

# Bank robbers about to face fate

*Crooked cop handed inside information to robbers to terrorize bank employees*

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Staff Writer

Four convicted bank robbers, including a Niagara Regional Police officer, will have to wait until Tuesday to learn their fate.

Justice Ted Minden reserved judgment after a two-hour sentencing hearing in Newmarket Friday.

Crown attorney Peter Westgate called for 10-to-12-year jail terms for Const. Richard Owens, 37, a nine-year traffic unit veteran, and Stuart Joseph Bailey, 36, of Richmond Hill, who has been described as the gang's ringleader.

Owens used his position as a police officer to gather information on bank employees so his accomplices could intimidate them during the robberies and ensure co-operation, court heard during a 45-day trial, which ended May 5.

The pair were convicted of two Richmond Hill robberies — a September, 1994 heist at a Bank of Montreal branch and a December, 1996 hold up of a Yonge Street Scotiabank.

The gang netted close to \$300,000, which has not been recovered.

Owens and Bailey, former co-workers at Brinks security, were also convicted of four counts of attempted robbery and one count each of conspiracy to commit robbery.

"They were motivated by greed and the easy gain," Westgate said. "The callousness of these individuals — they knew the seriousness of the act, they knew the impact it would have if they were caught, on their careers, their families and their children, yet they continued."

Owens' lawyer, Bill Trudell, told Minden his client's life-long dream was to be a police officer.

"This fall from grace is extreme," he said. "He has lost his position in the community, he has lost his position as a police officer, he will never again work in the field that was his true vocation."

He asked Minden to sentence Owens to a term of less than two years to avoid jail time in a federal penitentiary.

"He knows and I know that jail is a necessity, but a federal penitentiary would be crushing for everyone," Trudell said. "It would crush this man who has stepped out of character."

Owens, wearing a grey suit, glasses and a goatee, remained impassive during the hearing. The father of two boys, 14 and eight, was described by family and friends in letters to the judge as shy, sensible, docile and peaceful.

During the trial, Minden heard Bailey would stake out the banks, noting licence plate numbers of employees as they arrived for work. He would pass

along the plate numbers to Owens in Niagara, who would then run them through the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) for personal information.

While Owens did not participate in the actual robberies, he gave crucial information to Bailey, who along with two accomplices, would hit the branch about two weeks later.

The three armed, masked robbers used employees' names as they handcuffed them. They were able to tell the workers where they lived, what cars they drove, how many children they had and where those children were.

"There was extensive planning by Mr. Bailey and that involved Mr. Owens securing as much information as possible about the employees for no other reason than to add confusion and terror to those employees," Westgate said.

York Regional Police Staff-Sgt. Bruce Ringler cracked the case when he asked the Ministry of Transportation to conduct an audit and learned 10 bank employees' plates had been run from Owens' Niagara Regional Police computer terminal.

The gang were finally caught after an aborted robbery in Scarborough on July 5, 1997. Mark John Hands, 42, of King City was found guilty of two counts of attempted robbery.

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