

'Notorious' Hague Av. is antidrug success story

Nick Davis, a St. Paul activist, was remembering how it was when the law caught up with drug dealer Ralph (Plukey) Duke.

Not only did Duke get maximum sentences and fines. He was held up to public ridicule.

Minneapolis police used one of Duke's cars, a 1988 limited-edition Corvette, in antidrug programs at schools. There was a sign on the side: "Drug Users Lose Everything."

After Duke was sentenced to life in prison, a billboard went up in St. Paul.

"Goodbye Plukey Duke," it read.

"Do you suppose," Davis asked sarcastically, "there'll be billboards saying, 'So long, Longs?'"

There probably will be no billboards no matter what a jury decides in the complex money-laundering case involving the former owners and employees of Long Cadillac in Roseville, which was Plukey Duke's car dealership of choice.

Duke was the dealership's best individual customer, testimony at the federal trial shows. At times, he would enter the business carrying brown bags filled with cash.

Deliberations, which began Wednesday and broke off over the weekend, are to resume Monday.

While jurors deliberated, Davis took a reporter on a walking tour of Hague Av. in St. Paul. Expensive cars, sold to drug dealers on a cash basis, once had been a common sight along Hague.