

Off the record Arabian carpet flies into fable

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SALEM — One Arabian night in the fall of 1974, a political wager was placed in high places, eventually leading to the mysterious disappearance of an apparent flying carpet from the gubernatorial john.

It was no ordinary carpet. It bore the stamp of Atiyeh Bros. and was well placed, according to the fable, in front of the toilet used by Gov. Bob Straub.

The carpet was, indeed, a special one, according to Billy Joe McFarland, Oregon bureau manager for United Press International. McFarland was the purchaser of the rug, which was used to pay off an election wager with Ken Fobes, who subsequently became Straub's press aide.

"I didn't think it was going to be a big deal," says McFarland. "I bet Fobes a genuine Atiyeh rug against \$50 that Atiyeh would beat Straub in the 1974 election. I lost."

But when McFarland got around to paying off the debt, he discovered it wasn't easy to purchase a genuine \$50 Atiyeh rug during these inflationary times.

When he called Ed Atiyeh, Vic's brother, he was told: "Sorry, Billy Joe, we don't sell \$50 rugs."

"You don't understand," said McFarland, "I have to have a \$50 rug, certifiable as an Atiyeh rug, to pay off an election bet. I mean, if Vic had won . . ."

McFarland said Ed Atiyeh went to the attic for this one, looked through the scraps and other materials and did, alas, come up with a 2-by-4-foot carpet, stamped with the Atiyeh Bros. label.

Fobes placed the rug in Straub's john, a small cubby-hole with marbled walls just off the governor's working office. But the rug has vanished — taken flight long before the 1979 transition and the room's ultimate use by the new governor, Vic Atiyeh.

Some say the carpet floated mysteriously away at about the time Fobes left Straub's service in 1976. Fobes swears he didn't take the rug with him.

Anyway, a check of the gubernatorial john this week revealed that there was no carpet on the black-and-white checkerboard tile floor, and no sources in or out of government were willing to vouch for McFarland's taste in wagering or Fobes' taste in displaying the spoils of Straub's 1974 election victory.