

Pawn shop owner cleared of weapons charge

BY JAMES MAYSE
MESSENGER-INQUIRER

An Owensboro pawn shop owner who was charged with possessing firearms while being an illegal alien was acquitted of the charge last week in federal court.

Antonis Panayi, owner of PGP Pawn on Triplett Street, was charged with having firearms in his store in March 2012.

A jury found Panayi not guilty Thursday in U.S. District Court. During the trial, the jury heard testimony that Panayi had been informed that he could handle firearms at the store, even though Panayi did not have a federal firearms license, Panayi's attorney said Monday.

According to the complaint filed in U.S. District Court, the investigation began when an agent of the federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms was doing a routine check on pawn shops and noted Panayi was the owner of PGP Pawn, but the store's federal

license to purchase firearms had been issued to a store employee.

Because Panayi is the store owner, the firearms at the pawn shop are considered to be his property.



Antonis Panayi

The employee told investigators in February 2012 that he had not been in the store since December 2011. The employee said that during that December 2012 visit, Panayi showed the employee two firearms he had pur-

chased, the complaint says. Panayi came to the United States on a student visa in June 2005 to attend Murray State University, but the visa expired in December of that year when Panayi did not enroll for classes, the complaint says.

Police searched the pawn shop last February and found 50 firearms in stock, which Panayi said either he or the employee with the firearms license had purchased, the complaint says.

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Panayi's attorney, William M. Butler Jr. said Monday that before his arrest, Panayi had been told by an ATF agent that he could have weapons in his pawn shop.

"I was able to show, when a federal firearms license was applied for, the ATF agent - after being informed by Mr. Panayi that he was not a U.S. citizen but that he intended to work on that and gain citizenship - told him, 'that's no problem,'" Butler said. "The proof was there was a meeting,

several people were present and the ATF agent told him, 'you're good to have a federal firearms license if you want one.'"

Butler said Panayi decided to not get a firearms license for himself. Although Panayi did not apply for a firearms license, Butler said the ATF agent told Panayi, "you're still good to handle firearms."

The ATF agent who charged Panayi is not the same agent who said Panayi could handle firearms, Butler said. "The jury believed he was informed by an agent of the government that it was OK to possess the firearms," Butler said.

According to the Associated Press, the 10th U.S. Court of Appeals in Denver ruled last year that illegal aliens do not have the right to own firearms.

Stephanie Collins, public affairs officer for the U.S. Attorney's office, said court records indi-

cate that Panayi is scheduled for a deportation hearing for May, 2014 in Chicago. Butler said Panayi has applied for permanent U.S. residency.

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