

A Fort Dodge businessman and leaders of a Dubuque-based casino company pleaded not guilty Friday to charges that they illegally funneled donations to the re-election campaign of Gov. Chet Culver.

Steve Daniel pleaded not guilty to charges of making a campaign contribution in the name of another and willful failure to disclose a campaign contribution.

Daniel was the leader of

Webster County Entertainment when the group was working with Peninsula Gaming LLC to create the Diamond Jo Fort Dodge. That casino plan was killed in May when the Iowa Racing and Gaming Commission declined to issue the license needed to open the venue.

Phone calls seeking comment from Daniel and his attorney, Monty Fisher, of Fort Dodge, were not returned Friday.

In addition to Daniel, Brent Stevens, the chief executive officer of Peninsula; Jonathan Swain, Peninsula's chief operating officer; and Curt Beason, an attorney from Davenport who was advising the casino planners; entered not guilty pleas to campaign finance violations. Beason also pleaded not guilty to a charge of obstruction. He was the only one charged with that crime.

Also, not guilty pleas were entered for Webster County Entertainment and Peninsula Gaming. Both entities were charged with making a campaign contribution in the name of another and willful failure to disclose a campaign contribution.

Guy Cook, the Des Moines attorney representing Stevens, Swain and the casino company, had said earlier this month that his clients would plead not guilty.

"Peninsula Gaming and its company executives adhere to the highest standards of ethical compliance," he said on Oct. 11.

Daniel, others plea in casino case - Fort Dodge Messenger

Written by Administrator

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Special Prosecutor Lawrence Scalise filed all the charges on Oct. 11 after probing \$25,000 worth of donations made to Culver's re-election campaign late last year.

Those donations were made by Daniel and two of his associates in Webster County Entertainment, Jim Kesterson and Merrill Leffler Jr. Kesterson and Leffler, both of Fort Dodge, were not charged with any crimes.

The donations were made not long after Peninsula Gaming paid the three \$25,000 as a consulting fee.

Because the not guilty pleas were filed, an arraignment scheduled for Monday in Polk County District Court will be canceled. A trial date hasn't been set.

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