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## Former federal prosecutor on trial for allegedly molesting six teens

By **William C. Lhotka**

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Clayton — Onetime federal prosecutor Eric Tolen lured under-age boys by offering small jobs at his home and then traded gifts such as dirt bikes, liquor or cigarettes for sexual favors, a St. Louis County jury was told Thursday.

Prosecutor Kathi Alizadeh said the six victims — ages 11 to 15 at the time — had to perform sex acts on Tolen, or allow him to perform acts on them, to get what they wanted.

Tolen, 47, is charged with 38 counts of criminal conduct. He steadfastly has denied any wrongdoing. He is a former assistant U.S. attorney who more recently had a general law practice in Overland. His past clients included a mayor of Overland and St. Charles city councilmen.

He lived in Town and Country, where officials allege that many of the crimes occurred.

Tolen has been in custody in lieu of a \$1.2 million bond since August 2007, when he was accused of tampering with a witness by attempting to force a youth to recant his accusations.

That is one of the 38 counts; another is attempted statutory sodomy with one of the six teens who says he refused to go along with Tolen's demands. The other 36 counts of statutory sodomy involve the other five boys, Alizadeh said.

Defense attorney Cassandra Williams said she is confident the jury will acquit Tolen on all counts at the end of what is expected to be a two-week trial. She cited conflicting accounts of the witnesses, "who have told many stories on many occasions."

The allegations go back to 1995, when Tolen was a federal prosecutor and living

in Olivette. He befriended a teen whom he invited to do work around his house and then offered to buy him bicycles in exchange for sex, Alizadeh said.

The prosecutor said that teen is now 26, and a reluctant witness who will say he still loves Tolen.

Williams said the man was questioned as a teen in 1997 and denied any improper advances by Tolen. In 2001, he told police about sexual conduct but later recanted and tried to turn the tables on police at Tolen's request by tape-recording a conversation with them that he initiated, he has admitted.

Alizadeh said the youths were troubled teens, whom Tolen took to events or restaurants and paid to cut grass or do work at his home, first in Olivette and then in Town and Country.

One of the teens described Tolen as "a big brother with credit cards," Alizadeh said.

Tolen told the teens they had to "work" for the gifts, the prosecutor said, but "the word 'work' meant sex."

Williams insisted that Tolen meant what he said: work was work, and he paid the youths for chores such as cleaning house, cutting grass or raking leaves.

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