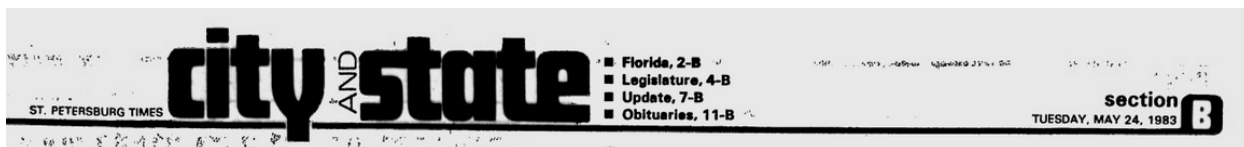
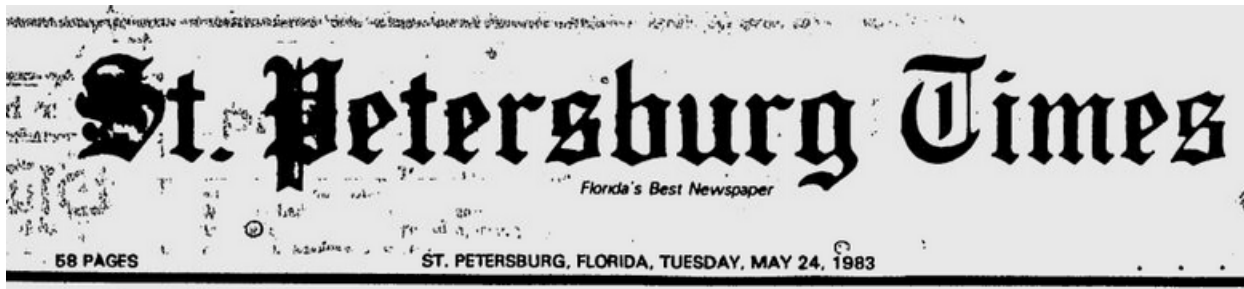


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# Jurors returning to decide amount Straight must pay

By MILO GEYELIN  
St. Petersburg Times Staff Writer

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — Attorneys for a former client of Straight Inc. will try to convince a federal jury this week that the St. Petersburg-based drug treatment program routinely held clients against their will even after program officials were warned that the practice is illegal.

Two weeks ago a six-member jury agreed in U.S. District Court in Alexandria that Straight unlawfully imprisoned 20-year-old Fred Collins Jr. last year when Collins visited the program's St. Petersburg headquarters. Collins claims he was forced to join Straight against his will and kept there for five months until he ran away last October.

Beginning today the jurors will decide how much Collins can collect in damages from Straight. Collins had sought \$750,000 when he filed the suit, but the jury disallowed his claims of assault and emotional harm by Straight staff members.

Collins' suit is the most extensive and damaging legal action ever taken against the drug treatment program, which has five branches nationwide. Attorneys for both sides say they do not know how significant the case is until the jury returns an award for damages.

COLLINS' ATTORNEYS will try to present testimony and evidence that Collins' case was not isolated. According to Collins' lawyer, Philip Hirschkop, Straight has shown a "pattern and practice" of keeping clients against their will, both before and after Collins was in the program.

Attorneys for Straight, however, are expected to object

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that the evidence about other cases should not be allowed because little of it directly involves Collins' treatment at Straight.

Among the witnesses and sworn statements Hirschkop wants to put before the jury are:

✓ Two women who claim they were kidnapped by their parents and other parents of Straight clients, driven to Straight's St. Petersburg headquarters and forced to join the program "voluntarily."

One woman, Arletha [REDACTED] of Sanford, is expected to testify that she was kidnapped two months before Collins joined the program. The other woman, Hope [REDACTED] of Orlando, is expected to testify that she was kidnapped last February, more than three months after Collins ran away.

✓ Sworn testimony from former client Keith [REDACTED] of Jacksonville, who says that he suffered six broken ribs and nerve damage to his arm when groups of other clients sat on him when he tried to leave Straight.

✓ Terrell R. Harper, a former official from the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS) who was responsible for monitoring Straight's activities. Harper and another HRS official are expected to outline charges of physical abuse and false imprisonment filed with HRS against Straight. HRS has asked Straight for a response and "corrective actions."

✓ Sworn testimony from a prosecutor in the Sarasota state attorney's office, which has been investigating charges of possible criminal abuse at Straight's Sarasota branch for more than a year.

According to testimony by prosecutor David M. Levin, Straight's Sarasota branch engaged in "a standard policy or practice . . . to advise clients routinely that they could not leave the program."

**LAST MARCH** U.S. District Judge Albert V. Bryan Jr. ruled that during the first portion of the trial, Collins' attorneys could only introduce evidence directly relating to Collins' treatment. Bryan left open the possibility that other

LAST MARCH U.S. District Judge Albert V. Bryan Jr. ruled that during the first portion of the trial, Collins' attorneys could only introduce evidence directly relating to Collins' treatment. Bryan left open the possibility that other evidence involving other clients could be introduced during this week's portion of the trial.

Straight attorney Ronald Goldfarb could not be reached for comment Monday to discuss the evidence of other cases. But in legal documents filed in the federal courthouse in Alexandria, Goldfarb has asked that most of the testimony be excluded from the trial because none of it pertains directly to Collins' personal treatment.

Goldfarb, a Washington attorney regarded as an expert on the rights of prison inmates, also complained that a half-dozen sworn statements Hirschkop wants to submit were made on short notice during the two weeks before the trial began May 9.

"(Collins' attorneys) actions, in taking a series of depositions in defiance of the court's order . . . and without giving timely notice at this late date in the case, constitute a pattern of harassment that has highly prejudiced" the case, Goldfarb contends.

**COLLINS SAYS** that he was forced to join Straight during an eight-hour high-pressure interview last summer when he visited the program to see his younger brother, who is a client at Straight. At the time, he was on vacation from his first year at college.

Though Collins acknowledged that he drank alcohol and smoked marijuana while in high school, he testified that those problems ended when he left home and went to college.

Since March 1982, Collins' "drug" use while at Virginia Polytechnic Institute was limited to weekend beer drinking with his college fraternity, he testified. His freshman grade-point average was 3.2 out of a possible 4.0.

Collins said he joined Straight after Straight staff members told him that his father would withhold his college tuition unless he tried the program for two weeks. Once he joined, Collins said, he was prevented from leaving until he smashed a kitchen table through a window and fled.