

W. Seneca's inspector sold plans on the side

*FBI is reviewing how
Czuprynski ran office*

By MARY B. PASCIAK
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

As West Seneca's building inspector, William P. Czuprynski was responsible for reviewing plans for every building project in the town for the last quarter of a century.

He did far more than review the plans, though.

Czuprynski also drew many of the plans he was supposed to approve or reject, and charged residents and developers fees for his drawings.

That practice was the main reason the man known to some as "the bulldog" — and to others merely as a bully — was finally forced to retire this year, bringing an end to what many residents consider his reign of terror. And FBI agents are asking town residents and officials questions about how Czuprynski ran the inspections office.

If you wanted to get a project approved in West Seneca without any problems, you had to show up in Czuprynski's office in the basement of Town Hall — ready to pay cash, according to builders, contractors, and homeowners.

And town officials knew what was going on. Yet cash continued to change hands across the counter in his office for years — sometimes as often as twice a week, during busy seasons, according to town residents and people who have worked in Town Hall.

"It was common knowledge that Bill was doing work on the side," said Vincent J. Graber, who was on the Town Board for 12 years. "He was never told

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FOCUS: STATE

*"People love their parks. ... We
of parks they're going to*

— AL CACCISE, AUDITOR

Perilous prospe



Woodlawn Beach State Park, which lost \$312,452 in the state fiscal year end

*With revenues failing to cover op
in Western New York, governor pr*

By DENISE JEWELL GEE
NEWS NIAGARA REPORTER

Niagara Falls, Allegany and Letchworth state parks are the cash cows for the regional parks system, but they do not make up for the losses at smaller counterparts.

Seventeen of the 23 state parks in the region lose money, which helps explain why some have been caught in the cross hairs during the state budget crisis.

The disparity between those making money and those needing subsidies has become acute as the state teeters on the brink of financial doom.

Gov. David A. Paterson has announced

Not created equal

State park profits, losses vary grea

Biggest money-makers

Niagara Falls	\$2.8 million
Allegany	\$482,731
Letchworth	\$175,370

Biggest money-losers

Artpark	
Fort Niagara	
Beaver Island	

Source: state Office of Parks, Recreation and E
*Separate from Artpark and Fort Niagara num

Plane crash kills Polish leader, lea

*Kaczynski, dozens of dignitaries were en route
to memorial at site of 1940 massacre in Russia*

By VICTORIA BURAVCHENKO
AND MONIKA SCISLOWSKA

ASSOCIATED PRESS

SMOLENSK, Russia — The crash of

ment lay dead in woods a short drive from the site of the Katyn forest massacre, where 22,000 Polish officers were killed by Soviet secret police in one of Poland's greatest national traumas



CONTINUED FROM PAGE ONE

Many complain code enforcement was arbitrary

INSPECTOR • from A1

that he couldn't. He was doing it long before I ever got on the Town Board."

There was no job too small or too big — porches, additions, entire houses. One of the priciest subdivisions in West Seneca literally has Czuprynski's handwriting all over it.

Frank J. Mathews, the 88-year-old engineer who worked with Czuprynski on his side jobs, said he's known the former building inspector since he was in high school with Mathews' son. Over the years, the elder Mathews and Czuprynski would work together on drawings, he said.

"He'd do the drafting. I'd verify they were structurally sound," Mathews said.

By the time Czuprynski, 63, retired this year, he had drawn plans for projects totaling many millions of dollars in West Seneca.

"You had to do what he wanted," one former contractor said. "If not, you'd always have to worry about him coming in and telling you that you did this wrong, you did that wrong."

That wasn't the only reason people feared Czuprynski, residents say.

Over the years, he became known as a foul-mouthed bully who intimidated and belittled people who came to his office looking for help.

Many complain that he arbitrarily enforced some town codes. Residents and developers often were left wondering why he threw the book at some people and turned a blind eye to others.

Once in a while, a house in despair would catch Czuprynski's eye. Rather than cite the code violations, he would persuade the owner to sell it to him.



Mark Mulville/Buffalo News

William Czuprynski's conduct while dealing with this house at 557 Main St. was part of West Seneca's investigation into his office.

ome of unhelpful," Janice McKay said. "You want to know, do you need a 2-by-4 or a 2-by-8? He wouldn't even answer those questions. We're essentially paying his salary, and he's mean to us. That doesn't make any sense to me."

