

ARMED ROBBERY CONVICTION LEADS TO 16-YEAR PRISON SENTENCE FOR SPARTANBURG MAN

A Spartanburg man received a 16-year prison sentence today for robbing an east-side restaurant at gunpoint.

Timothy Wayne Wilbanks, 37, of 980 Bethesda Road, received his sentence from Circuit Judge Larry Patterson during a morning hearing at the Spartanburg County Courthouse.

At the conclusion of a 2½ day trial Wednesday afternoon, a jury convicted Wilbanks of armed robbery and possession of stolen vehicle in connection to a hold-up that occurred Sept. 17, 2002 at Pappa John's Pizza, 1948-B E. Main St.

Wilbanks entered the business about 1:15 p.m. and demanded money from a female cashier. He lifted up his shirt and the clerk saw a piece of metal that appeared to be part of a gun. Wilbanks took a sum of cash from the register and fled the parking lot in a white four-door Buick. He traveled toward downtown. Wilbanks drove to a nearby motel and rented a room. A team of officers from the Spartanburg Public Safety Department arrested him hours after the robbery.

Wilbanks confessed to the robbery in a written police statement that was taken following his arrest. He proclaimed his innocence during his trial testimony. He was also critical of the prosecution and his own defense attorney.

During the sentencing hearing this morning, Wilbanks proclaimed his innocence. Wilbanks' attorney said his client committed the robbery during a drug binge relapse.

"This trial is a good example of why we have a criminal justice system," Principal Deputy Solicitor Barry Barnette said. "The jury thoughtfully considered the evidence before rendering its verdict."

Wilbanks will have to serve 85 percent of the sentence before he is eligible for release.

For more information, contact Murray Glenn at 596-3862 or 809-4892.