

FOOTBALL

Sandusky	20	Willard	29
Barberton	6	Shelby	20
St. Mary's	14	Tiffin Columbian	21
Clyde	14	Norwalk	12
Huron	20	Bellevue	34
Perkins	7	Upper Sandusky	0
Port Clinton	17	Vermilion	13
Margaretta	7	Midview	0
Monroeville	18	Ottawa Hills	9
Crestview	0	Danbury	7

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Sandusky

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Lottery

Daily: 500; Pick-4: 8482

SUNDAY



Help's available for drug and alcohol abusers.

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ODOT employee cleared of coercion

By BILL MISHLER
Staff Writer

NORWALK — A Municipal Court jury found an Ohio Department of Transportation employee not guilty of political coercion late Friday afternoon.

After the jury deliberated 56 minutes, Donald Roth, 43, 31 Maple St., Norwalk, who is the supervisor of the Huron County ODOT garage, was acquitted of a second-degree misdemeanor charge of coercion.

Members of the five-man, three-woman jury said there was not enough evidence to support the charge that Roth coerced Norwalk businessman Harlon Jennings into buying a ticket to a state Democratic Party function.

Roth was accused of telling Jennings, owner of Jennings Ready Mix, 40 Woodlawn Ave., his future dealings with ODOT would be jeopardized if he did not buy the ticket. The alleged threat took place April 29, 1983, at the counter of Jennings' business.

Roth, a former two-time nominee for

mayor of Norwalk, quickly left the courtroom after the verdict was announced.

Interviewed later in his home, he expressed relief.

"I'm glad it's over," he said as he relaxed in a chair.

Asked if the accusation against him affected his wife, Mary, and his eight children, Roth smiled and gestured toward one of his sons, who was jogging through the house and laughing.

"If they've got something to eat, I guess they're happy," Roth said, smiling.

Would a conviction have cost him his job?

"I can't answer that," he said.

The verdict came despite Jennings' Thursday testimony: "He (Roth) said he was selling tickets to a Democratic dinner in Columbus and if you want to continue being on the approved vendor list you'll have to buy these tickets."

Businesses need to be on the list in order to bid on state projects.

Jurors said there were three reasons for the not-guilty verdict.

• Jury Foreman Virginia Smith said Jennings' employees Sue Mikesell and Ron Albright did not give the same version of events as Jennings. Ms. Mikesell testified she did not recall any mention by Roth of a vendor list, a bid list or tickets; she testified she thought Roth was just seeking a contribution.

Albright testified he heard no mention of a bid list, and he also thought a donation was being sought, not a ticket purchase.

• Juror Carol Davis pointed out that Jennings did not complain about the alleged April 29, 1983 coercion until 1984 when investigators, spurred by newspaper accounts of alleged ODOT shakedowns, first questioned Jennings.

• "There just wasn't enough evidence," said juror Linus Ott.

Roth took the stand in his own defense late Friday afternoon and said, "I don't remember threatening him."

"We felt there was probable cause (to

file the charge). We don't feel we did anything wrong," said Law Director Reese Wineman.

Wineman said he feels he has a much stronger case against the only other ODOT employee charged in the investigation, former ODOT Ashland office Administrative Assistant Matthew Cunningham.

"As far as everything we know, there were additional events" in the Cunningham case, Wineman said. Cunningham, 46, Brunswick, is scheduled for trial Nov. 1.

Wineman said Cunningham's alleged coercion of William Dauch, owner of Dauch Concrete, Norwalk, covered an extended time period as compared to the single incident that led to Roth's trial.

Huron County Democratic Party Chairman John Allton, whom Wineman accused in court of trying to threaten him into dropping the Roth case, said: "All along I knew Don was innocent because I knew Don. I know Don isn't a

political guy. If the thought he was coercing somebody had crossed his mind, he would have messed his pants.

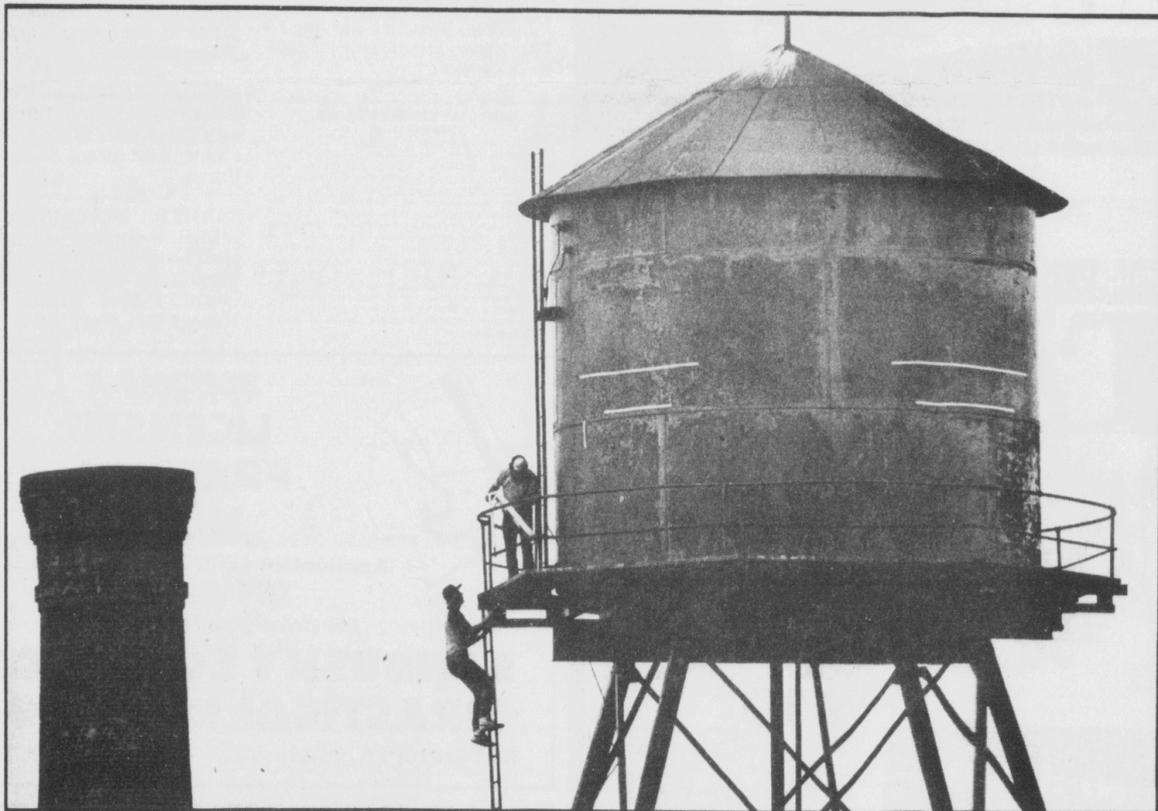
"I thought Reese knew that. What I was trying to say is that everybody has to sell tickets, and you never know when somebody is going to complain. I often have to buy tickets, and I don't always like it," Allton said.

