

### Sam Offen

Sam Offen, 80, of West Bloomfield was fishing at his in-laws' cottage on Horseshoe Lake, an hour's ride from Detroit, when his family started waving frantically to him from shore.

His partner, Sol Ceresnie, was on the phone. Riots had broken out in Detroit, and he was concerned that their first store, Ceresnie Bros. and Offen, a furrier concern on Livernois and Outer Drive, was in trouble.

Sol wanted to go to the store immediately, but police told the partners it was too dangerous.

Traveling to the store the next day, Offen said they both heard shooting and saw stores either burned down or looted.

"Our store was completely looted on the ground floor, but the more expensive furs locked in the downstairs vault remained

untouched," Offen said.

After the riots, business was never the same.

"Our customers feared coming to our area," Offen said. "Regrettably, they started moving to the northern suburbs and, in order to survive, we had to follow our customers."

In 1969, the store moved to Birmingham. "Detroit was once a beautiful and thriving city, but the riots changed the whole landscape," Offen said.



Sam Offen



Clockwise from left:

Furs by Ceresnie Bros., Detroit Free Press photo, 1954.

Interior of Ceresnie Bros. And Offen, 1955

Jewish News Merchants of the Week, Jan. 3, 1963: Sol Ceresnie, Sam Offen and Harry Ceresnie.



## Remembering The Riots

HARRY KIRSBAUM and SHARON LUCKERMAN  
Staff Writers

**A**n urgent phone call from work woke up Robert Tell early on July 23, 1967. The chief nurse at Sinai Hospital of Detroit told him flames were visible in downtown Detroit and it looked like the whole city was on fire. No one was sure what was happening, she said.

Tell, the administrator on duty that day, left his Oak Park home and headed for the former Jewish hospital in northwest Detroit.

Though it happened 35 years ago, Tell's memories remain vivid.

From the hospital rooftop, he saw billowing black smoke, "an overwhelming sight."

He decided to assemble staff and hold a meeting. The top priority was to get inner-city employees to the hospital.

These staffers were calling in reports about snipers, tanks, police and chaos. Still, they wanted to come in to work, but no public transportation was running in what now was being called a riot.

Tell, then 30, rented buses to pick up Sinai Hospital's stranded employees. During the course of the day, some of the buses were caught by sniper fire and came in with bullet holes in the windows.

"These were employees risking their lives to come to work and they did it for two reasons," he said. "They didn't want their patients to be abandoned, and they wanted to make it clear that it wasn't everybody in the African American community burning and looting."

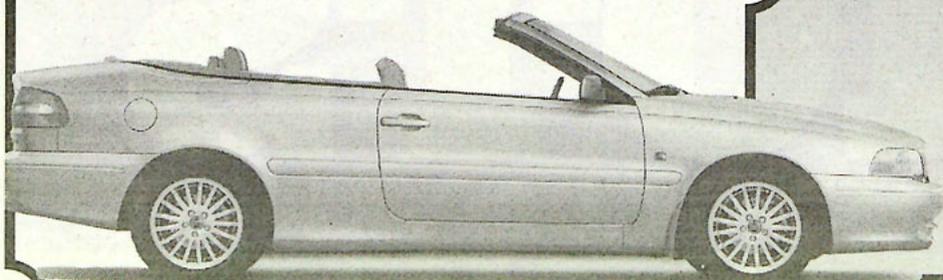
By nightfall, 90 percent of the staff had made it to the hospital. "No sick person went without care," he said.

Now 65 and retired, Tell of Farmington Hills is proud of what the Sinai employees did then, but what happened in Detroit changed his view of the city forever.

"As a newcomer to Detroit, I thought that racial tension was much lower here than in the New York City I had left. The areas around Sinai Hospital

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