

# St. Louis Post-Dispatch

## St. Louis Post-Dispatch (MO)

July 25, 2007

### Consultant held in case that turns on misuse of money

Author: Kavita Kumar

ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH

Edition: Third Edition

Section: News

Page: A1

Index Terms:

POLITICS;OFFICIAL;ARREST;COLLEGE;CAMPAIGN;FINANCE;FUND-RAISING;FRAUD;CRIME;St. Louis Community College;Steven Wyatt Earp

Estimated printed pages: 3

Article Text:

A political consultant was arrested Tuesday morning on accusations he stole more than \$220,000 from a St. Louis Community College campaign fund last year and used the money to buy a BMW, a Lexus and an engagement ring that topped \$10,000.

Steven Wyatt Earp, 31, of Fenton, was charged late Monday by the St. Louis circuit attorney's office with two felony counts of stealing more than \$25,000 and two felony counts of stealing more than \$500.

"He used (the stolen money) to finance a high quality of life, is what the evidence indicates," said assistant circuit attorney Scott Ingram.

Earp posted bond, which was set at \$100,000, and was expected to be released Tuesday afternoon.

Clinton Wright, Earp's attorney, said Earp is innocent and will fight the charges.

"It seems fitting that this has exploded during the release of the latest Harry Potter book," Wright said. "Because it seems like a witch hunt."

Wright pointed fingers at the college's campaign committee but declined to elaborate.

The committee, which was made up of college employees and supporters, has been asking authorities to investigate the possible misuse of funds.

The campaign committee raised about \$600,000 from donors to pass a property tax increase in April 2006. The referendum failed, and soon after the election, college officials and the campaign committee noticed questionable payments and began looking into how money was spent during the campaign.

In recent months, the FBI and St. Louis police have been investigating. Members of the campaign committee who were interviewed said investigators asked about Earp and Michael Rohrbacker, a college board member who wrote the checks during the campaign. Rohrbacker and Earp are friends.

Earp, who says he is a descendant of the famous frontier marshal, was paid by the committee \$507,436 to oversee mailings, canvassing and campaigning. According to the criminal complaint, he falsely charged the committee on four separate occasions in March of last year.

In one instance, he charged the committee for \$218,715 for postage of five mailings, but bank accounts and other records show he only paid \$116,200 for postage, the complaint

said.

The complaint, citing bank records and other sources, said Earp also charged the committee:

- \$130,720 for printing when he only paid \$44,230.
- \$40,000 to pay canvassers when he only paid them \$20,620.
- \$60,000 to pay \$20,000 each to three canvassing supervisors. Earp paid two of the supervisors - his brother, John Earp, and his current wife, Tiffany - that amount. But the third supervisor, Ramona Marshall, received only \$2,000, so Earp overbilled for \$18,000, the complaint said.

Earp's contract said he would be paid a fee of \$30,000 plus reimbursement of expenses, the charges say.

"It's very clear from the people that we've talked to that Mr. Earp was paid a flat fee for his services, so he wasn't supposed to get any sort of mark-up for his printing or mailing," Ingram said.

Days after the April 2006 election, Earp and his soon-to-be wife bought two new cars that cost nearly \$20,000 with a down payment and taxes, the complaint said, citing bank records. He also spent more than \$10,000 for an engagement ring.

Earp told the Post-Dispatch in January that he had made a good living on recent political campaigns and that he bought the cars used, making payments on them like most other Americans. He also said he got married in Jamaica last summer. He said that he made a good profit from the campaign but said he earned it.

According to charges, Earp also deposited \$90,000 into an account for Decrevi Inc., a company he owned and which was used to receive money from other clients and to pay other consultants. Earp and his wife regularly took money out of the account as a "salary." He also withdrew several thousand dollars in cash for unknown purposes, the charges say.

The campaign committee has also questioned Rohrbacker's handling of money. It claimed in January that he spent \$13,000 in the campaign account without its knowledge. The committee also claims he improperly forgave \$60,000 in debt in a campaign finance report and improperly dissolved the committee.

"We investigated the full campaign," Ingram said. "We've charged the people who we feel there is compelling evidence to charge at this point."

Richard Wilkes, spokesman for the St. Louis police, said Tuesday that the police investigation into the campaign is ongoing.

"It is not done," he said.

Joel Schwartz, Rohrbacker's attorney, declined to comment Tuesday.

Bob Nelson, president of the college's board, said the "matter lies with the circuit attorney's office, and we'll have to wait and see what happens."

St. Louis Community College Chancellor Henry Shannon could not be reached for comment.

Memo:

CAMPAIGN FUND

Copyright (c) 2007 St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Record Number: 1001078885