom of Information request for it. I forget what the exact request was. They never have turned over anything pertinent to the investigation itself. But they have turned over things such as whether Pederson had ever requested to have outside employment and anything relating to outside employment. I think that was probably the first Freedom of Information request that I had filed. That was the start.

"There was no single thing that said, 'Yes, there is a story here' or 'No, there isn't a story here,' because it is a many faceted story. . . . I'd say the dealings involving Penoyer Inc., also involved many things.

"... You see, it was the type of investigation where you had to take a shotgun approach, because if you go under the initial allegations, this guy had wide-ranging influence and had his fingers in a lot of bowls. First I looked at anything that I could having to do with his business and personal relationship with public officials. And as we carried that on, we found some that were questionable, with Pederson, with Thomas."

BY LATE SUMMER, Lagerkvist was working on the story full-time and had found a part-time partner, Alan Higbie, still with the *Chronicle* at that time, although, according to a former editor, Higbie was not working on the story for the paper.

Together they felt they had compiled enough information to show that Deitz had improper business and personal dealings with a former county prosecutor, a circuit court judge and state police post commander Pederson. In mid-August Higbie called Deitz to set up an interview with him at the *Chronicle* on the 21st.

Here is Higbie's account of the conversation, taken from a memo he prepared as

"BOTH THOSE SICK SONS
OF BITCHES SHOULD BE
SHOT. AND YOU CAN
QUOTE ME ON THAT."

— Cal Deitz



Grand Rapids Press Photo

part of his notes on the story:

"I told him we wanted to talk to him about his business relationships with Pederson, Terry Thomas, [Douglas] Springstead, former Judge [John] Riley.

"Mr. Deitz asked what I wanted to know. I repeated that Mark and I wanted to know about his business relationships with the above.

"'Why the hell would I meet you in Muskegon?' he asked. I said for the interview. He said, 'What business is my business relationships of yours? Anything I've done is none of your f----- business.'

"Then Mr. Deitz went on in a tirade against Lagerkvist. . . . I couldn't get the whole stream of things he said past that point, but they include:

"If I see him I'm going to tear his f----- head off.'

"'Somebody's gonna get hurt and it's not going to be me.'

"'What I've done up here is nobody's God damn business.'

"'A friend of mine who's a judge told me newspaper people are the scum of the earth. So that includes you.'

"After all these threats, I then asked him if that meant he wouldn't do an interview. 'That's right on the head, pal,' he said.

"'I'd like to see you come up here. I don't care about you. But that Lagerkvist wants to know how much pull I have up here. Well, we're going to see how much pull I have up here. I'm going to tear his f----- head off, and we'll see how much pull I have up here. And that's not a threat, that's a promise.'"

Even without the interview Higbie and Lagerkvist felt they had enough material to go ahead with the story. They presented the series, more than ten pages, to the *Chronicle*.

However, after reading the series and consulting with their attorneys, the *Chronicle* refused the story. According to Jack Bell, then-editor of the paper, "We checked

it with our attorneys and the story was not in proper shape.

"I didn't really know Lagerkvist," said Bell. "He had worked on the *Chronicle* but that was before I was there.

"The principal reason is that it was not staff-written. As far as I know, he did a good job with his documents."

According to then-city editor John Swartley, "The editor thought it was not complete enough and didn't feel it was fair as written.

"I thought it was a good story, for sure," said Swartley.

"I don't know," said Bell, "how much he changed it or developed it [for WZZM]." Saying that he had seen segments of the series when it was broadcast, Bell said it seemed Lagerkvist ". . . added quite a bit to it, though it was basically the same."

Bell has since retired after a long career with the Booth Newspaper chain and Swartley is now a city editor for the *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*.

Once the *Chronicle* refused the story, the rights to the articles reverted to Lagerkvist, including any parts that Higbie had helped to compile.

Lagerkvist headed directly to WZZM and Riekse.

"I knew Jim," said Lagerkvist, explaining why he took the series to WZZM. "It was ironic, because we had run into each other a couple of months before at an investigative reporters' conference in Kansas City. So when the project that became the 'King of Nawaygo' series became my property and things weren't working out with the Muskegon paper, I offered it to WZZM."

"... WHEN MARK CAME into my office," said Riekse, "and asked if we were interested . . . my interest was piqued as soon as I heard the name, because I'd heard about Deitz. In fact, I'd had people who had called me and said, 'You ought to look at Deitz.'

"I read what he had done so far . . . which was very interesting, and took it to George Lyons."

