



Judge dismisses jurors in major meth case

Entire pool of potential jurors poisoned by remark

15 HOURS AGO • BY TONY LYSTRA / THE DAILY NEWS

A roomful of potential jurors in a significant drug case was dismissed Wednesday because of a snafu during jury selection, once again delaying the trial of suspected meth kingpin Sidney Potts.

Potts, 62, is accused of using his Oregon Way car lot, Potts Family Motors, as a front for a large-scale meth ring. Jury selection began Tuesday, and the trial on money laundering and drug charges was supposed to begin this week.

On Wednesday, a potential juror told the court during questioning that he had “a negative business dealing” with Potts, Superior Court Judge Michael Evans said in a phone interview Thursday. Evans, who is presiding over the trial, dismissed the juror from the case and assumed the man was told he was free to go.

Unbeknownst to those in the court, the man rejoined the crowd of potential jurors and eventually made his way back into the courtroom. Evans said he continued to ask questions of the jury pool. When he asked if any potential juror felt he or she might be predisposed to supporting the defense or prosecution, the man spoke up, once again, saying he’d had a business relationship with Potts.

Only then did court officials realize the juror was back in the court room. The damage had been done, Evans said. Given the context of the question, there was a strong case that the jury had been tainted against the defendant and that any conviction that might result from the jury pool would be overturned on appeal.

Evans dismissed all of the potential jurors. Jury selection will begin again Tuesday with a new jury pool, Evans said.

“It is frustrating,” Evans said. But, he said, “It’s part of being human.”

The case has been plagued by other problems. Last fall, it was revealed that Longview police listened to recordings of jailhouse phone calls between Potts and his lawyer. A former U.S. attorney who was brought in to investigate the matter determined that the breach was likely an accident, and a judge ruled that the case could go forward.

Other delays came as Potts tried to represent himself in court. Potts groaned and made other outbursts during a recent hearing and was warned by a judge to better control his behavior. Another judge eventually ruled that Potts was not qualified to defend himself. A new public defender was appointed and the trial was rescheduled.

The Longview Street Crimes Unit arrested Potts and several alleged accomplices in an August 2012 sting and seized 25 cars, more than \$33,000 in cash and nearly a pound of meth worth at least \$10,000.