

Crooked lawyer played \$600,000 on lotteries

By PAUL LEGALL
The Spectator

A STONEY Creek lawyer who admitted cheating clients and investors out of about \$1.7 million was told to expect a long jail sentence when he appears in court again next month.

Albin Rogala, 42, pleaded guilty yesterday to 31 counts of fraud in connection with a bridge financing scheme in which about 30 creditors lost from \$4,000 to \$210,000 each.

Provincial court Judge Anton Zuraw said a "lengthy period of incarceration is necessary for deterrence" and adjourned the case until June 9 when he will sentence Rogala.

Rogala, who was disbarred earlier this year over the scam, will be allowed to remain out of custody until then.

Peter Speyer, an assistant Crown attorney from Kitchener, said police estimated that Rogala had spent about \$600,000 on lottery tickets, had

invested about \$244,000 in the Power House Restaurant in Stoney Creek and had squandered an undetermined amount on his "own personal concupiscence (lust) of the flesh."

He did not spell out precisely what he meant by "concupiscence of the flesh." But he told the judge it was hard to determine how much Rogala had spent on these indulgences because they involved a kind of business where "books are not kept."

Mr. Speyer said police found no evidence Rogala had secreted investors' money in a Swiss bank account or that he had lived an extravagant lifestyle with the stolen money.

He said the former lawyer — he specialized in real estate law before his disbarment — spelled out the workings of his investment scam in a 3½-hour confession after he surrendered to the Hamilton-Wentworth fraud squad Jan. 10.

According to the Crown brief, Rogala gave acting sergeants Bill Campbell and Mike Campbell permission to search his law office and bank accounts.

Mr. Speyer said most of the victims were businessmen and sophisticated investors who gave Rogala money to invest in short-term loans for third parties involved in real estate transactions.

In all cases, the former lawyer promised to pay back the principal with interest and/or a bonus within a pre-determined period of time.

Mr. Speyer said the scheme, which started a few years ago, may have been well-intentioned at the beginning and that a number of victims had made successful investments before the scheme collapsed late last year.

During the later stages, Mr. Speyer indicated, Rogala used the money to pay off old debts or for personal indulgences such as lottery tickets, which he bought in large blocks from

at least 22 outlets.

The losers, who were concentrated around the Stoney Creek-Hamilton area, included retired newspaper publisher Roger Brabant, who got stung for \$210,000; real estate developer Walter Galdenzi, who lost \$90,000; former regional chairman William Sears, who was out \$34,000; and school trustee Michelle Clarke, who was taken for \$30,000.

But there were ordinary working people, too, such as Walter Oskroba, who lost his life savings of \$50,000.

In a letter to Rogala, which was read in court, he demanded his money back and chastized the former lawyer for his actions.

Mr. Oskroba wrote that he had worked hard "by the sweat of my brow" to save money, "not for my own pleasure, but to give my children a foothold in society."

"You knew you were at the end of your rope and should not have
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abused me," he told Rogala.

While he was involved in the bridge financing scheme, Mr. Speyer said, Rogala appeared to have little time left to practise law.

During a four-year period from 1985 to 1988, he collected a total of about \$90,000 in salary.

During this same period, however, he won a number of lotteries and collected amounts ranging from \$1,500 to one windfall of \$50,000.

But he refused to have his picture taken and paid an associate to pick up the winnings, according to the Crown brief.

Nothing sinister

Mr. Speyer suggested that he was shy about publicity because he didn't want his investors to know where he was spending their money.

But defence lawyer Al Cooper countered there was "nothing sinister" about buying lottery tickets and said his client had voluntarily surrendered to police before "anybody was on to him."

Rogala said nothing and showed no obvious emotion during the proceedings.

A bachelor, he lives on Sunrise Drive with his mother.



Albin Rogala: pleaded guilty