It was Czuprynski's moonlighting that not only angered residents and developers, but also provided him with a source of income.

He has been drawing plans for residents, for a fee, for many years. Some residents recall paying him for drawings as much as 20 years ago.

"Everything was \$100. If he drew a sketch for you, it was 100 bucks cash, whether it was an addition or a dormer," one resident said.

Although Czuprynski has retired, many people interviewed for this story spoke on the condition that their names not be used. Some said they feared other people in Town Hall might still be allied with Czuprynski and might seek retribution. Others

least two streets in Camelot Square, a subdivision in the Town of West Seneca that falls within the boundaries of the Orchard Park School District where many houses fetch well above \$200,000.

The drawings Czuprynski did for 23 houses on Taylor Court and Taylor Drive represent more than \$5 million worth of new builds in the town.

Mathews said Czuprynski would do some of his drawings working after hours out of his basement office in Town Hall, and some in Mathews' Delaware Avenue office. Czuprynski never did drawings while he was on the clock for the town, Mathews said.

"They make it sound like he did nothing but come in and do side work on company time, which isn't true. He's not a crook. He's an honest guy," he said. "I've never seen him cheat. I've got nothing but good to say about him."

Neither Czuprynski nor his attorney

Czuprynski admitted that he did.

Russo's wife, Teresa, pushed the issue a bit more. She wanted to know whether the builder, James Sorge, had any assurances the project would be approved.

"I do 99.9 percent of the site plans in town," Czuprynski shot back.

Ten people interviewed for this story who were at that meeting — town officials as well as residents — vividly recall that admission.

"It was a whole Perry Mason moment. It got him to speak the truth. Everyone was shocked and appalled but him," Teresa Russo recalled last week.

The Town Board was outraged, Graber said. Czuprynski's public admission was the first solid proof town officials had that the building inspector was abusing his position, Graber said.

After the public meeting, the Town Board met privately with Czuprynski and told him he had to stop.

"You did the drawings, and now you're going to be the one to review the drawings? I think any reasonable person would have a problem with that," Graber said.

Despite the warning from the other town officials, Czuprynski continued doing drawings for residents.

Then, a building he wanted to get his hands on started his downfall.

Deal goes bad

For years, the white house at 557 Main St. has been a source of anxiety for the neighbors.

Once a stately single-family home, the building had been carved into apartments. Eventually, it sat vacant, slowly deteriorating. Unregistered cars sat rusting in the driveway. Junk piled up in the barn. Paint peeled from the

buying it.

"Well, I guess you should've bought it," the building inspector said, according to the neighbor.

The owner of the house, Orchard Park resident Ed Blonski, had been cited for numerous code violations early last year. But Czuprynski was angling to buy the house, and let the violations slide, according to town files and town officials.

In the meantime, the neighbors who had wanted to buy the house approached Councilwoman Sheila M. Meegan with their concerns. She pushed town officials to follow through on the violations and Blonski was hauled into Town Court, putting Czuprynski's deal in jeopardy.

He did an about-face and pressed for enforcement of the violations, in an effort to persuade Blonski to lower the sale price and close on the deal, according to town documents and town officials.

The deal fell through, but the neighbors' complaints about Czuprynski using his position to enforce — or not enforce — town codes, to his benefit, led town officials to direct their labor attorney to investigate the building inspector's dealings.

In the fall of 2009, they drew up civil service charges against Czuprynski, including counts related to his conduct with the house at 557 Main St., his practice of taking money to draw up plans, and several other issues.

The police chief escorted Czuprynski out of Town Hall in December and he was suspended without pay. The town agreed to drop the civil service charges in exchange for his retirement, which took effect Feb. 18, according to Sean Beiter, the town labor attorney.

State officials said they have not yet

were structurally sound," Mathews said.

By the time Czuprynski, 63, retired this year, he had drawn plans for projects totaling many millions of dollars in West Seneca.

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That wasn't the only reason people feared Czuprynski, residents say.

Over the years, he became known as a foul-mouthed bully who intimidated and belittled people who came to his office looking for help.

