

Indicted officer returns



STONE

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An East Palo Alto police-woman indicted in a \$2.5 million fund-raising scam and called a "parasite" by other officers is back on duty while

she awaits trial. Lesa Carole Stone, 38, ex-wife of imprisoned former Santa Clara County Sheriff's candidate Armand Tiano, is working for the department while out on bond, East Palo Alto City

Attorney Michael Lawson confirmed yesterday.

Indicted officers are usually put on administrative leave until their cases are adjudicated, he acknowledged, but said East Palo Alto officials decid-

ed Stone could continue to work. The decision surprised San Mateo County Chief Deputy District Attorney Steve Wagstaffe.

"I know of no other officer

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indicted in this county who was put back on duty," Wagstaffe said. "Usually officers are put on administrative leave until the matter is adjudicated."

But Lawson insisted Stone's case was unusual.

"It's a tough call," he said. "It's unfortunate that this happened, and it's difficult for some people to understand why an officer would remain on staff, but there is a presumption of innocence."

The conduct, he noted occurred in the mid-1990s, before she was hired. And Stone now is performing only "administrative duties," Lawson said.

And if Stone remained on administrative leave, as most officers do, she must be paid even though she is not working, the city attorney noted.

"This way we get the benefit of her experience," Lawson said.

Stone and Tiano, along with 11 others, are charged in Santa Clara County with setting up phony police fund-raising groups and collecting millions of dollars.

None of the money — and prosecutors said \$2.5 million was a "minimum" — went to police organizations or families. Instead, it was spent on luxury cars, race cars, recreation vehicles and other extravagances, the indictment charges.

Stone and the other defendants are scheduled to go on trial July 21 in San Jose.

Santa Clara County Deputy District Attorney Martha Donohoe, who will prosecute the

group, said her office had no control over Stone's work while she was out on bond.

Stone has testified before the grand jury in the case, she noted, but would not say if she were cooperating with prosecutors. Stone continues to face felony charges in the case, Donohoe said yesterday.

The indictment charges that the phony fund-raising efforts used names such as "Santa Clara County Deputy Sheriff's Sports Association," even though they had no such affiliation.

Angering Millbrae police officers was one count saying the group had raised \$18,000 in the name of slain Millbrae officer Dave Chetcuti with phony organizations such as the "Officer Chetcuti Fund" — but his family never received a cent. Stone was not indicted on that count.

At the time of the indictment, Millbrae police Sgt. Rich Dixon referred to the group as "the lowest of the lows — these individuals are parasites."

Chetcuti was shot to death in 1998 during a routine traffic stop.

Indicted officers are usually subject to an internal affairs investigation that can lead to their firing, but Lawson said Stone's case was different.

"The indictment covers crimes committed before she worked for East Palo Alto," he said. And since she was not indicted at the time of her arrest, a background check would not have turned up anything, Lawson said.

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