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Ariz. man fighting record-industry suit over music file swapping

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PHOENIX – A part-time cab driver in Arizona is fighting a record-industry lawsuit accusing him of sharing 2,000 songs freely across computer networks.

The Recording Industry Association of America is seeking \$40,000 from Jeffrey Howell, of Scottsdale.

Howell said he did nothing wrong and merely transferred his CD-music collection to his computer.

"They have no evidence of me giving copies to anyone," Howell said.

According to Phoenix federal court records, the record industry claims its agents could access Howell's music collection through Kazaa, an Internet file-swapping Web site.

Howell's case, which began in 2006, is scheduled for oral arguments Jan. 24.

Howell said he did have a Kazaa account but had no idea his entire hard drive of about 2,000 1970s rock songs was being shared with the public.

"As near as I can tell, they're saying that if they could see my music that it must have been in my shared folder," Howell said.

The recording industry has gone after 20,000 people for sharing music since 2000, after forcing file-sharing service Napster to shut down.

"This is one of our plain old illegal-downloading cases," said Jonathan Lamy, a spokesman for the record industry. "This is not about making personal-use copies. The record industry continues to have no objection to that."

Howell said he turned off the file-sharing setting on his computer a dozen times and doesn't know what happened.

"I used to spend days playing with music," said Howell, adding that he loved putting together his favorite songs to listen to during his cab drives.

"Back in the day, everybody made mix tapes," Howell said. "Why carry around 40 of your favorite CDs when you could put your favorite songs on three?"

Howell said he has been representing himself in court because lawyers in the Phoenix metropolitan area wouldn't take his case.

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