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# Testimony opens in suit against Straight Inc.

■ *Another Straight client files local suit, 14-B*

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. — To hear his attorneys tell it, 20-year-old Fred Collins "was a normal, healthy, bright young man who went off to college to start his career."

But then he visited Straight Inc., the St. Petersburg-based drug treatment program, last summer. And what Collins claims happened there is now the focus of a \$750,000 lawsuit he filed against Straight last December.

Monday the suit went to trial in U.S. District Court in Alexandria.

Collins claims he was shanghaied into Straight against his will last June and imprisoned there for five months. His lawsuit charges the nationally acclaimed drug abuse program with "false imprisonment, assault and intentional infliction of emotional distress."

"WE HOPE TO convince you — and we are confident that we will by a preponderance of the evidence — that Fred was robbed of five months of his life," said Collins' attorney, Philip Hirschkop, in his opening statement before a six-member jury Monday morning.

But an attorney for Straight painted a different picture of the tall, clean-cut college sophomore who on Monday was wearing a nicely tailored three-piece suit.

According to attorney John Brandt, who along with Washington attorney Ronald Goldfarb is defending Straight, Collins was deeply involved with drugs when he was interviewed by Straight staff members last summer and he agreed to join the program voluntarily.

"This is a case of false imprisonment," Brandt said. "But the evidence will show you that Fred was not imprisoned. Straight is tough but Straight is loving."

**MONDAY'S TRIAL** is only the beginning of a

**See STRAIGHT, 14-B**

flurry of lawsuits that have been filed against the controversial drug treatment program. But Collins' legal action is the most extensive and bitter suit against Straight yet to go to trial. Monday's testimony pitted father against son.

Fred Collins Sr., a 60-year-old retired government worker who is now a realtor in Virginia, testified that Fred, the older of two sons, used numerous drugs regularly, including marijuana and alcohol, when he was in high school. The drug use, Collins testified, led to intense family disputes between Fred and his mother, which in turn caused Fred to run away from home once for three weeks.

"He wore mostly Army jackets and Army pants. His hair was long and he wore sunglasses," Collins testified about his son. "He looked pretty much like an animal in his room. I was very unhappy with his friendships. . . . They (the friends) looked shabby and were insolent toward adults. He told me they were drug users."

Collins testified that he believed in Straight because the program has been successful in treating his younger son, who was admitted to Straight in January 1982.

**IT WAS IN** order to visit his younger brother that Fred came to St. Petersburg last June with his parents for a "sibling interview." The interviews are required by Straight, and it was during the interview that Collins says he was detained, prevented from leaving and pressured for more than five hours until he agreed to join the program "voluntarily."

"I told them drugs were not a controlling factor in my life," Collins testified. At the time Collins was on summer vacation from Virginia Polytechnic Institute, where he maintained a 3.2 grade average out of a possible 4.0. He had A's in math and chemistry and was voted vice president of his college fraternity.

He said Monday that he had stopped smoking marijuana four months before coming to Straight.

Nevertheless, an executive director at Straight, Chris Yarnold, interviewed Fred, talked to other staff members and clients in the program and decided that Fred should join Straight.

**"HE SAID, 'WE** have determined that you need the program,' and he wouldn't let me leave the room or see my father until I signed in voluntarily."

Yarnold also convinced Collins' father that

Fred should join Straight.

"From the appearance of Fred's eyes, Yarnold said he believed that Fred had smoked marijuana in the past 48 hours," Fred's father testified.

Yarnold also told Fred that his father would not pay his college tuition unless he joined Straight and that he could leave if he did not wish to remain after 14 days.

"I signed that paper (voluntary consent form) under great duress," Collins said Monday.

**TWICE, COLLINS** said, he asked to leave and was set back in the program.

Straight attorney Brandt countered the Collins' testimony with entries that Collins made in a nightly journal — called "moral inventories" — that all Straight clients are required to maintain. Collins wrote regularly of his prior drug use and that Straight was helping him "make amends."

But Collins countered that the entries were written to satisfy Straight staff members so he could advance in the program and eventually escape.

"People (clients in Straight) will be dishonest and exaggerate so they can progress in the program and get out," Collins said.

The trial continues today.