

BLACKMAIL CASE IN JURYS HANDS

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Author: STACEY ALTHERR

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In closing statements yesterday, the prosecutor and defense attorney in the trial of a Smithtown highway worker gave different interpretations of a meeting at the center of the blackmail case.

Jurors later deliberated but Judge Martin Efman sent them home last night after no verdict was reached.

David Clark, 41, of Kings Park, was charged with first-degree attempted coercion.

The Suffolk County district attorney's office said that Clark, frustrated that he had been turned down for several promotions, handed a DVD to Daniel Ryan Jr., the son of Superintendent Daniel Ryan Sr., depicting Ryan Jr. using a town-owned truck to plow his mother's driveway. Ryan Jr. is also a Smithtown highway employee.

The plowing occurred before Ryan Sr. was elected superintendent. Ryan Jr. has not been disciplined.

In his closing argument yesterday, defense attorney Michael Brown said Clark gave Ryan Jr. the DVD following an argument they had, and that Clark never asked for a promotion in exchange for the DVD.

According to testimony, Ryan Sr., with the help of the town's public safety office, clandestinely taped a meeting between himself and Clark where prosecutor Kevin Ward said it was clear the DVD was offered in exchange for a promotion, and that Clark knew that a public release of the tape would embarrass Ryan Sr. both personally and politically.

"The defendant recognized the inherent value of what's on that DVD," Ward told the Suffolk County Court jury in Riverhead, adding that Clark never tried to give the DVD to the police or anyone in legal authority.

Brown, however, told the jury that Clark handed the DVD over to Ryan Jr. after Ryan Sr. pointed Clark out in a meeting for personal ridicule.

Before the incident in which the DVD was handed to Ryan Jr., Clark had applied for a promotion and was denied by Ryan Sr. Clark filed a grievance and, after the meeting with Ryan Sr., won a subsequent arbitration giving him the upgraded title of "Highway Construction Supervisor Grade I."

About 20 people showed up yesterday morning in support of Clark.

Credit: BY STACEY ALTHERR. stacey.altherr@newsday.com