

The Palm Beach Post

JUPITER

‘They were in such a rush’: After arrests, Florida couple demolished garage room where teen lived

er their arrests, Timothy and Tracy Ferriter had a demolition company knock in the garage that had led to their charges.

Katherine Kokal and Julius Whigham II Palm Beach Post

Published 6:01 a.m. ET June 5, 2022

JUPITER — Rebecca Miller's demolition company usually schedules its jobs weeks in advance.

Timothy and Tracy Ferriter refused to wait.

Just 12 days after their arrests Feb. 8 on aggravated child abuse and false imprisonment charges, the Ferriters paid more than \$3,400 to demolish the small room in their garage where they are accused of locking their adopted teen for up to 18 hours at a time. The parents pleaded not guilty on March 23.

“They were in such a rush. They didn’t seem to care about price. They just wanted it done,” said Miller, owner of DemoBoyyz in Boynton Beach.

On March 5, less than a month after the Ferriters’ arrests, Miller’s team hauled the room out of the family's Egret Landing home piece by piece.

More on this story:

- ▶ A Florida couple kept an adopted teen locked in the garage. Their lawyer says they had no choice
- ▶ Did Florida's adoption system fail Jupiter teen forced to live in a locked garage room?

► Jupiter parents say adopted teen locked in garage room had attachment disorder. What that means

The Ferriter couple and their four children had recently moved back to Jupiter when the parents were arrested. For four years prior, the family lived outside Tucson, Ariz.

But they had roots in northern Palm Beach County. The Ferriters lived in Palm Beach Gardens and elsewhere in Egret Landing from 2004 until 2017.

Public records show the garage room was not a new invention for the Ferriters: At least one other home the family occupied had a garage room that locked only from the outside.

And according to police records, issues followed the family no matter where they lived.

Ferriter parents were born in Midwest, lived in Gardens for 10 years

Timothy and Tracy Ferriter were both born in 1975 in Wisconsin and Illinois, respectively. They lived together in Michigan and then locally in Lantana before buying a home in Palm Beach Gardens' Bent Tree community in 2004.

They lived there for 10 years through the birth and adoption of their four children. Timothy worked as a vice president of publishing for a Catholic media company and then started a healthcare and business podcast, and Tracy worked as a classroom aide at a nearby church.

In 2014, the family moved to Egret Landing in Jupiter to a five-bedroom, three-bathroom home on Swallowtail Lane, which they bought for \$578,000.

Building plans from the town of Jupiter do not show any garage room at the Swallowtail Lane home, and the town has not issued any demolition permits to that address since the Ferriters moved out.

But in an interview with police, the home's new owner, who bought it in February 2017, said he had a room removed from the garage, which his real estate agent highlighted as a "bonus room" when he bought the home for \$649,000.

The new homeowner declined to comment, but according to court documents, he told police he removed the room because "he believed the room was made to keep someone inside of it."

Jupiter police received no calls for service to the Swallowtail Lane home while the Ferriters lived there.

Teen ran away twice while family was living in Arizona

The Ferriter family left Jupiter in 2017 for Pima County, Ariz., where they bought a home that April for \$439,149.

Pima County records show that the teen ran away at least twice in the months prior to the family's return to Florida.

The Palm Beach Post is not identifying the teen or their gender.

A report from the Pima County Sheriff's Department said the teen ran off on Thanksgiving Day. Timothy and Tracy Ferriter told deputies the teen left after being asked to wait outside while they spoke to the teen's sister about money the teen allegedly had taken from her.

The couple said they searched the neighborhood and surrounding area before eating Thanksgiving dinner with family members and waiting for the teen to return, the Pima County report said. The couple contacted deputies the following morning when the teen did not show.

That evening, deputies responding to a burglar alarm in an apartment complex found the teen sleeping on a couch in the lobby, records show.

The teen held several credit cards, a quick charger and a flashlight, the report said. Deputies found the owner of the credit cards, but the report did not indicate how the teen obtained them, and the owner declined to press charges.

A deputy described the teen as "shaking and scared." They said they ran away because their parents physically abused them, the report said, by spanking them with a jump rope and leather belt. The teen said their mother had recently restrained them against a wall and yelled at them.

Deputies called Timothy and Tracy Ferriter, who arrived at the apartment complex a short time later. They said the teen was a "compulsive liar" and was undergoing counseling for reasons not specified in the report.

On Dec. 7, 2021, the teen was reported missing again in Arizona, with Tracy Ferriter telling deputies the teen left school early that day and did not come home. She said they had not displayed any recent peculiar behavior nor gotten involved in any incidents other than getting into trouble at school for misusing their laptop.

The teen was found the next day at a friend's house.

Shortly after the second time the teen ran away, the Ferriters returned to Jupiter. They sold their Arizona home for \$821,000.

A man who purchased the Ferriters' Tuscon-area home said that neither he nor another resident noticed anything strange when they moved in, but floor plans of the home dated September 2021 were published on the website Realtor.com and showed an attached garage and separate structure identified as an office workshop.

Pima County assessor records show that the last permits applied for on the property were for a new pool and fence in May 2017.

After arrests, Ferriters moved quickly to demolish garage room

Trouble followed the Ferriters when they moved back to Jupiter.

They bought the home on Crane Point North in November for \$710,000.

On Dec. 28, a contractor identified only as "Jack" called Jupiter police to report a job he found "very strange" in the Ferriters' new home.

He said the Ferriters hired him to build an 8-foot-by-8-foot space in the garage with its own ceiling and door. The room was to have a deadbolt lock and doorknob only on the outside, and no knob inside.

"So if someone were inside the office, they would not be able to exit unless someone opened the door for them from the outside," the contractor said.

Although officers took a report of the incident, there's nothing in the public records that show the police contacted the Ferriters about Jack's concerns.

Jupiter permitting records show the Ferriters didn't obtain a permit to build the structure, which had electricity and air conditioning. A town spokesperson said the family should have obtained a permit.

On Jan. 28, Tracy reported the teen missing when they didn't return from school and administrators at Independence Middle School said the teen missed the last class of the day.

She told police the teen had run away before and often "hides out" until they feel they're ready to come home. Police checked with the teen's friend and searched the grounds of the school and St. Peter Catholic Church, across Central Boulevard from Egret Landing, with no success.

Two days later, Jupiter police tried to check in with Tracy Ferriter at her home but she wouldn't let them in. She said she wasn't comfortable with police inside her home when her husband wasn't there. When one officer convinced her to let him enter, he found the garage room with the teen's belongings.

Just a week and a half after their arrest on Feb. 8, the couple scheduled the demolition of the garage room by DemoBoyyz.

Miller said her company had to pull a town permit to demolish the space.

Miller said the permit cost the couple \$3,450, while the Ferriters told her they spent about \$3,000 to construct the structure.

Miller's team demolished the room on March 5.

Katherine Kokal is a journalist covering northern Palm Beach County at The Palm Beach Post. You can reach her at kkokal@pbpost.com. Julius Whigham II is a public safety and criminal justice reporter at The Palm Beach Post. You can reach him at jwhigham@pbpost.com Help support our work, subscribe today!