

Dying for a Pizza

by Ralph R. Reiland

It started as more than 50 people were being killed in Los Angeles by rioters who didn't agree with the verdict in the Rodney King case. That same night, while the rest of us were watching the mayhem on television, Carl Truss of Schenley Farms in Pittsburgh's Hill District called Pizza Hut for a pie.

The store said it was too dangerous that night to deliver to Truss's neighborhood, a predominantly African-American area. Now, after investigating the case for over four years, Charles Morrison, Director of the Human Relations Commission of Pittsburgh, says it's a case of illegal redlining: "We've determined there is probable cause to believe that it is more likely than not that a discriminatory act occurred here. We found that they did deliver to areas that had greater incidence of crime yet were not perceived to be 'black areas.'"

Morrison is referring to the Oakland section of the city—home to the University of Pittsburgh, Chatham College, Carlow College, and Carnegie-Mellon University—where Pizza Hut takes its risks to deliver to a large student market. That's a judgment call by a store manager, but most Pittsburghers, I'd guess, would see Oakland as safer than the Hill District on the night of the Rodney King riots.

"We don't want any business to be exposed to putting their drivers in harm's way," says Morrison, "but there has to be a basis for

denying service. You can't just say, 'We hear it's bad there.'"

With the way the Human Relations Commission operates, the burden of proof is on the store, a case of being guilty until proven innocent. The Commission is saying that pizza managers, on top of juggling teenage workers and other workplace headaches, must also be proficient in crime statistics by street and neighborhood in order to stay out of court. "There could be a loss history," explains Morrison, "such as, 'When we go to ABC street, we get robbed.'"

The year after Truss didn't get his pizza, Jay Weiss, a 34-year-old man who worked for Chubby's Pizza in Pittsburgh's North Side, was killed by two teenagers while delivering a pizza. As the driver was dying, the boys sat on a curb and ate the pizza.

A few minutes after Morrison was interviewed on the Jim Quinn radio talk show in Pittsburgh, "Dan," a former Pizza Hut driver, called the show to explain how it looked from the inside. "We had drivers robbed every day," he said. "In East Liberty, we had the same driver robbed three times in one day. They usually robbed us with a gun—they know we're not allowed to carry a gun, or more than \$20. They'd rob us just for the pizza. If we'd drive to Schenley Farms, they hid in the bushes across Herron Avenue to rob us. Drivers would quit after a couple days."

Morrison explained to Quinn's listeners that the Human Relations Commission in this case was going after "a large company, not a

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