

Burnout blamed for false arrest

BY WILLIAM MURPHY

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A retired Nassau County detective testified yesterday that a heavy caseload and long hours caused him to forget for four months that a man arrested on a charge of armed robbery in 2005 was in jail when the crime was committed.

"It was a long day. I was burned out," retired Det. Nicholas Leema said in U.S. District Court in Central Islip, as he explained why he forgot the time he found Crews' jail records.

"The caseload I had, it just slipped my mind. These things do happen, and I'm sorry this happened," said Leema, 57, who was forced to retire after the incident.

Leema testified at the trial of a false arrest lawsuit brought against him, Nassau County and the police department by the man who was arrested, Raheem Crews, now 29, of Roosevelt.

Crews then took the witness stand and told the jury that while he had once been in a juvenile detention facility, his arrest in 2005



JAMES CARBONE

Former Nassau County Det. Nicholas Leema took four months to correct an arrest oversight.

at age 19 put him into the general population at the Nassau County jail, where he was menaced by older inmates who took his sneakers and meals.

"I was scared. I felt like a little kid around grown men," said Crews, whose criminal case was dismissed after he spent four months in jail on \$150,000 bail.

He was expected to continue his testimony when court resumes today before Judge Joseph Bianco.

Leema's attorney, Mitchell Garber of Manhattan, and an attorney for the county, Matthew Cuomo of Manhattan, tried through their questioning to show that Leema had not per-

sonally arrested Crews and had not filled out some of the paperwork.

But Crews' attorney, Frederick Brewington of Hempstead, repeatedly pointed out that Leema was the lead detective on the case, and as such was responsible for properly handling the arrest.

Brewington also produced a pretrial deposition in 2009 in which Leema said that after finding out through a computer search that Crews was in jail at the time of the robbery, "I kept it to myself and said, 'Let the chips fall where they may.'"

Leema testified yesterday that he meant to say he was ready to admit he made a mis-



Raheem Crews is suing Nassau County and the police department for false arrest.

take, "and face the consequences. . . . I'm willing to take my punishment for my actions."

Brewington asked what consequences he meant, since Leema had not been disciplined and had been allowed to retire with a full pension after 22 years with the department.

"I had to retire. I had no choice," Leema said.

Brewington asked whether Leema could have stayed on and fought any disciplinary action.

"I would have been fired," Leema said.

"You chose to leave before they could come down on you?" Brewington said.

"Yes," Leema replied.