

TRIAL:

Items the FBI seized from the McMahan home included a list of "straw donors" to his 2002 campaign.

FROM A1

low it.

Eddy and Krahl also asked Payne to acquit the McMahans on all counts because of a lack of evidence.

Payne agreed to dismiss one mail-fraud count having to do with a 2004 Democratic National Convention poster that the McMahans allegedly mailed to Steve Phipps, a Kiowa businessman.

Testimony by Tim Arbaugh, a former employee of the auditor's office, and Phipps indicated that Phipps gave the McMahans \$3,500 so they could go to Boston for the convention.

If true, the gift would be improper because McMahan's office regulated the abstract industry, and Phipps, a multimillionaire, owned several abstract companies in partnership with former state Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester.

Prosecutors believe that the McMahans sent the poster to show their appreciation for the trip.

Among the last witnesses called by the government were four FBI agents who were involved in various aspects of the investigation, including three interviews with Jeff McMahan and an interview with Lori McMahan as agents were serving a search warrant at the couple's

About the trial

Oklahoma State Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan and his wife, Lori McMahan, face charges of conspiracy, mail fraud and Travel Act violations in connection with their alleged acceptance of bribes.

The indictment alleges that the McMahans accepted for his 2002 campaign about \$77,600 in illegal "straw donations" allegedly orchestrated by Steve Phipps, a Kiowa businessman who, with former state Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester, owned several abstract businesses.

The auditor's office regulated the abstract industry at the time, but oversight was moved to an independent board Jan. 1 in connection with the allegations that Jeff McMahan showed favorable treatment to Phipps over competing abstractors.

The penalty for each count is a prison sentence of five to 20 years and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Tecumseh home.

Seized from the home was a list of "straw donors" who illegally contributed to McMahan's 2002 campaign; a copy of the Ethics Commission rules, open to the page concerning the acceptance of items of value; documentation of airline tickets to Providence, R.I., for the Democratic National Convention trip; and a ring and matching earrings that Phipps has testified that he bought for Lori McMahan on two all-expense-paid trips to New Orleans.

Erin Bradshaw, a strategist in

McMahan's 2006 campaign, testified about a "dead list," which she described as a list of "Phipps' people" who contributed in the 2002 campaign.

Jeff McMahan instructed her not to call anyone on the dead list, Bradshaw said.

Phipps was under investigation at the time in connection with payments to straw donors to contribute to Democrats' campaigns and bribes to legislators to funnel state funds to a dog food factory that Phipps owned with Stipe.

Bradshaw said she wanted to call one of the contributors — Melia Rose, who gave the maximum \$5,000 in 2002 — to see whether she would give again.

"I was told I was not allowed to contact her because she was one of Phipps' people," Bradshaw said, noting that Jeff McMahan told her that Rose was a secretary and couldn't afford to contribute.

FBI Special Agent James Shook testified that Lori McMahan said Phipps gave her earrings and a matching ring on two separate trips to New Orleans.

FBI Special Agent Steve Kaitcer said Jeff McMahan denied in August 2006 that he ever had any business or secret meetings with Phipps.

But Kaitcer said that Jeff McMahan, during an interview in June 2007, admitted having had contact with Phipps during his 2002 campaign and wondering how some of the contributors, employees of Phipps', could afford \$2,000 donations.

Lori McMahan has said in FBI interviews that she — not her husband — is responsible for illegal activities. She admitted that she accepted about \$5,000 in cash from Phipps for her husband's campaign on two

occasions.

The legal limit for contributions per election cycle is \$5,000.

Kaitcer testified that Lori McMahan said she told her husband that a New Orleans trip was paid for with a tax refund, but that when he found out that Phipps had paid for their hotel room, she was supposed to reimburse Phipps.

Phipps testified that he never received any reimbursement.

Kaitcer said Lori McMahan said she couldn't recall whether she left \$1,200 on Phipps' coffee table or just said she did to satisfy her husband.

Kaitcer said Jeff McMahan said that he recalled only the earrings and that he told his wife to return them to Phipps.

Jeff McMahan described them as costume jewelry worth about \$50. A sales receipt shows that they cost \$500.

Kaitcer said Lori McMahan said her husband was present when Phipps gave her the ring. A sales receipt shows that it cost \$1,640.

Kaitcer said Jeff McMahan said he saw his wife with about \$5,000 in cash that she was using to buy campaign signs.

"He said he didn't know where it came from, and he didn't ask because he didn't want to know," Kaitcer said.

He testified that Jeff McMahan told him he suspected that the cash came from Phipps.

Phipps testified last week that he gave \$157,882 to McMahan's 2002 campaign by reimbursing straw donors who made contributions within the legal limits and by passing cash to Lori McMahan to pay for signs and radio advertisements.

Susan Hylton 581-8381

susan.hylton@tulsaworld.com

Wagoner official won't run

WORLD CAPITOL BUREAU

OKLAHOMA CITY — Wagoner County Commissioner Jerry Hefner, whose name has been mentioned in recent federal court proceedings, is not seeking re-election.

Hefner did not register to run for the seat in last week's filings. He could not be reached for comment Monday.

A former Democratic state representative, Hefner was named by witness Steve Phipps who alleged that Hefner and two other legislators received kickbacks after state money was steered to a Phipps project. Phipps was a longtime partner of former state Sen. Gene Stipe, D-McAlester.

