

DEFENSE SAYS LAWYER IS CULPRIT

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An attorney for Vincent "Pete" Wahby told a jury Tuesday that the real culprit in an extortion scheme was not Wahby but a lawyer who has disappeared.

Wahby, 31, is on trial this week on charges that he extorted money and favors from two felons by using his power as a marshal for the Missouri Court of Appeals at St. Louis. One of his duties involved handling the paper work necessary to send felons to prison after their appeals failed.

One of the felons, Larry D. Sutton, has accused Wahby of keeping him out of prison for 20 months in exchange for his work - without pay - at Wahby's Gun Shop, 2711 Clifton Avenue in south St. Louis.

But Wahby's attorney, Dennis J. Myers, said Tuesday that Wahby had failed to send Sutton to prison because Wahby was depending on information given to him by Sutton's attorney, Robert Hampe. Myers told the jury that Hampe had assured Wahby that Sutton's case remained pending and that Sutton was not supposed to be sent to prison.

Wahby trusted Hampe because "Hampe was Wahby's attorney and his family's attorney," Myers said. In fact, Wahby referred Sutton to Hampe, Myers said.

"The evidence will prove that Robert Hampe is the one who ought to be on trial," Myers said. "I will give you enough evidence to convict the right man, and that's Robert Hampe."

Both Myers and Assistant Circuit Attorney Anthony P. Gonzalez said they didn't know where Hampe was.

Hampe, 43, could not be reached Tuesday by a reporter, either.

A woman who answered the telephone at Hampe's former office in St. Louis said that Hampe had left the state without a forwarding address.

Wahby, of the 6100 block of Magnolia Avenue, was marshal for the Missouri Court of Appeals at St. Louis for nearly two years. Wahby was fired from his job June 16, a few days after allegations against him surfaced.

His trial on 16 charges began Monday.

Some of the charges involve a scheme to extort money and favors from Sutton and Marsha C. Fredrickson, former operator of a massage parlor. Other charges involve the unlawful transfer of weapons to Sutton, a fugitive.

Fredrickson accused Wahby of acting with Sutton in a scheme to extort money from her in exchange for a favorable ruling in her case before the appeals court here. Fredrickson's case has since been transferred to another court to avoid a conflict.

Hampe also acted as Fredrickson's attorney, Myers said. Fredrickson "never paid money to Pete Wahby," Myers said.

Fredrickson, 36, is the former operator of the Golden Goddess massage parlor, in Jefferson County. She was convicted in 1986 of promoting prostitution and evading income taxes.

Sutton was convicted in 1983 of felony theft by deceit. He was accused of paying an accomplice to burn his vehicle, then collecting nearly \$3,000 on his insurance.

In October 1985, the appeals court affirmed Sutton's conviction. The decision should have resulted in Sutton's being sent to prison. But records show that he remained free for 20 months - until he made his accusations against Wahby.

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Section: NEWS

Page: 6A

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