

MINGO HIRES CONTROVERSIAL DOCTOR

Maryclaire Dale The Charleston Gazette; News; Pg. P1A July 01, 1997, Tuesday

A Williamson doctor facing an August medical licensure hearing and a possible criminal retrial in Kentucky was recently named Mingo County's medical examiner.

Diane Shafer, who was charged with bribing a Kentucky hearing examiner she later married, will replace former sheriff and funeral home owner Gerald Chafin, who had been named county coroner earlier in the month. **Shafer is apparently now married to or involved with Henry Vinson, the former Mingo County coroner who served time in prison for running a Washington, D.C., male prostitution ring which reached the White House.**

Since 1975, all West Virginia counties have been required to have a physician serve as a county medical examiner, responding to homicides, suicides, accidents and questionable deaths. The examiner's role is to survey the body, talk to police on the scene, and gather information for the state medical examiner offices in Charleston, Morgantown and Wheeling.

The Mingo County post had been vacant for about a year, forcing police to wait up to two or three hours for a medical examiner to come from Charleston.

In early June, Mingo County commissioners appointed Chafin county coroner. He has had his own legal troubles in recent years, having been twice indicted on federal wiretap charges that were later dismissed.

"I told them he really doesn't fit the guidelines. Do you have a physician down there? Then she [Shafer] called," **State Medical Examiner Irwin Sopher** said.

Sopher knew of Shafer's controversial history, which included a bribery conviction in Kentucky that was later overturned, the current loss of her Kentucky medical license and a prior suspension of her West Virginia medical license.

"Well, she has a license to practice medicine, and I discussed some of these things with her, and I think she'll be able to handle some of this," Sopher said. "The job is mainly a reporting position.

"They don't do examinations, or actual autopsies."

He said the job pays \$50 per case, making it difficult sometimes to attract physicians. At times, nurses, dentists, funeral directors or other people have served as interim coroners, as is currently the case in about six counties, Sopher said.

Sopher said the Mingo County medical examiner would typically handle about 60 cases a year.

Shafer's criminal conviction on bribery charges in Kentucky was overturned in 1995 by the state's Supreme Court.

The retrial had been set for earlier this year but was apparently postponed. Shafer said she thinks the charges will be dropped. She was convicted in Kentucky state court of bribing Gregory Holmes, a Kentucky hearing examiner who was reviewing charges she overbilled insurers for her work. Holmes, a blind and already married 39-year-old lawyer, cleared her of wrongdoing 10 days after they were allegedly married and after Shafer allegedly gave him \$ 42,500. Holmes, who denied marrying Shafer, was convicted of bigamy and bribery. A medical board panel in West Virginia found probable cause to take Shafer to a hearing, now set for Aug. 20, 21

and 22, on charges she fraudulently signed four disability papers during a period when her West Virginia license was suspended.

Shafer said Monday someone approached her to apply. "Well, people ask me to do house calls. This is certainly less work than that," she joked, when asked why she wanted the post.

She said the job should be held by physicians as opposed to funeral directors. "A physician has nothing to gain from a suicide. A mortician does. He would probably process the body for burial," she said. "I don't think it's [the funeral industry] a charity business."

She could not be reached for comment later in the evening about her relationship with Vinson.

Shafer, who ran unsuccessfully for the House of Delegates in 1996, gave her age Monday as 42.

According to a story published under her byline in a Temple University alumnae magazine, she graduated from Temple's medical school in 1976.

The story described her long days working in an impoverished Appalachian community.

Shafer collected more than \$ 500,000 in a six-year period from the West Virginia Workers' Compensation Fund alone.

During the time of her licensure troubles, when she had an office in Kentucky but no license and a license in West Virginia but no office, she was photographed handing pieces of paper presumed to be prescriptions to patients out of her car at a small airfield in Mingo County.

Chafin said Monday he was not upset Shafer replaced him. "If we have an M.D. that is agreeable, then it is to be an M.D.," he said. Sopher, told later that Shafer appears to be involved with Vinson, said he wanted time to think about the situation before commenting on her fitness for the job.

Vinson's sister, Brenda Copley of Fort Gay, said Monday that as far as she knew, Vinson married Shafer after his late 1995 release from federal prison.

A man who answered the phone at Shafer's medical office Monday initially identified himself as Shafer's husband, Henry Shafer, and said he could answer questions about her medical examiner appointment.

"We were married years ago, and then we tried it again recently," he said.

Later in the day, the same man denied saying he was her husband and made a series of sexually explicit and racist remarks when asked if his name was actually Henry Vinson.

"Would you like to come and have sex with me, you f-- n--- b--. What the hell is your problem?" he shouted loudly into the office telephone line.

Several longtime Williamson residents said Monday Shafer has been seen around town with Vinson.

Vinson served as Mingo County coroner from 1985 to 1986 before resigning after a widow complained he left her husband's body in a funeral home for 42 days because of her inability to pay him. **In 1990, he was charged with running prostitution rings which advertised in Washington newspapers under the names "Man to Man" and "Dream Boys."**

Prosecutors said the business made \$ 500,000 to \$ 1 million between 1987 and 1989, and clients included low-level staffers in the Reagan and Bush White House.

Vinson, who was represented by lawyer-turned-legal commentator Greta Van Susteren, eventually pleaded guilty to racketeering and credit card fraud charges in the 43-count indictment.