Testimony about Hefner came up in the trial of state Auditor and Inspector Jeff McMahan. The auditor and his wife, Lori, face federal charges of conspiracy, mail fraud and Travel Act violations linked to their alleged acceptance of bribes.

Hefner has not been charged with any crime.

Former Democratic state Rep. Mike Mass of Hartshorne has entered into a plea deal with federal prosecutors. The other lawmaker, former Rep. Randall Erwin of Nashoba faces seven counts in the case.

GIRLS:

A family member found the bodies not far from the Placker family home.

FROM A1

ies were found.

The longtime friends lived in the outskirts of Weleetka, more than two miles north-east of the city. They attended the rural Graham school district, Choate said.

Their bodies were found

along the west side of County Line Road, about three-fourths of a mile north of Coleman Road, the sheriff said.

Each girl had been shot several times.

Choate said the girls' bodies were found by Taylor's father, who had gone looking for the pair.

However, family members told The Associated Press it was Taylor's grandfather, Peter Placker, who found the bodies.

Choate said the Okmulgee County Sheriff's Office contacted his department shortly after 4 p.m. after receiving a 911 call.

Skyla was visiting the

Placker home when the girls decided to go for a walk "as they often did," Choate said. Their bodies were found about 30 minutes later.

According to Choate, Sky-la's mother called the Placker home and said she would drop by to pick up her daughter.

At that point, the sheriff said, Taylor's family went looking for the girls, and their bodies were found about one-fourth of a mile north of the home.

"I can't describe coming up on it," a sobbing Peter Placker told the AP as he tried to remember walking up on the scene. "I did it once, and I can't do it again."

Skyla was the carefree adventurer, the girl who walked barefoot almost everywhere and rode her bicycle down endless dirt roads, said her grandmother, Claudia Farrow. Where she went, her many cats followed, along with her pet goat. Skyla wanted to become a veterinarian, Farrow said.

Taylor was a big-hearted girl who rescued helpless turtles crawling in the middle of the road and wanted to become a forensic scientist, like on the TV shows, said Peter Placker, who said he raised Taylor like she was his daughter even though he was her biological grandparent.

The Oklahoma State Bu-

reau of Investigation has been called in for help in the case. Choate said authorities combed County Line Road for evidence Sunday and again on Monday.

The sheriff said some clues have been found and that his office has come up with possible suspects. He would not elaborate on any evidence found, nor would he say how many suspects are involved.

Choate said authorities still are trying to determine if the girls were killed by someone driving a car along the road "or whether someone just walked out of the woods and shot them."

"We're not eliminating anything at this point," he said,

as the OSBI and his deputies continued their search for more clues or possible witnesses.

Choate asked that anyone with information call his office at (918) 623-1122 or the OSBI at 1-800-522-8017.

Their killings have shocked much of the area's residents, he said.

"Murders are rare in this county," Choate said, noting the last homicide there occurred nearly three years ago.

Manny Gamallo 581-8386

manny.gamallo@tulsaworld.com

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

CAR:

Foster thinks he'll have it running by the end of the year.

FROM A1

agonizingly slow by the car's fragile state, workers are attempting to put some color back in the old girl's cheeks.

"A lot of the stainless steel cleaned up extremely well," said Dwight Foster, who took on the task of preserving the Belvedere through his company Ultra One. "But so many things are so fragile we have to be very careful."

"It's amazing that it has been one year since we saw Ms. Belvedere," said Sharon King Davis, who oversaw the Belvedere's unearthing and the activities surrounding it. "She has been on quite a journey."

Foster and relatives of Raymond Humbertson, a Maryland man with the winning entry in a 1957 contest for the car, picked up the Belvedere in November. At the time, Foster maintained optimism about his ability to not so much restore the Plymouth as preserve it.



Dwight Foster of Ultra One Corp. stands in front of a 1957 Plymouth Belvedere at his shop in Hackensack, N.J. The car, with four miles on the odometer, was buried as a time capsule in front of the county courthouse in Tulsa in 1957 and unearthed in 2007 as part of the state's centennial celebration. RICH SCHULTZ/Associated Press

He still thinks he'll have the Belvedere running by the end of the year, but admits it's been a big job.

"The clay that dried on it is basically concrete," Foster said during a recent phone interview.

Perhaps the biggest challenge has been the Belvedere's frame. Almost rusted through in spots when the car was recovered, it has since broken down completely, Foster said.

"We're going to have to

separate the body from the frame," Foster said. "We have a donor frame that we're going to set the body on."

Another delicate operation involves separating the "skin" of the trunk from its rotted underpinnings and reattaching it to a replacement.

Still, photos taken by Foster show some progress. He has even made up an advertisement for his company featuring the car and says he continues to receive inquiries about the Belvedere.

When asked if he regrets getting involved in the project, Foster replied: "Absolutely not. I feel that I'm the most qualified person to deal with it. This is personal for me. It's not even about business now. It's like an artifact from the Titanic."

"She's quite a traveler," King Davis said. "I do hope we see her again — and we just might."

Randy Krehbiel 581-8365

randy.krehbiel@tulsaworld.com

IRAQ:

Hurst earned the Purple Heart and the Bronze Star.

FROM A1

It was unclear Monday night how long he had been in Iraq.

Hurst received more than a dozen awards during his service, including a Purple Heart and Bronze Star.

He is survived by his parents and two brothers, officials at Fort Polk said.

As of June 9, at least 4,094 soldiers have died in Iraq, with 3,335 killed in action, according to the Department of Defense.

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