"Quite frankly," said Lagerkvist, "when I walked in, what I dropped into Jim's lap already was a bundle of dynamite. The main thing was to weed out the information. . . ."

"... to put it together as a television story," said Riekse.

"I can't think of a week that I worked less than 80 or 90 hours," said Lagerkvist. "Checking information, double-checking information, writing scripts, trying to write television for the first time."

"Transferring documents to video," said Riekse, "to make sure they're understandable. Using the squeeze zoom and the technological aspects of the business makes it easy to explain. I thought he caught on very quickly."

"I had a lot to learn," said Lagerkvist. ". . . Jim had a lot of advice and a lot of input because I was just doing things for the first time. If I was doing something that wasn't going to work for television, Jim would be there to tell me. There were a lot of pressures."

... It's realizing you have to have a picture for everything you say," said Riekse.

"Once you have that engrained," said Lagerkvist, "then it's not that hard, then it becomes kind of second nature."

"It's just doing your job and running a camera at the same time. Showing what you're doing while you're doing it," said Riekse.

"Right now," said Lagerkvist, "the way we are running them, our investigations are at least as complex and exhaustive and time-consuming and painstaking as anything any newspaper in the state is doing. We're doing better work than any newspaper in the state in my opinion and we're doing all this complex stuff. The only thing is that we've got to be able to narrow it down to something very concise, very compact, and still [be] logical and easy to follow. . . .

"[Newspapers] are more detailed in some ways. In any case I've run across so far in preparing these kinds of projects for broadcasting, there's been material that we just haven't had room for or time for. And there is some stuff we've had to drop, other things that typically in newspapers you add more and more space [for].

"The only problem with newspaper investigations these days is many of them are so boring and so poorly presented that readers don't even get that far to begin with.

"If Jim and I are doing our jobs right, the beauty is, we can take on a complex subject, but when we are done with it, everyone who has been paying attention will know damn well what's going on."

"That's like George Lyons coming in and saying 'I liked part one, because it was easy to understand.' Which he did to us," added Riekse.

"And then he said, 'I hope you don't use too many facts and figures through the rest of the thing,'" said Lagerkvist. "So the whole next piece was numbers [in the 'Great Medicaid Ripoff']."

"But when you hear the numbers," said Riekse, "you also see the numbers. And they are added up so you can understand it."

THE "KING OF Newaygo," now produced as a ten-part television series, was scheduled for broadcast Oct. 27, 1980 and would run for ten consecutive weekday nights. That would place the series half into the critical November rating period, called "the sweeps."

WZZM still needed an interview with Deitz, however. According to Riekse, they had no television footage of him at all. They called Deitz's office, only to learn that Deitz was in South America and wouldn't return to Newaygo until the 27th.

Moving the broadcast date back a week, the WZZM crew decided to film Deitz coming out of his real estate office. On the 27th they stationed two vehicles near the office. According to Lagerkvist, one was parked on the street in front of Deitz's office while another was in a

"MARK IS 'MR. DOCUMENTS'...IF THE DOCUMENT EXISTS, MARK'S GOING TO FIND IT."

— Jim Riekse



public parking lot behind the office. The strategy was meant to cover both of the office's exits. Out front were Riekse and cameraman Rick Kamel, while Lagerkvist and cameraman Mike Mishler waited out back.

The setup was for an "unscheduled interview," a technique often used by television crews to confront an unwilling or hostile subject. In other circles they are less kindly called "ambush interviews."

"We wanted to at least get a shot," said Lagerkvist. "At least get some video of him, even if he wouldn't answer any questions. . . .

"He went out to lunch and we followed him to the restaurant."

Once in the parking lot of the restaurant, the Highway Inn in Newaygo, Riekse dropped off cameraman Kamel and said he pulled around back to park the car. Meanwhile, Lagerkvist said he and Mishler parked and were waiting for Deitz, who was accompanied by his brother Larry Deitz.

The scene that took place next is history in western Michigan: Larry Deitz knocks Kamel to the ground and kicks and hits him repeatedly; Cal Deitz walks on smiling; Larry Deitz then comes after Lagerkvist, and before he can form the second word of his question to Cal Deitz, Larry punches him in the mouth, splitting his lip; Cal Deitz walks on.

The footage of the incident, through Mishler's camera, was so spectacular that WZZM used it as part of its promotion for the series that week and during the weeks of broadcast. It was also the lead-in for the story and was repeated at the end of the series as part of the wrap-up. "CAL DEITZ HAD the misfortune of being his own worst enemy in the series," said Lagerkvist.

"We didn't sensationalize the series," said Riekse, "he did."

