

# Money-laundering trial gets underway

By Chris Ison  
Staff Writer

The prosecution called them "a drug dealer's dream come true." But defense attorneys countered Monday that the six defendants in the so-called "Long Cadillac money-laundering case" are on trial in part because they refused to be suspicious of black people with money.

Attorneys made opening statements in U.S. District Court in Minneapolis yesterday in a complex trial that is expected to last a month.

The six are charged with conspiring to help Twin Cities drug dealers launder profits through sales involving at least 12 luxury cars.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Nate Petterson said Long Cadillac in Roseville "became the dealership of choice for drug dealers." Among those who bought cars there was Ralph (Plukey) Duke, who is described as Minnesota's major drug dealer and is now

-serving a life sentence plus 40 years for drug-related convictions.

Other convicted and suspected drug dealers are expected to testify that they also bought luxury cars from two other dealerships: Long Imports and Long's Other Place, both in St. Paul.

Petterson told jurors that the conspiracy included helping prepare false credit applications to hide the fact that buyers were drug dealers, and advising the buyers to keep cash payments under \$10,000 to avoid reporting requirements that are mandated by law. The Internal Revenue Service uses the reports to track drug dealers and other criminals who buy big-ticket items with cash as a way to launder "dirty" money.

Though all are charged with conspiracy, some defendants also are charged with different crimes, which could make the case complex for the jury.

Defense attorneys yesterday attacked the reputation of the prosecution's expected witnesses, saying one already has committed perjury and others face long criminal sentences and have reason to "sell" their testimony in return for leniency.

Most of the defense attorneys also brought up the issue of race. The car buyers all were black. Although some of the defendants were suspicious because the buyers were young and had large amounts of cash, attorneys said their clients did not know they were drug dealers. To deny them service would have been discriminatory, the attorneys said.

The Long family has a 20-year history of helping the police, and had given police considerable information about Duke during that investigation, defense attorney Ron Meshbesh said.

On trial are Richard N. Long, 29, of Mendota Heights, former general manager of Long Imports in St. Paul

and later sales manager of Long Cadillac; Timothy P. Long, 26, of St. Paul, former sales manager of Long Cadillac; James Long, 29, of Vadnais Heights, former used-car salesman for Long dealerships; Terrence Graham, 50, of St. Paul, former used-car sales manager and finance and insurance manager for Long Imports in St. Paul; Gerald Bell, 62, of Maplewood, who owned West Auto Brokers in St. Paul; and Stephen J. Goethke, formerly the finance and insurance manager at Long Cadillac.

George Sonnen Jr., 42, of Mendota Heights, a former salesman at Long Cadillac, recently pleaded guilty to conspiracy to impede the IRS. He is expected to testify for the prosecution.

In January, Twin Cities auto dealer Wally McCarthy bought Long Cadillac; it is now called McCarthy Cadillac. Long Imports also was sold and is doing business under a new name.