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2003

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\$250,000 bail in tree felling

Alpine man, two co-defendants plead not guilty

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Date: September 23, 2003

Section: NEWS

A wealthy currency trader was led away in handcuffs but freed within hours Monday after pleading not guilty to charges that he cleared public parkland to build a private tennis court. Bail for [REDACTED] was set at \$250,000 at the hearing in Hackensack, his first court appearance since a grand jury indicted him last month on theft, criminal mischief, and other charges.

Two men accused of following [REDACTED] orders to clear the 1.5-acre swath behind his Alpine mansion also pleaded not guilty. Superior Court Judge John Conte set their bail at \$25,000 apiece.

[REDACTED] who paid \$4.2 million for the mansion, quickly made bail and was released. His two co-defendants, [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], were being held Monday evening in the Bergen County Jail.

[REDACTED] attorney, Jay D. Fischer, said the case "represents an egregious instance of state agencies making a mountain out of a molehill."

But Assistant Bergen County Prosecutor Michael Maher said [REDACTED] actions amounted to "an outrageous crime." Replacing the trees removed from the park land would cost about \$600,000, he said.

The tract abutted Krieger's Anderson Avenue home in an isolated section of woodland owned partly by Bergen County and partly by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission.

██████████, who runs ██████████ Co. Inc. in Fort Lee, originally tried to negotiate a deal for the land, according to state and county officials. He's accused of clearing it after negotiations collapsed.

██████████ and ██████████ who worked as part-time caretakers for ██████████, allegedly began felling trees and bulldozing the area in the spring of 2002.

Park officials say they removed 300 trees, demolished a stone wall, and altered the drainage of several streams.

██████████, who works for the New York State Department of Roads, will have a tough time making bail, said his attorney, **Michael Beatrice**.

"This is cutting down trees," Beatrice said. "It isn't a violent crime.

"It seems Mr. ██████████ is being hung on the cross of Mr. ██████████'s fame and wealth."

██████████, a high school special-education teacher, also will struggle to make bail, said his attorney, Ira Levine.

"It just flies in the face of common sense," Levine said.

But Conte said the gravity of the charges, combined with the extent of the property damage, justified the bail. The theft charge, the most serious the defendants face, carries a sentence of up to 10 years in prison.

██████████ also faces two lawsuits, one filed by the county and one by the state.

Fischer said the Bergen County Prosecutor's Office should have let civil court resolve the matter.

He accused Bergen County Prosecutor John Molinelli of violating ethics rules by making public comments about the case at the time of the indictment - comments that were printed in The Record.

Malcolm A. Borg, a Palisades Interstate Park Commission member, is chairman of North Jersey Media Group, which owns The Record.

Fischer asked Conte to restrain the Prosecutor's Office from commenting publicly on the case, but Conte declined.

Molinelli said his comments were in compliance with ethics rules governing lawyers, as well as the state's public information guidelines.

The case is scheduled to return to court for a status conference Nov. 3, but the defendants vowed to file motions to reduce bail and dismiss the indictment before then.

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