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Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

Attorney Larry Kaluzny, who stood in for his son Todd, says robbery suspect Lawrence C. Lawson was not thinking rationally.

Accused thief: Jail was motive

Unemployed auto designer opts for odd defense: Cell was better than being

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

TROY -- Out of work and desperate, 60-year-old Lawrence C. Lawson entered a LaSalle Bank branch with a note and a loaded .357 Magnum to pull off the heist he considered for some time, Troy police say.

On the way out, he fainted and fell to the floor, they claim.

An Oakland County judge on Monday ordered the unlikely accused thief from Madison Heights -- an aging unemployed automotive designer -- to undergo a psychological examination to see if he's competent to stand trial on bank robbery charges that could land him life in prison.

Jail was all he was after, Lawson's attorney said of the July 13 heist.

"He did not really have an interest in stealing the money," said Todd Kaluzny, Lawson's court-appointed attorney. "He wanted to get caught. He was in a desperate situation."

Lawson, who has no criminal history, "had fallen on hard times and wasn't thinking rationally," Kaluzny said. He expects the mental tests, to be done within 90 days, with his belief.

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"His unemployment had run out and while he was staying with a friend, there was a chance he might soon get evicted because he couldn't pay his share of the bills," Kaluzny said.

"He thought the best way to deal with all of it was to stay in jail. I genuinely feel sorry for him."

Kaluzny confirmed Lawson was employed for more than a decade by J.S. McNamara Co. in Madison Heights, whose customers include the Big Three automakers and others, until he was laid off in November. Lawson, who has an engineering degree, also worked for another auto-related company for several years before McNamara, Kaluzny said.

Lawson told Kaluzny, contrary to police reports, that he has no medical problems, did not faint and "simply laid down on the floor and waited for police to arrive" at the bank.

Police say they know only what Lawson told them after his arrest.

"He told us his bills were piling up, he couldn't find work and had thought of robbing a bank for some time before he got up the nerve that particular day," said Troy Police Lt. Gerard Scherlinck.

Lawson's next-door neighbors on Edward Street said they knew him by sight. They were surprised he was locked up and faced charges that could land him in prison for the rest of his life. Lawson had moved in with a friend on Edward over the past year and frequently chatted before driving off in his black 2005 Chevrolet Malibu.

"My goodness, that's certainly no way to solve your problems," said Catherine

Napolitano, a neighbor. "He was always friendly, but we didn't even know his name

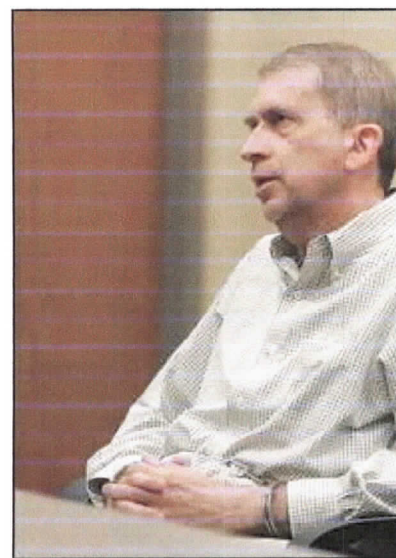
Lawson confided to Napolitano and her husband of chronic back trouble, his inability to find a job, and earlier this month even asked if the retired couple had any work they need around their house.

Terry Booth, a veteran FBI agent who's handled bank robberies in Michigan for 20 years, said Lawson sounded like "a very unusual bank robber."

"I've seen a lot of them over the years and about 80 percent are driven by a need to gamble," said Booth, adding some criminals get an "adrenalin rush" from breaking into a bank.

Serial bank robbers often can't stop because of other addictions, including greed, said Booth. He noted there was even a bank robber, a minister, who robbed 14 Metro Detroit banks for prostitutes.

Booth said people lose jobs "all the time" and the economy isn't always an accurate



Charles V. Tines / The Detroit News

Lawrence C. Lawson, a 60-year-old unemployed auto designer charged with a bank robbery, claims he wanted to go to jail because he couldn't keep up with his bills.
[See full image](#)

Robberies down

There have been 160 bank holdups in Michigan this year to date compared to 454 all of 2005. There were 454 total bank robberies in Michigan in 2004.

Across the U.S. there have been 3,400 robberies to date compared to 6,701 bank robberies total in 2005. There were 7,744 in 2004.

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation

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whether crime may go up or down. He noted how Michigan's current economy is
robberies are also down, compared to other years.

"Desperate people do desperate things but robbing a bank, that's a pretty big step,'
said. "And to go from no crime to a crime that serious is very unusual."

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