

HARD LUCK BANDIT

'Stole to help my kid'

By KATI CORNELL SMITH

A cash-strapped dad who claims he robbed banks to cover his autistic daughter's medical expenses agreed yesterday to serve up to 11 years in prison at a hearing where details of his mounting desperation came to light.

Wayne Phillip Costigan, 44, a former Verizon phone technician, confessed to carrying out two heists while disguised in a cowboy hat and mustache and armed with phony bombs.

The first time, on May 24, 2002, he displayed a briefcase and a note to the manager of an HSBC branch in upstate Brewster and made off with \$103,118.

"The note said there was a bomb in the case when there wasn't. She gave me the money and I walked out," Costigan told Brooklyn federal Judge Allyne Ross yesterday.

But on his second attempt, the father of three from Dutchess County wasn't so lucky.

Costigan was armed with a gun when cops nabbed him Dec. 17, 2003, as he left a Fleet branch in Flushing, Queens, where he'd presented a teller with a gift box — wrapped in Christmas paper — that he claimed contained explosives.

"He felt this was his only way out," defense lawyer Robert DiDio said outside court.

"He has an autistic child. She requires home-schooling [and has] significant medical bills."

Authorities retrieved an AK-47 from Costigan's car and 17 other guns from his home.

Costigan pleaded guilty to the Queens robbery in April.

According to his lawyer, Costigan owes \$50,000 to the IRS and repeatedly tried to kill himself during an eight-month stay in a federal prison in Brooklyn.

The suicide attempts stem from a posttraumatic stress condition Costigan developed after he was in a fatal car crash while working as a bus driver, DiDio said.

Costigan said he sees a psychiatrist and is currently on Zoloft.

Court papers show that he stashed a letter to his family in his car when he went to rob the Flushing bank.

Upon his arrest, he told cops "that he should have killed himself and that the ... officers should have killed him," prosecutors wrote.

The desperate dad, who will be formally sentenced on Oct. 25, also told cops, "It is especially difficult around Christmas time."