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Butler County police officer to serve time for taking evidence money

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By Karen Kane, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

A Butler County part-time police officer and state constable is waking up behind bars this morning, sentenced yesterday by a Butler County judge who threw the book at him for "breaching the public trust."

George R. Galovich Jr., 49, of Summit, was sentenced by Common Pleas Judge George Hancher to 45 to 90 days in jail for a misdemeanor count of theft by unlawful taking.

Hancher also refused to continue Galovich's bail, ordering that he be taken by sheriff's deputies to the county jail immediately.

Galovich's attorney, Mel Vatz of Pittsburgh, promised he would file today a motion for bail pending an appeal.

Galovich also was sentenced to a year of probation and ordered to do 75 hours of community service as well as pay a \$400 fine.

Standard range under the state sentencing guidelines called for probation, but Hancher said he was going beyond that for "breaching the public trust."

Galovich was convicted in March for taking \$376 in drug evidence money last year from the Mars Borough Police Department. He had been employed there as a part-time sergeant/detective and was suspended last year.

His one-day trial, during which Galovich took the stand in his own defense, ended with the single conviction. An evidence tampering charge was dismissed.

Mars Police Chief Kevin Radford testified for the prosecution that, on April 1, 2004, he discovered that two evidence files containing money from a drug case had been emptied. He said he later caught Galovich trying to return two similar files with an equivalent amount of money.

Galovich testified that he wasn't returning the files, just retrieving them to give to the chief.

Assistant District Attorney Jerry Cassady yesterday pointed out that Galovich had abused his position and compromised the drug cases from which the money came.

Hancher said he would hold a hearing on whether bail should be given to Galovich after Vatz made a written motion requesting one.

Galovich was to have faced a second Butler County trial next week in connection with allegations that he collected but failed to turn over to Saxonburg District Judge Sue Haggerty more than \$4,000 in fines and court costs from defendants for whom warrants were issued when he was serving as a constable. The trial has been postponed to July 25.

He also faces theft charges filed last month in Allegheny County Common Pleas Court accusing him of failing to turn over about \$1,200 in fines three years ago to District Judge William Wagner in McCandless. His preliminary hearing in that case is to be held Wednesday before District Judge Richard Opiela in West View.

Butler County Common Pleas President Judge Thomas Doerr has said he notified all district judges in his jurisdiction to stop calling on Galovich. Constables typically serve warrants, liens, subpoenas and other court papers, evict tenants and transport prisoners.

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Karen Kane can be reached at kkane@post-gazette.com or 724-772-9180.

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