

## Local author lived life "Between The Fences"

BY LINDA GALLAGHER

BELLAIRE - It's a long, long ways from the Port Isabel Service Processing Center in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas to the Dollar General in Bellaire, Michigan.

But talk to him for a few minutes and you'll soon realize that Tony Hefner, the man who has traveled that long and winding road, has lived a great deal of life in the past 20 years, a life lived "Between The Fences".

Between The Fences, Hefner's recently published documentary of his years as a security guard at a federal detention facility for illegal immigrants, where he witnessed and documented sexual assaults, physical beatings, death threats and widespread sexual harassment and discrimination, then began an ongoing battle for justice that continues today, is a shocking, yet compelling, revelation of blatantly illegal activities, including drug smuggling, conducted in a U.S. government facility long before anyone had ever heard of Abu Ghraib.

At first glance, the quiet little man, who with his wife of 31 years, Barbara, once hoped to make a lifelong career of a

children's ministry, doesn't at first appear to be someone who would be willing to risk his life and everything he'd gained to take the lead in a battle against the federal Immigration and Naturalization Service.

But, he said, he had always wanted to make a difference somehow, and after witnessing the vicious beating of a detainee who died suspiciously after being refused medical treatment, began taking notes, making inquiries, and filing complaints.

Warned to stay out of it, Hefner eventually lost his job, but remained involved in a legal struggle against the civil rights and physical abuses he had witnessed.

Anonymous threats as a result of the legal actions, which eventually were won on appeal by the former security guard and his co-plaintiffs, and subsequent media attention, which included the "Inside Edition" television show, forced Hefner and his wife to sell the beloved ranch they had called home for 12 years in San Benito, Texas, as well as their adored Quarter horses, and escape to the safety and peace of Rapid City, Michigan, Barbara's hometown.

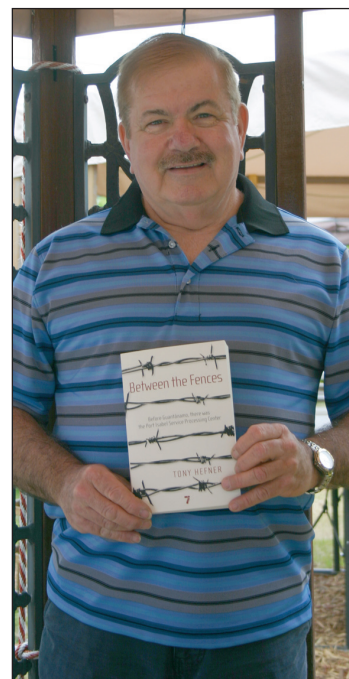
Said Hefner of their 1994 move north, "The Rapid City area had always been home for Barbara, one of the last graduates of the old Rapid City High School."

Now it's home for him, too. After eight years at DURA Automotive, where he worked as a welder, his first profession before he graduated from the School of Scriptures in Milford, Ohio, he is currently employed at the Bellaire Dollar General, a job he enjoys, and teaches Sunday School at Central Lake's Bible Baptist Church.

He does miss Texas. This winter, he was called as an expert witness to Brownsville, Texas, for another discrimination suit. "I realized how much I missed the palm trees, the great winter weather, the fishing in the Gulf of Mexico, and especially, the horses," Hefner said last week, his voice wistful.

"But," he continued, "Barbara and I were both ready for a change, so now we're happily shoveling snow."

And still fighting to end the tyranny and corruption that continues to exist today, Hefner says, in our federal detention facilities.



Local author, Tony Hefner

"It's hard to think, when you live in a nice, quiet area like we do, that horrifying abuses of that nature still occurs," he said. "But it does."

*(Editor's Note: Tony Hefner will be at the Bellaire Library on Friday, June 11, between 2 and 5 p.m. and at the Helena Township Library on Monday, June 14 at 7 p.m. to meet with the public and sign copies of his book.)*