

Pair reaches plea deal in city bar drug case

By Jay Hodgkins
Staff Writer

BALTIMORE — In a re-arraignment held Wednesday, the U.S. Attorney's Office sealed a plea agreement with the primary suspect in a massive federal drug investigation while a prominent local attorney and former Ocean Pines board member also accepted a deal.

Pesto's Bar and Grille owner Paul Apostolopolous, 36, of Salisbury and Christopher Llinas, 40, a lawyer from Ocean Pines, were not scheduled to go to trial on a multitude of federal drug charges until July 17, but both accepted plea agreements from U.S. Attorney Rod J. Rosenstein that were offered to them June 6.

Apostolopolous agreed to give up hundreds of thousands of dollars in various bank accounts as well as four properties in Salisbury, one in Ocean City and one in Blades that were in his name, his wife's name or in both of their names, according to the plea agreement.

The Salisbury businessman also pleaded guilty in the Wednesday court session to conspiracy to distribute and possession with intent to distribute heroin and cocaine, conspiracy to engage in money laundering and transportation of stolen goods.

U.S. Attorney spokeswoman Valerie LeDuc would not specify further terms of the deal such as treatment of Apostolopolous' wife, Wendy, or brother, Dominic, who are also defendants in the upcoming trial, or what sentence they would suggest for Apostolopolous in court.

However, on charges of conspiracy to distribute and possession with the intent to distribute, Apostolopolous can face no less than 10 years in jail and up to life in prison. He could face up to 20 years and 10 years in prison from the other two charges and faces a maximum of nearly \$5 million in total fines, according to the plea agreement.

In the plea agreement, Apostolopolous admitted Pesto's was often used as a place to store and sell cocaine, heroin, marijuana and prescription pills, and admitted that between 1999 and July 2005 that he, his brother and various other drug dealers in the

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operation distributed between 3 and 10 kilograms of heroin and 15 to 50 grams of cocaine on Maryland's Eastern Shore.

Apostolopolous also named accused New York drug dealer Angel Garcia as his source for much of the drugs, and admitted to wiring \$110,000 to Garcia for drugs.

Llinas pleaded guilty to obstructing a federal drug investigation and could face up to 20 years in prison, however, Llinas said in a phone interview Thursday that his deal with the U.S. Attorney's Office specifies they will recommend a sentence of 10 to 16 months to the judge when he is sentenced Sept. 22. The judge does not have to accept the suggested sentence.

In the plea agreement, Llinas consented to admitting he was purchasing three "8 balls" — an eighth of an ounce — of cocaine per month from Apostolopolous as well as 50 to 70 Percocet and oxycodone pills per month.

Llinas also admitted to removing a multitude of drugs from Pesto's after federal agents arrested Apostolopolous in an effort to cover up the drugs and obstruct the federal investigation.

"I did have a drug and alcohol issue, but I've been clean and sober for a little over six months, and that truly is a wonderful thing," Llinas said Thursday.

"I took the path of least resistance and stand ready to accept the consequences of my conduct," Llinas said. "I've lived a life of service up to now and I hope to find a way to be of service after all this is done."

Llinas, 40, apologized to his wife, two children and other

family, and said he would not be taking any more clients in his personal practice.

The U.S. Attorney's Office Grievance Committee official Mel Hershman said when Llinas is sentenced, he will likely be disbarred by the Maryland Court of Appeals because of the seriousness of the felony.

LeDuc did not specify how the U.S. Attorney's Office would proceed against Wendy and Dominic Apostolopolous or Andres Morales, who are still set for the July 17 trial originally set for all five defendants.

Apostolopolous' plea agreement also names a myriad of drug dealers, users and accomplices in the extensive drug network, but LeDuc would not discuss future charges against any other parties.

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