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**MSI owner gave 'big-league gifts';**

**Firm bought access, prosecutors say**

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SPRINGFIELD-Instead of giving state government's political elite $ 35 fruit baskets for Christmas, Management Services of Illinois opted for a big splash: expensive steak and lobster tail packages.

"If you're going to be playing in the big leagues, you need to give big-league gifts," the firm's indicted owner William Ladd told jurors in MSI's federal bribery trial Monday.

Federal prosecutors contend that approach to gift-giving is partly what helped buy MSI access within state government and eventually defraud the state Public Aid Department out of at least $ 7.1 million in a bribery-related scheme.

Under defense questioning that lasted the entire day Monday, Ladd also shed more light on an exclusive dinner date Edgar had at Chicago's Ritz-Carlton Hotel with a group of MSI officials, including one who sipped on a glass of wine that cost more than $ 100.

At that May, 1994, engagement, where the firm and its partners committed $ 40,000 to Edgar's re-election campaign, the governor acknowledged he had "heard good things about MSI" and, at one point, even asked for advice about DCFS, Ladd said.

The Department of Children and Family Services was in near chaos after being hit with a spate of negative publicity, including questions about the agency's role in permitting 3-year-old Joseph Wallace to be returned to his violence-prone mother, Amanda, who ultimately murdered him in 1993.

"There was a lot of negative press on how DCFS was being run, and he was open to ideas on how to improve DCFS' image," Ladd said.

Ladd said he and his indicted former partner Michael Martin spent an hour with a "relaxed" Edgar along with two of MSI's then-partners, Terry Logsdon and Terry Bedgood.

Bedgood, a close friend of Gov. Edgar's, organized the dinner meeting at the urging of Edgar's campaign staff and was the one drinking the expensive wine, Ladd said.

Last week, Edgar testified his memory had faded about that evening encounter, recalling it as a campaign event where he was providing "face time." Edgar said he could only specifically remember Bedgood's presence.

Also Monday, the name of a prominent former state politician, Sen. Aldo DeAngelis (R-Olympia Fields), surfaced in court. Prosecutors want permission to confront Ladd with details about a 1994 investment by Ladd, Martin and DeAngelis in a Florida concrete-crushing company.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Patrick Chesley suggested that relationship is relevant in the current case because it constituted a conflict of interest that led Bedgood and Logsdon to end their business ties with Martin and Ladd -- a claim defense attorneys disputed.

In another development, U.S. District Judge Richard Mills angrily rebuked then dismissed a juror for clipping out newspaper accounts of the trial against his orders.