

The following is the text sent by State Attorney Norm Wolfinger to Florida Today for a “Guest Column” that ran in the paper in the Editorial section on Oct. 7, 2004. The paper made a few style changes.

I thank Florida Today for the opportunity to share my thoughts with the community on the recent exoneration of Mr. Wilton Dedge.

First, Mr. Wilton Dedge deserves to know that I respect the fact of his innocence and that the community supports him as he begins the difficult task of rebuilding his life. I have contacted local legislators and the governor’s office in that regard.

Second, I must offer some accurate information for Florida Today’s readers. Mr. Dedge was tried twice by two juries- 1981 and 1983- unfortunately resulting in what we now know were erroneous guilty verdicts. I was working at the Public Defender’s Office then, but I have since become familiar with the evidence. The following facts and other evidence are documented and any member of the public is welcome to inspect these documents at my office:

- With regard to the victim’s identification, review of police reports and trial testimony show she gave a very strong identification of her attacker. Within 48 hours of the assault, she directed a composite sketch that bore a striking resemblance to Mr. Dedge. More than a week later, she saw a person she believed was her assailant at a convenience store. It was Wilton Dedge. Today, because of science, we know Wilton Dedge was not the assailant.
- Transcripts from the 2nd trial clearly show defense counsel acknowledged that Mr. Dedge shared facts learned through the first trial with an inmate he met afterward. Counsel effectively argued the inmate made up the incriminating parts at the 2nd trial.
- Two pubic hairs were found on the victim’s bedding. In 2001, DNA tests were run and showed that neither hair belonged to Mr. Dedge or the victim, and in fact came from 2 different unknown sources. Hairs transfer quite easily. It is not unusual to find hairs not identifiable with a perpetrator at crime scenes. Neither hair came from the victim, but we know she was there. Trial testimony demonstrated that the hairs had numerous possible unknown sources other than the perpetrator.
- My office agreed to DNA testing of far more significant evidence- semen that could only be left by the perpetrator. Initial testing by defense contracted lab did not exclude Mr. Dedge. In 2003, the defense team stated in court that “all the testing that could be done had been done.” “Frankly there is nothing left to test”. Not true! On July 21, 2004, my office discovered in court through cross examination of the defense expert that semen evidence remained that could be tested through techniques available since 2001. My office requested the test over strong objections of Mr. Dedge’s attorneys. Yes, the test that set Mr. Dedge free in August was requested by my office and objected to by the defense.

I believe in our system of justice, although it is not perfect. Neither my office nor I are infallible, but I can offer you my continuing pledge that we will always approach our duties with professionalism, honesty and integrity.