Man in high profile theft case convicted

By SESHADRI KUMAR

Joey Sula, a friend of noted Fort Bend County political consultant Karen Pearson, was sentenced to 20 years in prison for stealing $548,000 from her.

A jury in the 400th District Court in Fort Bend County, presided by visiting judge D.W. Woods, handed down the sentence on Monday.

The judge ordered that Sula will undergo the sentence consecutively, meaning the convict will spend 10 years in the penitentiary for theft and another 10 years for money laundering. He will also have to pay a fine of $10,000 on each count.

Sula's defense was that Pearson had "loaned" him the money and that he did not steal it. His default in not repaying the loan should be a civil matter and not a criminal offense, Sula's attorney Larry Vick argued.

Assistant District Attorney Scott Carpenter produced ample evidence in emails and text messages to convince the jury that Sula indeed stole the money from Pearson.

The jury found Sula guilty of theft and money laundering after more than two hours of deliberation last week.

Carpenter said Sula was supposed to invest $400,000 of Pearson's money, but he did not make the investment.

In another instance, he was given the money on a collateral that Sula expected to receive from a litigation with Wells Fargo Bank. No such litigation existed and the collateral was false, Carpenter said.

Sula received the money from Pearson from July 2006 to August 2007.

Carpenter said after the theft charge was established the fact that Sula knowingly spent the stolen money exposed him to the money laundering charge.

This case had a chequered history.

Sula made an unsuccessful attempt to get the charges dropped alleging prosecutorial misconduct and conflict of interest. He implied that Assistant District Attorney Mike Elliott, who had represented Pearson as an attorney, arrested him on trumped up charges.

Pearson was also a consultant to Elliott's wife, Annie Elliott, who is an elected District Clerk in Fort Bend.

The judge dismissed Sula's claims after Carpenter argued that Elliott had nothing to do with the investigation of Sula in the current case.

Contrary to the defense claim, which was widely published, Sula was arrested by the Harris County Sheriff's Deputies on a Louisiana warrant. A criminal case of theft from a casino is pending against Sula.

Several months later Sula was indicted in Fort Bend County by a Grand Jury. Elliott did not present the case before the Grand Jury as was reported in a section of the press.

Elliott was a witness when the Harris County officials arrested Sula as Elliott had known Sula before through Pearson and was able to identify him.

After the Fort Bend County officials obtained an arrest warrant, Sula tried to escape to Japan.

In a Fort Bend County warrant, he was arrested by the Homeland Security in Guam and was extradited to Fort Bend County to stand trial.