

Former city manager Lychak under constant fire out west

When Doug Lychak left Mississauga in 1992, he knew he was jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire.

He may not have realized how hot things were going to get in his new home of Surrey, British Columbia, however.

Part of the former Mississauga city manager's house was burned down over the weekend in a case of suspected arson and B.C. papers are full of speculation that the fire may have been started to send the controversial Surrey city manager a message.

Lychak and his family were asleep about 5 a.m. when Ola Lychak went to the bathroom and smelled smoke. The couple managed to get two of their children and one of their children's friends out of the home and safely to neighbors.

The garage and one bedroom of the house were severely damaged, and there was smoke damage throughout the house. Damage is estimated at \$100,000.

A replica Austin-Healey automobile, which Lychak spent many hours restoring, was also destroyed in the blaze.

One councillor, Judith Higginbotham, hoped the fire wasn't deliberately set. "But there has been so much turbulence in Surrey lately," she said, "that

if this does prove to be arson, I'm sure there will be a thorough investigation."

Lychak initially refused to say anything about the fire but has since confirmed that he received threats last year in the midst of a bitter, five-week strike



LYCHAK

by most of Surrey's highly unionized staff. The strike shut down most of the municipality's operations.

Almost from the beginning of his west coast tenure, Lychak has been the focus of controversy because of what many residents and councillors consider the very generous contract that lured him from Mississauga.

The five-year deal at \$160,000-per-year also included provision for a potential six per cent annual bonus, dependent on performance. During the strike there was speculation that Lychak's bonus may have been tied to savings from job action, but that was shown to be untrue when the terms of the contract became public through a Freedom of Information inquiry.

More recently, Lychak has been sharply criticized for a deal to build a new stadium, to be called the Stetson Bowl, for the local Surrey Glacier baseball franchise. The team folded, the deal went bad and the municipality is now stuck with a \$2.3 million bill.