In his closing argument, Roth attorney Ben Chapman said the evidence showed no one had told Roth whom to contact or how to sell the tickets, that Roth had waited a week before trying to sell the 10 tickets he had received, and that he sold two of the 10.

"He only sold two tickets! Is this a man who's out coercing people to buy tickets?" Chapman asked the jury.

Wineman closed his case by arguing that political contributions must be an exercise of freedom of choice.

"If that freedom of choice is interfered with," he said, "the system is subterfuged."



(Register photo — CHRIS CLARK)

Before and after — Painters tackled the job of giving this old water tower a new coat of paint last week. The tower sits atop a building at Water and Jackson streets owned by Perry Keller. The painting is part of the renovation of the building. Mike Ward (left), Mike Gorby (center) and Mike Ackerman had just about completed the job by this week.



(Register photo — TIM FLECK)

Fight ends football game early

PLYMOUTH — A fight involving players, coaches and fans broke out with 20 seconds left in the Black River-Plymouth game Friday, forcing referees to call the game.

The fight started as Black River defensive back David Savick was running 99 yards for a touchdown after intercepting Plymouth quarterback Troy Keene's pass. Penalties nullified the touchdown and left Black River with a 29-24 win.

While Savick was running down the field, Black River assistant coach Mark Kepler apparently ran onto the field and hit Keene in the head, according to Peter Paddock, a witness.

Players and fans from both sides of the field rushed onto the field and began fighting.

No injuries were reported.

Kepler and Keene could not be reached for comment Friday night.

Plymouth head coach Richard Roll declined to comment about the fight, saying he "would rather not point the finger at anyone."

"We're just trying to piece this thing together," Plymouth Police Chief Robert Conley said.

Police locked the Plymouth team inside the gates of the field as the Black River players boarded their bus, Paddock said.

Plymouth was on Black River's 16-yard line, trying for the go-ahead touchdown, when Keene threw the interception and Savick intercepted on the one-yard line.



News digest

GM layoffs start: General Motors Corp. said it is laying off 10,900 workers at four plants in the first U.S. cutbacks resulting from a strike by GM Canada workers.

In Toronto, bargainers for the United Auto Workers and GM Canada broke off a rowdy bargaining session without reaching agreement. The UAW went on strike Wednesday. The walkout involves 36,000 workers at 13 plants.

Soviets soften: The Soviet Union is willing to include American cruise and Pershing missiles deployed in Western Europe in a proposed nuclear arms freeze, a foreign ministry spokesman indicated.

The spokesman, Vladimir Lomeiko, also hinted Moscow might soften its insistence that NATO remove the U.S. weapons before the suspended Geneva nuclear arms talks can be resumed.

Jacksons perform: Michael Jackson and his brothers dazzled a Cleveland Stadium audience with bright lights and energetic dancing but some still thought the cost of the Friday night show was too high.

Some 35,000 people attended the show.

CIA plane crashes on Salvador spy mission

WASHINGTON (UPI) — An unarmed CIA spy plane monitoring arms shipments by Nicaragua to Salvadoran rebels crashed into a mountain at a rebel stronghold near San Salvador Friday, killing all four Americans aboard.

Reagan administration officials said the mission of the unarmed plane was "to assist the government of El Salvador" in detecting movements and identification of shipments of arms and ammunition by the insurgents in U.S.-backed El Salvador.

Sources close to the Senate Intelligence Committee said the

plane apparently was part of the interdiction program to prevent the leftist Sandinistas from funneling arms into El Salvador.

"The aircraft was flying during heavy rain during limited visibility and crashed into a mountain near Salvador," officials said. They later clarified that to say San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador.

A U.S. official at the embassy in El Salvador said the plane crashed into the Guazapa volcano, 15 miles north of San Salvador. The sprawling volcano, 4,686 feet tall, has been a guerrilla stronghold since 1981. The official refused further comment.