

# DUI lawyer's ticket-fixing trial opens

## His 'co-defendant' committed suicide

By Bill Rankin  
STAFF WRITER

When a DUI lawyer took a girlfriend for a weekend in the North Georgia mountains, he bragged that he paid for his cabin through a ticket-fixing scheme in Atlanta Traffic Court, a federal prosecutor said Tuesday.

The lawyer, Eddie Castleberry, also asked the woman, Lisa Williams, if she knew a computer hacker who could send a virus into the court's computer system so all his clients' records would be erased, Assistant U.S. Attorney Bill McKinnon said.

Castleberry, 44, is on trial in federal court on charges he paid

off former Assistant Solicitor Kenneth London to dismiss his clients' drunk-driving tickets. London was found dead April 6, 1993, in White County as a federal investigation into the Traffic Court intensified. His death was ruled a suicide.

In his opening statement to the jury, McKinnon said Williams would testify about her weekend in the mountains with Castleberry. The prosecutor said he would prove that London routinely accepted bribes to dismiss DUI cases. "While Mr. London is not here, he is going to be present as a defendant in absentia, post-mortem, so to speak," McKinnon said, looking over to a vacant defense table next to Castleberry.

Stratton Leedy, a part-time Traffic Court judge who once worked with London as an assistant solicitor, described London as an extremely disorganized

prosecutor whose desk was piled high with hundreds of cases.

Leedy testified he believed London had an alcohol and drug abuse problem and, in 1992, came to believe he was fixing tickets. Leedy said he told his boss, Traffic Court Solicitor Louise Hornsby, about his suspicions.

"I think Louise, in hindsight, should have gotten him some help," Leedy testified gravely. "Instead, she gave him a little more rope. And with that rope, he hanged himself, so to speak."

McKinnon told jurors they would hear 14 of Castleberry's former clients say they paid him from \$1,500 to \$6,500 in fees. McKinnon noted that they did not have to appear in court and that no DUI charges were placed on their records.

"Nothing happened to Mr. Castleberry's clients so long as

Mr. Castleberry was representing them and Mr. London was alive," McKinnon said.

But Castleberry's lawyer, C. Michael Abbott, told the jury that Castleberry's clients simply benefited from an overburdened, antiquated Atlanta Traffic Court system. The court lost thousands of cases over the past 15 years, and the best lawyers knew how to manipulate the system on behalf of their clients, Abbott said.

London dismissed weak cases, and he had a sympathetic ear to hard-luck tales, Abbott said. "Eddie Castleberry naturally would take advantage of all of the above," he added.

First, Castleberry would try to make a deal, but if that didn't work, "he'd fall back to Plan B — taking advantage of gross mismanagement at Traffic Court," Abbott said. "He knew how to manipulate the system."

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