



GAROLE ROBINSON

Headley accepts plea bargain resigns as county's sheriff

By MINDY TATE, Editor
mtate@williamsonherald.com

Williamson County Sheriff Ricky Headley resigned his elected office Wednesday as part of a plea bargain agreement with Williamson and Davidson County district attorneys to end a prescription drug fraud case against the 44-year-old lawman.

According to Headley's attorney, David Raybin, Headley turned his resignation in to Deputy District Attorney Derek Smith Wednesday morning before appearing before Judge Kerry Blackwood at noon. Blackwood accepted a plea bargain agreement which allowed Headley to plead to four misdemeanor counts of simple possession in Davidson County and one count of conspiracy to commit official misconduct in Williamson County.

Raybin would not allow Headley to speak to reporters on Wednesday, saying the plea bargain brought "some closure to this terrible tragedy that impacted Ricky Headley and his family, the Sheriff's office and two Tennessee counties."

"As long as he was charged with felony offenses he had no choice but to stay in office and fight," Raybin said. "To resign would have been an admission that he was guilty of a felony. He didn't commit any felony. Those charges have been dropped."

Headley was arrested on Jan. 31, 2007, as part of an investigation of Brooks Pharmacy on Trousdale Lane in Nashville. Headley was charged with more than 30 counts relating to prescription drug fraud in that case. Last fall, Headley was indicted by a Williamson County

Grand Jury on four charges of official misconduct since he was wearing his uniform and driving his county-issued vehicle during visits to the pharmacy.

Smith, speaking after the hearing, said the plea bargain accomplished the main objective of District Attorney General Ron Davis.

“The main objective of General Davis was to see that Mr. Headley was removed from office,” Smith said. “If we had asked for felonies or jail time, Mr. Headley would have remained in office.”

Smith discounted the idea that Headley received a “sweet deal.”

“First and foremost the objective of General Davis, with concurrence of General (Torry) Johnson, was to see to it that this sort of runaway train comes to a screeching halt,” Smith said. “We had to remove the sheriff from office. People in the county I think felt embarrassed by the situation and we had to respond to that.”

Davidson County prosecutor Shannon Poindexter said there was never any indication that Headley was selling the Hydrocodone pills he obtained from Brooks without a prescription.

Poindexter said the theory under which Headley had been charged with felonies in the case was untested in court although she felt the state had a winning case.

“While again I believe it to be a firm winnable charge, it has not been tested,” she said. “Rather than run the risk of testing it in this case and have Mr. Headley remain in office pending appeals that could take two years or more, we opted to allow him to plead to some of the misdemeanor counts in the indictment. I would not term this a sweet deal. I think the end result, in terms of him losing his current livelihood, I think it would be a misnomer to call it a sweet deal.”

Smith said that Headley’s actions did not reflect on deputies serving in the department and related a recent incident that occurred as a deputy booked a young man into the jail on drug charges.

“(The deputy) said he arrested him and brought him into the county jail and the young man who was arrested for drugs looked at the picture of the sheriff and said, ‘I can’t believe that this man is having me arrested... and he is doing the same thing I am doing,’” Smith said. “I could just hear the level of frustration in that deputy’s voice because the fact is that every member of the Sheriff’s Department ... are individuals of great integrity.”

Wearing a navy blue suit and orange dress shirt, Headley answered, “Yes, sir” to every question asked by Blackwood as his wife Melissa sat behind him.

Headley received a sentence of 11 months, 29 days on each of the five counts, although jail time for each was suspended. The four in Davidson County are to run consecutively and the Williamson County sentence will run consecutive to those, Blackwood said.

While silent, the strain of the judgment showed on the face of the former lawman, who has said he now plans to pursue another dream — a gospel music career.

“Being sheriff for this man has been a life’s ambition. It was a dream job,” Raybin said. “It was something he cared about. It was something that was part of him and still is part of him.

“This was a difficult decision for Mr. Headley and his family, but it was an easy decision when he had to consider that his family comes first, his community comes first,” Raybin said. “You all can have lots of sheriffs, but there is only one wife and two children and that is what we are moving forward with.”

Headley has been in treatment for his condition during the past year, both inpatient and outpatient. Raybin promised to explain that process in more detail during a March 24 hearing before Blackwood where he will seek judicial diversion for Headley.

If Blackwood approves judicial diversion, Headley’s record could be expunged or cleared of the charges after a period of time.

How that would affect the stipulation in the plea agreement that Headley cannot hold an elected office nor seek a political appointment of any kind was not clarified by Raybin. Smith said he felt the stipulation would apply in the future although no action could be taken if Headley decided to run for office after his probation ended.

Chief Deputy Dusty Rhoades is currently operating the department on a daily basis. Until Williamson County Commission Chairman Houston Naron or County Court Clerk Elaine Anderson receive Headley’s resignation, it is not effective, so Rhoades would not speak about his future in a leadership role.

Whoever is selected by the County Commission to serve as interim sheriff will serve until the Aug. 5 general election. The person who wins that election will serve until August 2010, when Headley’s term would have ended.

Posted on: 2/14/2008