



THE PLAIN DEALER

Third man in 1988 slaying is officially free

Portage prosecutor won't seek retrial

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Freedom was just outside Bob Gondor's garage door Friday morning but it wasn't official -- or even known to him -- until a friend found two obscure Latin words on a Portage County Web site.

The words were "nolle prosequi," which meant the Portage County prosecutor was not willing to go ahead with his retrial for a 1988 homicide.

A jury already decided the same case in favor of co-defendant Randy Resh a week earlier.

No authorities called to tell Gondor that his 16-year ordeal was over, and he still had to go to county authorities in Ravenna to have his house-arrest ankle monitor removed.

Until Prosecutor Vic Viglucci filed his formal motion Friday morning, Gondor was still at risk of another trial and another conviction, even though a jury already had acquitted Resh.

And until then, Gondor could not drive, could not leave the small five-acre Mantua farm where he grew up, could not even contemplate when or where or how he would spend the rest of his life.

Resh and Gondor were convicted in 1990 for the 1988 slaying of Connie Nardi, whose body was found in a Geauga County pond. Both men were freed on bond in January after the Ohio Supreme Court ordered new trials.

The evidence against them was not physical. There were no tire tracks, fingerprints,

bloodstains or DNA.

There was only the word of Troy Busta, a proven liar who pleaded guilty to Nardi's slaying to save himself from a death sentence. He testified in Resh's trial earlier this month.

In a Friday interview, Vigluicci said nothing of the men's innocence.

He said only that Gondor had already served about as much time as a new conviction would have merited, and also that it was unlikely that prospective jurors had not heard about last week's acquittal.

Cleveland attorneys Mark Marein and Steve Bradley, part of the defense team for both men, were less circumspect.

As friends and family began to rally around the men in Gondor's garage, Marein described them as innocent victims whose prosecution should tell the public "that it could happen to anybody."

As he spoke, English and Hungarian flowed together in the garage where Gondor spent most of this year, cleaning it, working on his late father's car, rebuilding a work bench - anything to relieve stress and create a diversion.

The Hungarian belonged to a large part of Gondor's clan, a portion of the Hungarians who have lived in the area for years, said Patty Vechery, a friend.

The car, a Porsche 944, stood as one of many reminders of what Gondor lost. He could not drive it or even seek a driver's license until he was freed Friday. And Gondor's father, who bought the flood-damaged car at an auction, died while his son was in prison.

Next to it stood a 1975 Norton 850, a ferociously fast motorcycle that carries an opaque layer of dust from 16 idle years.

Gondor said he intended to put that back on the road, too.

But first, before he would entertain any thoughts of that, or even sip his first celebratory beer of the day, he and brother Jim drove to their dad's grave for a 15-minute visit.

Gondor brushed off questions about suing the state for their wrongful convictions and imprisonment.

"I'll tell you what I told people in prison when they asked me that," Gondor said: "I'll take the second step out of prison after I take the first step."

Clarence Elkins already has taken both of those steps and was in the garage Friday to

inaugurate their restored freedom. He was freed in 2005 after serving around seven years - less than half the time Gondor and Resh served - for rapes and a murder he didn't commit.

Elkins won more than \$1 million from the state.

His advice to Gondor and Resh: "Slow and easy. Try not to get too overwhelmed."

Gondor observed that at least he and Resh got to ease into freedom a little at a time, while Elkins went directly from prison to the shock of total freedom.

Even when Gondor went to get the ankle monitor removed, Resh had to drive him..

Vechery is eager for Gondor to get his license, too. "He's a terrible back-seat driver," she half-joked, speculating that that might be a "prison thing, you know, you don't have control of everything."