

Tellico Village man acquitted of assault

By Hugh G. Willett
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An assault case sparked by accusations of insults on a Loudon County blog ended in a not guilty verdict for a Tellico Village resident last week.

Angelo Paul Leone, 69, was found not guilty of assaulting Tellico Village General Manager Winston Blazer during an August 2009 incident at the property owners association offices.

Leone — who feels he was harassed in the days before his arrest because he was among a group of residents who requested documents related to the management of the POA — said he deserves an apology for being wrongly accused.

"It's terrible, what they tried to do to me," Leone said.

A spokesperson for the Tellico Village POA disputed Leone's version of events leading up to the arrest. In a written statement, Blazer pointed out that it was the district attorney general's office that brought the case, not the POA.

"This unfortunate issue is now in the past. The Dis-

trict Attorney General filed charges in this case, and a few employees were subpoenaed as witnesses. It has no impact on our relationship with our residents. Our employees continue focusing on providing outstanding service to our more than 7000 residents and property owners," Blazer said in the statement.

Assistant District Attorney General Frank Harvey, who prosecuted the case, did not return requests for comment.

Leone said he feels the POA needs to do more to make amends, including reinstating his right to attend POA meetings. A spokesman for the POA said Leone's right to attend meetings was only suspended for 30 days in 2009.

Life at Tellico Village was not always so complicated, Leone said.

He and his wife, Patricia, moved to Tellico Village from Long Island, N.Y., in 2007 after being drawn to the state by the climate, scenery and low taxes.

In 2008, he was among a group of residents who began asking questions about the financial management of the POA and requesting documents.

Another Tellico Village

resident, Richard Anklin, later successfully sued the property owners association for access to those documents.

Anklin testified in court that he asked Leone to pick up an application to run for the POA board of directors.

Within days, Leone said, he and his wife were the subject of what he calls "the most vile and disgusting" defamations on a local Tellico Village blog known as Topix. The posts referenced Leone's intentions to run for the board and also made references to his wife that he said were "of a sexual nature."

"When I picked up the application, they thought I was running for the board," Leone said.

Anklin testified that to his knowledge only Blazer and his secretary would have known that Leone picked up the document. Leone said he believes the only way for whoever posted the defamations to have learned about his picking an application was through Blazer's office.

"I never told anyone I was going to run. I had no intention of running," Leone said.

A spokesperson for the POA said it was his understanding that Leone picked up the application after a public meeting attended by a number of people, not all of whom are known to the POA.

Leone said he tried to contact Blazer at his office to discuss his concerns. He also tried to contact members of the board of directors. He said that on Aug. 24 he received a phone message that Blazer wanted to talk.

"I went down to his office to talk with him. I was totally calm at the time," Leone said.

Leone said that after asking to speak with Blazer in private, he entered Blazer's office, sat down and presented a copy of the Topix posts.

"After a few minutes the conversation deteriorated. He said I was bitten by the snake," Leone said. "I reached over to pick up the papers, and he grabbed at them. His stapler fell off his desk."

Leone claims that as he stood up and began to leave Blazer's office, his passage was blocked by Blazer, who he said began yelling, "Call the police!"

"I sat down and waited

for the police," he said.

A Loudon County Sheriff's Department deputy arrived and, after speaking with Blazer and several office workers who heard the argument but did not witness the incident, arrested Leone for simple assault.

Leone said his arrest, the first in his life, was an ordeal, but nothing compared to the troubles he and his wife experienced in the aftermath of the incident.

During the time he was waiting for his day in court, he said efforts were made to isolate him and his wife from the community, including an unsuccessful attempt to force him out of the Lions Club.

After requests for judicial diversion were rejected by the office of District Attorney General Russell Johnson, Leone said he had no choice but to go to trial. Despite testimony from Blazer and several POA employees who were in the office during the incident, the jury took about one hour to find Leone not guilty.

"I feel I can relax a bit now. The whole process has been stressful," Leone said.