

Chaz Equipment exec convicted of trying to bribe public employees argues for new trial

By **SUSAN SPENCER-WENDEL**

Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

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WEST PALM BEACH — Lawyers for Robert H. Wight asked a judge this morning to set aside the Chaz Equipment Co. vice president's recent conviction on the charge of conspiracy to commit unlawful compensation or reward for official behavior.

Or, in the alternative, argued attorney Gina Leiser, grant Wight a new trial.

Last month, jurors acquitted Wight of two first-degree felonies - racketeering and conspiracy to commit racketeering - but convicted him on the lesser charge of conspiracy to commit unlawful compensation or reward for official behavior. That crime is a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison. With no criminal history, the 57-year-old Wight probably would face probation rather than prison

under state sentencing guidelines. Sentencing is tentatively set for July 21.

Even so, it was a crushing defeat for the man Chaz Equipment employees called a "Boy Scout" and father of an Eagle Scout, and for his wife, Ellen, and two sons.

Leiser argued before Circuit Judge Edward Fine today that arguments prosecutors used at trial - including the fact that other persons had pleaded guilty somehow impugned Wight's presumption of innocence - should warrant a new trial, and that prosecutors had not met their burden of proof.

Fine said he would take the matter under consideration and rule later.

Prosecutors Scott Richardson and Danielle Croke argued at trial last month that Wight plied government officials with gifts to secure business, and keep millions of taxpayer dollars flowing toward the Wellington company.

One of 13 people arrested in a corruption sting in March, Wight invoked his right to a speedy trial in the first vetting of evidence from the investigation dubbed "Operation Dirty Water", in which a group of Chaz employees and various municipal employees who accepted gifts were charged.