

Rags-to-riches story ends with jail term

MILFORD — An Albanian immigrant who fled a brutal communist regime in the 1970s to seek a better life and then struggled his way from dishwasher to restaurant owner learned Tuesday about another American institution — jail.

Frok Thaqi, 51, of Michigan, was sentenced to four years behind bars for breaking into his estranged wife's Shelton home and holding a knife to her neck as she slept. At the time, the couple's five children were home, authorities said.

Thaqi had pleaded guilty to first-degree burglary in February, but his attorney, Tara L. Knight of New Haven, asked the judge to show some leniency on her client, who came from Albania in November 1974. She asked for a suspended sentence with probation.

In a moving plea to Judge Leonard M. Cocco, Knight described her client's efforts to attain the American Dream as something straight out of an Upton Sinclair novel — full of hard work, low-paying jobs and struggles to learn the language.

Since moving to this country, Thaqi has worked numerous jobs and studied English to help pave the way for the rest of his family.

He started as a dishwasher, earning \$54 a week before eventually opening his own restaurant. After saving enough money, Thaqi brought the rest of his family from Albania. He eventually moved to Connecticut, where he met his wife 17 years ago.

State's Attorney Mary Galvin said the relationship between Thaqi and his wife contained a "tremendous amount of violence."

Cocco seemed to agree with Galvin and imposed a 10-year sentence, suspended after Thaqi serves four years. He also was given five years' probation.