"What are you supposed to do," asks Lagerkvist, "when you try to interview

a guy and you have to be beaten up? Do you throw the videotape in the wastebasket? No."

"You use it," said Riekse.

That was the WZZM team's first face-to-face interview attempt with Deitz. Asked if Deitz previously had refused an invitation for an interview with WZZM Lagerkvist said, "Well, you saw his comments [in Higbie's notes]. We assumed from that he wouldn't be agreeable to an interview."

Deitz said he knew that the television crews were waiting for him outside of his office. And he was angry. "They were blocking the exits to the office," he said, "harassing customers . . . by taking pictures of the license plates of whoever came to do business [with me]."

"I didn't want to be interviewed. What the hell right do they have to be interviewing me?" he asked.

When told by this interviewer that WZZM wanted to talk with him about evidence that he had dealings with public officials, Deitz said: "Is that illegal? If that's the case, then it's a job for the police, not a reporter.

"Today, I can say, with no license, that I am an investigative reporter for GRAND RAPIDS Magazine. And with a camera, I can take pictures of you, call your friends . . . [and] if you don't hit me in the mouth, you've got no balls."

"The one point I want to make," said Lagerkvist, "when you talk about whether we were picking on these people or harassing these people, well, what we had [is] a case of three public officials, past and present, and a controversial relationship with a fourth person, Cal Deitz, who openly bragged of influence over them and power in Newaygo County. Now I think if you are talking about public officials and somebody who brags to have influence and control over public officials, that's fair game. It's kind of hard to sympathize with that."

By the next Monday, the series was on the air. The "King of Newaygo" then went on to sweep state and regional awards from the United Press International and the Associated Press, plus the Detroit Press Club Foundation Award and the national UPI award, all for investigative reporting.

The "King of Newaygo" was also off for what promises to be a long-fought libel suit.

As of this writing, the suit, filed in Newaygo County, is being reviewed by federal Judge Richard Enslin, who was asked by WZZM attorneys to decide if the suit could be heard in federal court. Failing that, WZZM reportedly would like to have the case heard in a Kent County court, which would require another venue decision. The suit was filed in February. Lt. Pederson has also entered a suit against WZZM.

RIEKSE AND LAGERKVIST followed up the "King of Newaygo" in February with another series involving Deitz. This five-part report entitled "Charity for Profit" detailed the alleged incestuous relationship between the Muskegon County Council on Alcohol-

ism and the Boyd Acres Treatment Center.

Quoting from the series' first part: "The conflict is this: Some of the people who run the Muskegon alcoholism council also own Boyd Acres, some of the charity's officers are in a position to profit."

WZZM alleged that Deitz and three others who served on the council were owners of Boyd Acres. It claimed that almost half of Boyd Acres' patients—many of whom pay \$5,500 for a 28-day visit—were referred by the Muskegon council.

Again according to Riekse, Deitz declined to be interviewed.

Following the broadcast, WZZM began receiving an avalanche of tips and story ideas from their viewers.

"These things are very much self-perpetuating," said Lagerkvist. "You do one project or one story that people think is really hot and a lot more information comes in. Most of the suggestions are, for one reason or another, unworkable. [But] out of all those suggestions you end up with some gems, too."

Sifting through the story suggestions, Lagerkvist came across a gem that launched him into a project that for the next eight months would test all of his researching skills and held a surprise quiz at the end—the results of a concurrent state investigation.

"In my opinion," said Lagerkvist, "'A Place to Profit' and 'The Great Medicaid Ripoff' are probably one of the best pieces of research I've ever done."

According to Lagerkvist, he learned that the State of Michigan also was investigating the nursing home's owners in late June, just before the first series was shown.

Edward Bladen, with the attorney general's office said he could not recall when the two investigations crossed paths but "we did not advise him as to our direction."

He did say that the state asked WZZM not to announce its investigation and expressed "the fear we always have [that] when it becomes public knowledge the perpetrators would have an opportunity to secret or destroy evidence or escape."

He said that he felt WZZM had been responsible with their broadcasts and did not jeopardize the state's case.

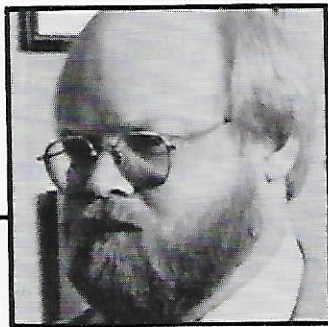
A former nurse's aide had written to WZZM about her eyewitness experience with abuse and neglect at the English Hills Nursing Home in Grand Rapids, where she had worked.

