

Auto repair price-fixing ruling soon

District Judge James Mies is expected to rule in about six weeks whether price fixing charges against a number of metropolitan area auto body repair dealers should be dismissed.

Defense attorneys for 62 auto repair shops and 123 shop owners and operators, primarily from the Detroit area, urged in Livonia 16th District Court Monday that Mies dismiss the charges.

The businesses, including four new car dealerships and seven collision shops in Troy, Birmingham, Farmington Hills, Rochester and Redford Township, were charged with price fixing in February by the Michigan Attorney General's office.

A WAYNE County citizens grand jury indictment alleged the defendants, led by the Automobile Service Councils (ASC) of Michigan, a trade group based in Livonia, fixed auto body repair prices by agreeing to add a fixed percentage increase to the cost of each body repair job.

The ASC, 27590 Plymouth Road, is the principal defendant in the case.

In asking Mies to throw the case out, the ASC's attorneys cited:

- That the state's 1899 anti-trust law does not apply to businesses selling services.
- Insufficient evidence brought to the grand jury by the attorney general and;
- Misconduct by assistant attorneys general in statements and comments made before the grand jury.

"WE DENY that completely," E. Raymond O'Malley, assistant attorney general, said Tuesday in reference to the misconduct charge.

Neither he nor a defense attorney would elaborate on the charge Tuesday except to say it involved grand jury transcripts.

"We've been fully up front on everything," O'Malley said.

Defense attorneys reviewed an estimated 400 to 500 pages of secret grand jury testimony in preparing their dismissal motion.

The Attorney General's Office called 33 witnesses before the grand jury, the majority of them insurance company representatives.

O'Malley said the state "does not deny" the anti-trust law does not include services, but added that other cases involving services by businesses have been brought under the law.

The auto body repair case is the first criminal price fixing case prosecuted by the state in 50 years.

If Mies doesn't dismiss the case, preliminary examinations have been scheduled for Sept. 9.

Oakland train on tracks for pyrotechnics

The Detroit riverfront fireworks won't fly until June 30, but tickets for SEMTA's two "firecracker special" trains from Oakland County are on sale.

Round-trip commuter rail fare from the northern suburbs will be \$3.50 per person, including any child occupying a seat. All tickets must be purchased in advance.

TICKETS ARE available at the J.L. Hudson Pontiac Mall ticket office, Telegraph north of Elizabeth Lake Road, and the Royal Oak Greyhound Station, 202 Sherman Road.

They are also available at the Southeastern Michigan Transportation Authority (SEMTA) main office, 12th floor of the First National Building, 660 Woodward, Detroit; the SEMTA Shelby Ticket office, Shelby St. between Lafayette and Michigan; and the SEMTA Renaissance Center train depot, Beaubien and Franklin streets.

The first train will leave Pontiac at 7:30 p.m. June 30 and arrive at the Renaissance Center at 8:30 p.m. Stops include Bloomfield, 7:38 p.m.; Birmingham, 7:46 and Royal Oak 11 Mile, 7:55.

The second train leaves Pontiac at 8 p.m.; Bloomfield, 8:08; Birmingham, 8:16; and Royal Oak 11 Mile, at 8:25. It will arrive downtown at 9 p.m.

The fireworks will begin at 9:55 p.m. If they're postponed due to rain, the train tickets will be honored on the day the event is rescheduled.

Passengers can't switch trains for the return trip. The first train will leave 25 minutes after completion of the fireworks display. The second will leave 45 minutes after the display.

Ticket information is available from SEMTA toll free at 1-800-452-5161 or 952-5515.

Tisch gets space

Area organizers for the Tisch property tax cut proposal have opened a campaign headquarters in Southfield.

Nelson Realty Co. donated the office at 25657 Southfield Road, Suite 8, Southfield 48075. The office phone is 552-8858.

Proponents of a 50 percent reduction in property assessments from their 1978 levels are still seeking enough petition signatures to qualify for the fall ballot.

The measure, which lost in 1978 to a less drastic property tax limitation referendum, bears the name of Shilawassee County Drain Commissioner Robert Tisch, its main proponent.



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