

Marin Independent Journal (<http://www.marinij.com>)

## **Marin bank robbery suspect delays plea as DA prepares more charges**

*By*

*By Gary Klien, Marin Independent Journal*

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A Larkspur man suspected of a bank robbery streak in Marin County delayed entering a plea Friday after the prosecutor said more charges are in the works.

Christopher Jay Wootton, 60, made his second court appearance since being shot and arrested earlier this month. He is currently charged with robbing one bank, but Deputy District Attorney Karen Lamb said she expects to file additional charges next week.

Wootton, who has prior convictions for kidnapping, burglary and check fraud, could face a life sentence on just the existing charges. He returns to court Jan. 2 for further hearings.

Wootton was arrested Dec. 11 after a robbery at the Bank of the West in downtown Novato set off a police chase into San Rafael. Wootton crashed into a pole in Terra Linda, tried to run away and allegedly pointed a gun at a sheriff's deputy and a police sergeant.

The deputy fired at Wootton and wounded him in the upper body and hand. Wootton spent several days at Marin General Hospital before being transferred to the county jail.

Wootton is currently charged with robbing the the Novato bank, pulling a gun on the deputy and the sergeant, recklessly evading police and carrying a loaded gun in a vehicle. But investigators have also requested charges in four other bank robberies in San Rafael and Mill Valley.

Authorities are also investigating whether he can be linked to about six other robberies over the past year in Corte Madera, San Anselmo, Greenbrae and Novato. The suspect in the robberies was known for wearing black gloves, dark-rimmed eyeglasses and a dark cap or a knit hat with tassled earflaps.

Wootton, who is still recovering from gunshot wounds, was brought to court in a wheelchair for his first appearance Dec. 19 and his second on Friday. The circumstances surrounding the first hearing were the basis for much of the second.

Wootton's public defender, Michael Coffino, complained that the Marin Independent Journal took photographs of Wootton being rolled outside the courtroom on Dec. 19 after a judge had denied the newspaper permission to take his picture inside the courtroom.

Coffino said the out-of-court photographs violated "the spirit" of the judge's order and potentially compromised Wootton's due process rights.

He also accused the newspaper of "taking advantage of" Wootton's injuries, because his use of a wheelchair required him to be briefly transported outside the courtroom. He said the newspaper might have violated state and federal laws granting equal protections to the disabled.

Coffino asked Judge Andrew Sweet to prohibit the newspaper from taking Wootton's picture outside court in the future. Sweet questioned the usefulness of such an order, given that photographs of Wootton have already been published, and asked Coffino if he was prepared to submit any case law that could justify the action. Coffino said he was not.

Sweet denied the request, saying neither he nor any judge would be comfortable "just winging" an order that involves such constitutional questions.

"I'm extremely uncomfortable restricting the media's activities in a public space," he said. "I don't think I have the authority to make the order."

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