The result of their investigation into her claims was 15 segments broadcast in three series: "A Place to Die"; "A Place to Profit" and "The Great Medicaid Ripoff". The first two were companion pieces shown over a two-week period in July. The last segment was shown in November.

"The Medicaid fraud [series] certainly didn't drop into our lap," said Lagerkvist, "It came from a lot of extra hustle. We weren't satisfied to look at just patient neglect and abuse. We wanted to pull out all the financial records and

"I DON'T REALLY TAKE A GREAT DELIGHT OUT OF BURNING SOMEBODY, UNLESS THEY REALLY DESERVE BEING EXPOSED."

— Mark Lagerkvist



take a peek at how the whole process worked."

"A Place to Die" dealt with neglect and abuse at English Hills and was along the lines of similar stories done by other media in town. It was well-told and thorough, but it wasn't the kind of turf where Lagerkvist is most comfortable. "A Place to Die" relied more upon eyewitness accounts and other interviews to build the case and less upon hard documents—though medical reports and in-house records were cited.

Where Lagerkvist got rolling was with "A Place to Profit."

In looking at public records about English Hills, a faint odor rose up. In other words, something was rotten in Appleton, Wis., the headquarters for the Como Corporation which owned English Hills and four other Michigan nursing homes. After some preliminary reading, Lagerkvist found that Como had the same address in Appleton as Michigan Skilled Care Centers, which operated the same five facilities.

After some earnest digging, he found that two Como employees, a former Como employee and the wives of the two major Como owners were listed as the major stockholders of Michigan Skilled. This fact made the two firms candidates for the Riekse-Lagerkvist "stink test."

"If you look at something and you look at it again and it still really stinks, no matter how you explain it, then it is interesting," said Lagerkvist. "You look at that and you look at that and you you say 'Is that right?' 'Is that right?' And then you say, 'Naw, it stinks.' And that's the stink test."

What finally raised the stink was the discovery that Como and Michigan Skilled had never disclosed their conflicting relationship to the state, a direct violation of Medicaid regulations. Not only did that stink, it is a felony.

Como, Michigan Skilled and their officers were charged in mid-November with \$1.3 million in fraud.

THOUGH THE JULY series touched upon many of the charges, it wasn't until Lagerkvist forced the state to allow him to review its audit reports on the five homes that he could substantiate specific allegations made in "The Great Medicaid Ripoff."

Winning access to these public records took an aggressive application of the Freedom of Information Act and threats of a lawsuit by WZZM to back it up. This tenacity is a reflection of WZZM's news director Jack Hogan's longstanding activity in the area of law and media. Hogan is a recent past president of the national Radio and Television News Directors Association.

Lagerkvist claims the distinction of being the first newsman to gain access to those audit reports, which are used to police Michigan's \$1 billion in Medicaid expenditures.

Said Riekse, "Mark is 'Mr. Documents' . . . if the document exists, Mark's going to find it."

"When it all goes on the air," said Lagerkvist, "it all looks simple. It is very logical, to the point. But to come up with all that stuff . . . is a complicated combination of putting together many different factors, many different proofs. . . . There is not just one 'smoking gun' document. Or even two. Or even six. . . . It's building blocks, and there is no document that says 'These guys are crooks.' "However if you are sitting around with a big stack of documents and start putting everything together, you can, in many cases, conclusively prove the same thing.

"IT'S VERY GRUELING, demanding, pressure-packed sort of work. When the impact comes down, the decisions I'll make will affect people's lives, their careers. It will affect so many other factors around me. I'm sensitive to that. I don't really take a great delight out of burning somebody, unless they really deserve being exposed. There is no great satisfaction.

"I took a certain amount of satisfaction out of the officials of Como getting indicted on 142 counts. I didn't exactly lose any sleep over that.

"[But] it's obvious that what you do has an impact on many people, an impact on the station. If I were ever to goof up—which is unthinkable and it won't happen as long as we're careful—it could cost the station literally hundreds of thousands of dollars in damages.

"So there's a lot of responsibilities there. There's a lot of pressure.

"It would be very easy in this type of job to become cynical, because you're basically dealing with people who are doing things that are illegal or improper or [who] want to keep them secret. It's kind of an attitude that can build up.

"Given human nature, nothing is that honest or that clean referring to [Grand Rapids]. And perhaps that is part of the cynical attitude. I believe in the better part of human nature, however, I realize the other part . . .

"[So] I really don't see any lack of things to do. I really don't." ■