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## INTELLIGENCER

## Did Ford Have a Friend at Court?



Staffeldt: A small world.

FORD MOTOR COMPANY WAS both smart and lucky in winning its recent acquittal in an Indiana criminal case involving its 1973 Pinto model. The reason: Ford hired local Winamac, Indiana, attorney Lester Wilson to assist its chief counsel, James Neal, a former Watergate prosecutor. The two defended Ford in the precedent-setting suit that saw a corporation for the first time brought to a criminal court for having produced an allegedly faulty product.

Why Wilson? Well, it seems that he and Judge Harold Staffeldt, who heard the sensitive case, had spent about twenty years as close colleagues in Winamac, the site of the trial. Though the two never had a formal partnership, they shared office space from the late forties to the late sixties.

Many observers agree that the prosecution's case against Ford was weakened time and time again by rulings from Judge Staffelt. "We felt he greatly limited the prosecution in terms of allowing evidence," said local prosecution counsel Daniel Tankersley.

Staffeldt said that his relationship with Wilson did not influence his rulinge-"Country lawyers live trgether and play together you can't avoid it," he remarked, "and thank goodness too; it doesn't detact from their actions in court."

Despite being apparent victims of the small-town old-boy network, the posecution chose not to press the point. "In a small town like this there are only about ten lawyers, and someone's got to be judge," aid one prosecutor. "Hell, 've been in that situation myself." —Bruce Henderson

## Gang Snatches Chinese Chef

FIVE WEEKS AGO, TSUNG Ting Wang, perhaps the hottest Chinese chef in town, was kidnapped and held for \$100,000 ransom as he left one of his three East Side restaurants. The partner-chef of the Shun Lee Palace, and partner in the Shun Lee Dynasty and the Hunam, Wang was seized and blindfolded by three Oriental men as he left the Hunam at 7:30 P.M. on February 12. According to police officials, Wang was held captive for 24 hours until an employee of his at the captors' request, delivered the cash to an Oriental man near the Queens Boulevard branch of Macy's.

Detective Leo Rosenthal, of the Manhattan Detective Area Task Force said, "This is a very unusual case. We've had a lot of trouble with Chinese youth gangs and our investigation is going in that direction. But they are more into extortions of restaurants and gambling houses—kidnapping is not their bag."

Meanwhile, Wang, the man who brought Hunan cuisine to New York, is reported to be physically unharmed though shaken by the event. When asked about his employer, one employee of the Shun Lee Palace said, "He's cooking. Maybe this will teach him never to leave the kitchen."

## All Quiet on the Newman Front

NEW YORK FILM PRODUCtions—notably The Godfather—have a history of reported patronage to locals whose turf they've invaded. But last week the producers of Fort Apache, The Bronx, the \$12-million Paul Newman film, said reports that they were encountering threats from local street gangs were "exaggerated."

According to Apache production manager David Golden, whatever tension existed as shooting began two weeks ago was the result of a misunderstanding.

ing.
"They thought our script was based on Tom Walker's

book, Fort Apache, which they found offensive," he said. "Its general approach is that the community should be swept into the East River. But our script has nothing to do with that. And we've been hiring as many community people as possible."

One city official, when asked about the production, said, "We keep as far away from this kind of thing as possible. You simply advise them to keep the neighborhood happy. To film in this town, you need a lot of street smarts."

BY CRAIC