

Four people testify they never received furniture: fraud trial

By **KIM ARNOTT**
Special to *The Champion*

The trial of a Campbellville man began this week with testimony from four former furniture store customers who told a Milton court they paid for items they never received.

Charles Currie, 43, is facing 17 charges of fraud under \$5,000 and one charge of fraud over \$5,000 in connection with dealings at the Village Pine Shoppe.

Hamilton resident Michael Giusto told the court that in September 1997, he put down a \$1,200 deposit on a \$3,898.50 order for bedroom and dining room furniture.

Mr. Giusto testified that Mr. Currie told him the furniture would be delivered in about a month, at which time the remainder owing would be due.

However, a month later Mr. Currie called to ask for more money.

"He explained to me that his suppliers needed more funds so if I wanted my furniture it would be in my best interest to give him more money," testified Mr. Giusto.

Mr. Giusto said he gave Mr. Currie an additional \$1,500 at that point, and then another \$500 in December 1997, when Mr. Currie said he needed more money to obtain the furniture.

"At this point I was getting a little skeptical and a little worried," Mr. Giusto told provincial court Justice J.D. Takach.

"But I wanted the furniture and I wanted the transaction to be closed."

When he still hadn't received his furniture by April 1998, Mr. Giusto called the Village Pine Shoppe and cancelled his order, he testified.

Although he said Mr. Currie told him he would have his money returned, Mr. Giusto told the court that no refund ever materialized despite regular phone calls to

the store.

"(Mr. Currie) kept on coming up with excuse after excuse," said Mr. Giusto. "On one occasion, he told me the store was robbed and he was going through insurance claims."

Eventually, Mr. Giusto testified, Mr. Currie simply stopped taking his phone calls.

A small claims court judgement against Mr. Currie's mother Oriana Currie — in connection with the Village Pine Shoppe — eventually awarded money to Mr. Giusto, but he testified he has never seen any of the cash.

On cross-examination, Mr. Currie's defense lawyer Anthony Bryant suggested that Mr. Giusto had never actually purchased the furniture but was simply putting money down on a layaway basis.

He suggested Mr. Giusto had eventually cancelled the order because he needed the money back.

Mr. Giusto disagreed, saying he had cancelled the order because it was late and he no longer wanted the furniture.

The court also heard from Debra and Ian Manson, a Mississauga couple who paid in full for a bedroom suite they testified they never received.

Ian Manson told the court that Mr. Currie blamed the delay in delivery of the furniture on the fact that an employee responsible for staining furniture had broken her hand twice.

Another former customer, Diane Pender, told the court that she gave the store a \$1,000 deposit against an oak entertainment unit — which she never received.

She told the court she was repeatedly told the unit was simply not ready, and never received either the furniture or her money back.

The trial has now been adjourned until June 4. It's expected to run another 16 days and continue into the fall.

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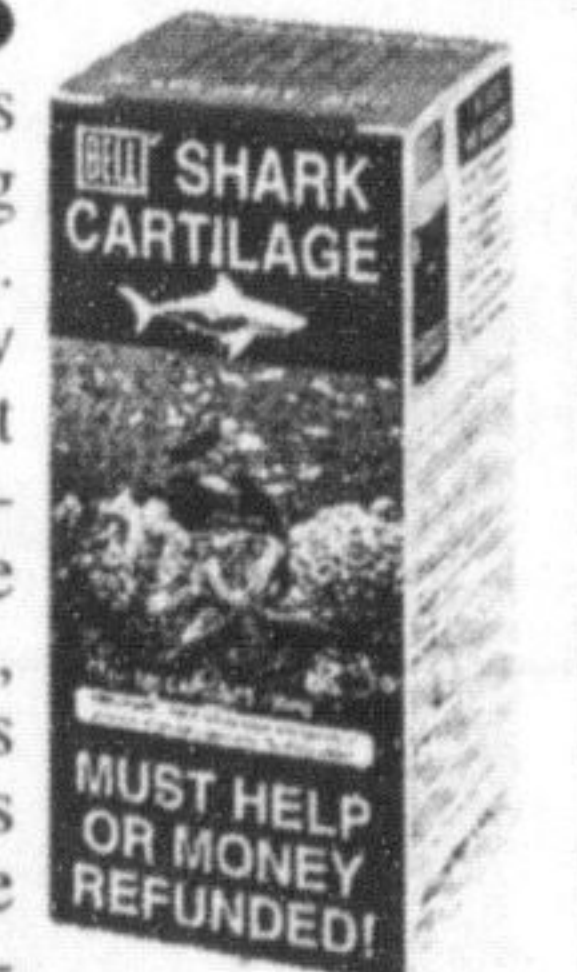
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