

# Jury Finds Officer Not Guilty

## Faced Allegations Of Stealing City Time

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A Hartford Superior Court jury has found a Hartford police community service officer innocent of lying to a grand jury and stealing city time.

Now Joseph M. Smith, who has been out of law enforcement for six years, wants back pay and his job back, his attorney said Friday.

Smith served in the Blue Hills section of the city before he was suspended for allegedly gambling and drinking free alcohol at the Charter Oak Package Store on city time in 1992 and 1993. He has always said he was innocent. During a three-week trial that ended Thursday, Assistant State's Attorney Dennis O'Connor tried to prove Smith falsified time sheets to justify being away from his post. But the jury found in favor of Smith. He was acquitted of perjury and second-degree larceny charges.

"I always believed Mr. Smith when he said he didn't do it," said his attorney, Salvatore Bonanno. "He wants to go back, because he loves being a police officer."

Bonanno said his client never denied going to a grocery store, next door to the Charter Oak Package Store, because he liked the Spanish takeout food.

It is not unusual for community service officers to leave their posts to eat or visit city hall, he said.

When Smith was arrested in 1995, Benjamin Baltran, the owner of the store, said allegations made by Superior Court Judge Arthur L. Spada, who served as a one-man grand jury, were off the mark. Baltran said he was friendly with several police officers who chatted about sports and other things. But none of them drank or gambled.

Police union President Sgt. Michael Wood was unavailable Friday to discuss what Smith must do to return to work.

The allegations against Smith surfaced in the mid-1990s, as Spada and a grand jury had investigated corruption in the Hartford Police Department.