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Peruto Says He'll Defend Heidnik

By **GLORIA CAMPISI**, Daily News Staff Writer (Staff writer Jack McGuire contributed to this report.)

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Young criminal attorney A. Charles Peruto Jr. says he will represent alleged torture-killer Gary Michael Heidnik despite a judge's order temporarily freezing Heidnik's assets, estimated at about \$600,000.

A spokesman for the district attorney's office said late yesterday that as far as he knew, the office had not been notified that Heidnik has hired Peruto.

Peruto, who said Heidnik had called him at the recommendation of other inmates, planned to be in court at 9:30 a.m. today for Heidnik's preliminary hearing on two counts of murder and related offenses.

The hearing had to be postponed last week when Heidnik appeared in court without an attorney.

Heidnik, 43, a self-styled minister, is accused of killing two women and keeping at least four others chained in the basement of his home on Marshall Street near Tioga, where he allegedly raped, beat and tortured them.

Asked about how he expected to be paid, Peruto said, "I can't discuss what arrangements have been made, only that they have been made."

A judge on Monday froze Heidnik's assets after one of his alleged victims filed suit. Another former captive sued yesterday.

Peruto said he sent an associate to visit Heidnik in the Philadelphia Detention Center last week "to discuss the financial arrangements." Peruto also said he met with Heidnik for about 90 minutes yesterday.

Other than saying, "Insanity is a possibility," Peruto refused to disclose what defense he plans for Heidnik, who has a long history of treatment for psychiatric problems.

"The fact is, there is no more insanity defense in Pennsylvania," Peruto said. "There is either guilty or guilty but mentally ill now . . ."

He said a verdict of guilty but mentally ill would mean an institutional commitment for Heidnik, "which in my mind would be a minimal victory."

Heidnik raised speculation at a hearing last week when he appeared without an attorney but said he thought "Mr. Snyder" was supposed to represent him. Vic Snyder, a well-known local plumbing contractor who now also practices law, confirmed later that Heidnik had sought his services.

Snyder could not be reached for comment yesterday, but a spokeswoman said Snyder had decided, in conjunction with attorney Thomas Rutter, to take Heidnik's case if Heidnik wished. Rutter could not be reached immediately.

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