

Wittmann

hermitage ransacked

Vandals discover,
wreck rustic getaway
built by retired priest

By Timothy Tait

The Arizona Republic

After years of ministering to parishioners, the **Lionel Harnish** planned to spend his retirement living like a hermit. He'd summer on a remote island in the Great Lakes and winter in the desert of the far northwest Valley.

He spent last winter building a small pole house near Wittmann. It didn't have running water or electricity, but it was perfect for watching scorpions creep by and avoiding the snow.

But when **Harnish** returned to the Valley last week, he discovered that a wall and a few posts were all that remained of his home. The sparse furnishings, stove and tin roof were missing. The last time anyone saw the house as a whole was when it was finished in February.

Now, the former priest is peeved.

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Dana Leonard/The Arizona Republic

"I don't like the fact that I can't go away. Do I have to sit in front on my house with a shotgun to protect my property?" says **Lionel Harnish**, a retired priest, whose desert getaway was vandalized.

property?" **Harnish** said, his blue eyes showing the frustration he feels. He doesn't yell and he isn't angry, just disappointed. "That's where I wanted to be — away from people."

The 12-foot-by-20-foot structure sat on five acres of land near 315th Avenue and Patton Drive. He bought the land for \$7,000 and estimated that the dwelling cost \$2,000 for materials, not counting the propane stove or kerosene lamp.

He is almost insulted when asked why

he would want to live out there, alone and without modern conveniences. **Harnish** is firm in his belief that he has the right to live where he wants without interference.

Walt **Harnish**, **Lionel's** brother who lives in Phoenix, said the former priest was tired of people still coming to him for advice and help after he retired.

"He wanted to get away from it all. He wanted to be a hermit," Walt said.

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