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Gary Peel grants wife ample divorce settlement



Gary Peel, his stepdaughter and wife Deborah Pontious-Peel, leave the federal courthouse with public defender Stephen Williams.

BY BRIAN BRUEGGEMANN

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The wife of Madison County lawyer Gary Peel, who was convicted on federal charges of child pornography and bankruptcy fraud, has divorced him.

Deborah Pontious-Peel, 46, of Glen Carbon, filed for divorce on Monday and a judge granted it.

Gary Peel, who did not contest the divorce, granted her all of his stocks, stock options and personal property, including their \$375,000 home in Glen Carbon.

Along with Pontious-Peel's divorce petition, a sworn document was submitted on behalf of Gary Peel, stating that he consented to a default judgment being entered immediately in his wife's favor. Associate Judge Clarence Harrison on Monday granted the divorce, which includes a property settlement agreement.

Gary Peel, 63, is awaiting sentencing on the federal charges, for which he could receive a jail term up to 40 years and a fine of up to \$250,000.

Acting U.S. Attorney Randy Massey, when asked Wednesday whether a judgment in the divorce could affect federal prosecutors' ability to have a fine imposed against Gary Peel, said: "Proceedings in civil court should not impact proceedings in criminal court."

Massey added, "The sentencing will happen in due course, and we will state our position in court. As a general rule, matters in civil court do not impact matters in criminal court. The fact that a person is or is not divorced isn't a matter that's considered as relevant to sentencing in most circumstances." Massey declined to elaborate.

Gary Peel's sentencing was originally scheduled for June 25, but it was postponed, at his request, to Aug. 3. He is being held in the Clinton County Jail while awaiting sentencing.

Peter Baroni, a law professor at DePaul University College of Law, said a judgment in a divorce case in favor of one spouse could possibly protect marital assets for that spouse.

"If that judgment in the divorce is final prior to the judgment in the criminal case, this certainly could be a way for her to preserve a substantial amount of the wealth," Baroni said.

The property settlement states that the Peel home on Kensington Court is currently in foreclosure and could be subject to bankruptcy proceedings, but if the property is freed of those entanglements, it is awarded to Pontious-Peel. The agreement also states that if any equity is gained from a sale of the house, the equity is awarded to Pontious-Peel.

In addition, Pontious-Peel was awarded the couple's 2002 Jeep Grand Cherokee -- with the same bankruptcy provisions as the home. She also was awarded any personal property she already has in her possession, all furniture and furnishings, all stock, all stock options and other personal property of Gary Peel. Gary Peel also assumed all of the couple's marital debt.

In March, after Gary Peel was convicted and ordered to jail, Pontious-Peel vowed to stand by her husband.

"His family can take all of his money, his dignity, his respect, his livelihood, but they absolutely can't take my love and the love of my family away from him," she said at the time.

Pontious-Peel could not be reached for comment Wednesday.

A federal jury convicted Gary Peel of trying to blackmail his previous wife, Deborah J. Peel, with naked pictures of her sister. Gary Peel and his previous

wife divorced in 2003 and reached a financial settlement. In 2005, Gary Peel filed for bankruptcy and asked that he not be held to terms of the divorce agreement.

In January 2006, Gary Peel put in his previous wife's mailbox nude pictures of her sister, Donna Rodgers, and threatened to mail them to the parents of the two women if Deborah J. Peel didn't drop her challenge to the bankruptcy. Gary Peel took the pictures in 1974, when he had an affair with Rodgers, who was 16 at the time, according to authorities.

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