

Lawyers: Billie behind venture

► SEMINOLES, FROM 1B

on an empire of enormous wealth in which tribal leaders are given virtually free reign to spend millions in private allocations and where expenditures and money transfers went unnoticed.

Prosecutors charge that Shore and other tribal officials were kept in the dark when, in the spring of 2000, Cox issued checks totaling \$2.77 million from

t r i b a l
accounts to
an entity
called Vir-
tual Data
L t d .
Wisher, a
f o r m e r
computer



SHORE

consultant to the tribe, is listed as president of Virtual Data, Cox as vice president, and Crumpton — Wisher's son-in-law — as secretary.

The men allegedly divided the money among themselves and tried to cover their tracks by drawing up fake invoices from Virtual Data to the tribe.

Shore testified that the five-member tribal council did agree to investigate Internet gaming in 1997 after learning it could generate more than \$700 million in the first three years of operation, but the idea never went anywhere.

"We didn't think it was legal," Shore said. The tribal attorney said he was afraid Internet gaming would also jeopardize the tribe's current gaming license.

Under defense questioning, Shore acknowledged that Billie, like other tribal council members, enjoyed wide discretion to conceivably use millions in tribal money to spend in such a venture.

Defense attorneys also pointed out that the tribe had many times before set up corporations that were not in the tribe's own name. Some of those companies listed Shore as an officer.

"This is something that is totally consistent with who Billie was," said Wisner's attorney, Bruce Zimet, of the online gaming operation.

In keeping with a defense request, jurors did not hear that Shore had been shot earlier this year at his home in an apparent assassination attempt.

Prosecutors said Billie and Cox, the former tribal business manager, narrowed the sphere of administrative and financial control to themselves.

Bonnie Jirschele, a former accountant administrator, testified that she was unaware of the payments and invoices associated with Virtual Data.

Cox's attorney, Kenneth Lipman, pounced on Jirschele's testimony, saying her name had also appeared on accounts to which thousands of dollars in tribal money was transferred for tribal business. The money included \$95,000 used to pay dancers at a cultural event. "Did you steal \$95,000? ... Has the government indicted you?" Lipman asked. Jirschele, who is not under indictment, had told investigators after she quit the tribe in the summer of 2000 that she suspected an Internet gaming operation was in the works in Belize, defense attorney said.

Lipman said the defense has not decided whether to call Billie as a witness. He has not been charged with a crime, although the defendants argue the government has gone after them because they refuse to cooperate with efforts to prosecute Billie.

Testimony continues today with tribal council member David Cypress expected to testify.