Many complain that he arbitrarily enforced some town codes. Residents and developers often were left wondering why he threw the book at some people and turned a blind eye to others.

Once in a while, a house in disrepair would catch Czuprynski's eye. Rather than cite the code violations, he would persuade the owner to sell it to him.

In the end, it was just such a house that would lead to his undoing.

Drawing for dollars

Czuprynski has been a fixture in West Seneca Town Hall for as long as anyone can remember.

In 1973, when he was 27, he was hired as an assistant building inspector. Twelve years later, a promotion put him in charge of the Building Department.

With the thousands of permits the town has issued during his tenure, it's hard to find someone in West Seneca who doesn't have a story about Bill Czuprynski.

When Janice and Mike McKay decided to build a garage, they headed to the Building Department for some guidance. That is where they met Czuprynski.

"He was just nasty. He was the epit-

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ome of unhelpful," Janice McKay said. "You want to know, do you need a 2-by-4 or a 2-by-8? He wouldn't even answer those questions. We're essentially paying his salary, and he's mean to us. That doesn't make any sense to me."

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Although Czuprynski has retired, many people interviewed for this story spoke on the condition that their names not be used. Some said they feared other people in Town Hall might still be allied with Czuprynski and might seek retribution. Others said they did not want to be publicly identified as someone who had given the building inspector cash for drawings.

While Czuprynski drew plans for countless building projects in West Seneca over the years, nowhere on those plans does his name appear. Some town officials, past and present, say that was what made it difficult for so long to prove what he was doing.

A Buffalo News review of files in the Building Department, including dozens of plans drawn by Czuprynski, found that the plans he drew often bore no signature or professional stamp. In many instances, Czuprynski stamped the plans he drew with the stamp of Frank J. Mathews, a professional engineer with an office on Delaware Avenue.

Building files show that Czuprynski drew the plans for all the houses on at

least two streets in Camelot Square, a subdivision in the Town of West Seneca that falls within the boundaries of the Orchard Park School District where many houses fetch well above \$200,000.

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Neither Czuprynski nor his attorney, Ralph C. Lorigo, responded to requests for comment for this story.

'Perry Mason moment'

If town officials had any doubts about what Czuprynski was doing, those doubts evaporated more than four years ago.

A six-unit apartment building was proposed for the corner of Clinton and Weigand streets — a project that neighbors were not very happy about, in the midst of a quiet, mostly owner-occupied area.

During a public hearing about the project at a Town Board meeting, neighbors raised a number of questions.

Who did the drawings for the apartment building? asked Dominic Russo, who owns the property on either side of the proposed building.

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Once a stately single-family home, the building had been carved into apartments. Eventually, it sat vacant, slowly deteriorating. Unregistered cars sat rusting in the driveway. Junk piled up in the barn. Paint peeled from the house. The porch started to cave in.

A neighborhood couple decided to look into buying the house.

"Here was a nice place, in a nice neighborhood — rotting," one of them said.

He went to the Building Department to find out more about the house.

"Czuprynski said, 'Why would you want to buy that?'" he said. "I thought maybe he knew something and was trying to protect me."

As it turned out, Czuprynski was working on buying the house for himself. Although an Orchard Park man still owned it, Czuprynski and his son were hard at work, gutting the interior.

When the neighborhood resident later saw the building inspector at the house, intent on buying it, he confronted Czuprynski and reminded him that he had discouraged the neighbor from

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State officials said they have not yet calculated the pension Czuprynski will draw based on his most recent years of earnings. His salary last year was \$83,656.

News of Czuprynski's departure from Town Hall led the FBI to reopen an investigation from a few years earlier, which had not resulted in any prosecution. A spokeswoman said she could neither confirm nor deny that he was under investigation. But many residents and employees said they have been interviewed recently by the FBI.

Mathews said he can't understand why anyone would find fault with Czuprynski's side job in West Seneca.

"What's wrong with that? I was city engineer in Lackawanna. I'd draw things up after hours," he said. "So he has his jobs there. People came to him. There weren't that many."

e-mail: mpasciak@buffnews.com

Deal needed by early May to prepare for summer

Wilson-Tuscarora in Wilson closing list.

free Tuesday in the Park con-