

ATLANTIC COUNTY PROSECUTOR'S OFFICE

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NEWS RELEASE

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MAYS LANDING – Two men were sentenced to 70 years in prison Wednesday for a June 2006 armed robbery of five employees at a Somers Point TGI Fridays, Atlantic County Prosecutor Ted Housel announced.

Derrick Johnson, 48, of Atlantic City, and Gary Sayers, 43, of Atlantic City, each found guilty of multiple counts of armed robbery, burglary, criminal restraint, conspiracy, aggravated assault and weapons offenses, must each serve 56 years before parole eligibility.

Superior Court Judge James Isman sentenced the two men, who have lengthy criminal records, to extended terms. Before imposing sentence, the judge told the men, who were sentenced separately, that they “earned” long prison terms. Their records are equally horrendous and they had equal roles in the violent act of armed robbery, Isman said.

“This was like a scene from a movie or on T.V. It was a classic hold up. The defendants were laying in wait,” Judge Isman said. Johnson and Sayers created sheer terror for victims.

After 11 p.m. on June 22, 2006, Johnson and Sayers and Steven McGuire, 22, went to the TGI Fridays restaurant at located on MacArthur Boulevard. They were armed, wearing gloves and masks. They accosted a cook at the establishment while the employee was taking out the garbage. At gunpoint the three men forced their way into the restaurant. During the course of the robbery one of the men put a gun in the back of the manager’s head and forced him to open the safe. One gunman told another to “assassinate” the bartender. One man forced the bartender to tie up three of his co-workers hands with duct tape. The gunmen then locked the five employees in a walk-in refrigerator and fled, Chief Assistant Prosecutor Cary Shill, who handled the state’s case, said.

Shill told the court Wednesday that Sayers and Johnson should be incarcerated for as long as legally possible to protect the public.

“We have five hard working people,” Shill said of the employees at the TGI Fridays. “They finished their shift and were about to go home. Men came in wearing masks...These people lived through a nightmare.”

The defendants also addressed the court. Johnson said he was sorry for the victims. Neither Sayers nor Johnson admitted guilt.

At trial in September, the five victims were unable to identify the gunmen, but three of the victims recognized the mask that contained Sayers’ DNA, Shill said.

Testimony also showed that shortly after the robbery Johnson, Sayers and McGuire took off to New Hampshire.

On July 6, 2006 the three men returned to Atlantic City where upon McGuire turned himself in the following morning to Somers Point police. The Atlantic City police arrested Johnson and Sayers later that day. The police searched Sayers’ car and recovered two masks and various pairs of gloves. According to testimony from Christine Schlenker, a Forensic Scientist with the State Police, one of the masks contained DNA consistent with that of Sayers and a glove contained DNA from Johnson, Shill said.

McGuire pled guilty to robbery and conspiracy, prior to the trial. He will be sentenced at 8:45 a.m. on Friday before Judge Isman.

Anyone with information involving serious crimes is asked to call the Atlantic County Prosecutor’s Office at 609-909-7800 or go to the Prosecutor’s Office Web site at <http://www.acpo.org/tips.html> and provide information by filling out the form anonymously on the Submit a Tip page. People can also call Crime Stoppers at 609-652-1234 or 1-800-658-8477 (TIPS). Crime Stoppers offers cash rewards for information leading to the arrest and indictment of those who commit crimes in Atlantic County.