

Charges in double killing unlikely for a few weeks

By Lyle Muller

Gazette Iowa City Editor

IOWA CITY — Charges are not likely to be filed soon in the case of two women whose beaten and burned bodies were found in an Iowa City apartment last March, Johnson County Attorney J. Patrick White said Monday.

White met with investigators from the Iowa City Police Department and the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation on Monday, but the meeting was a routine update rather than a session to map filing charges.

"We update each other and make judgments on where to go next," White said.

White said it would be several weeks before investigators have a better feel for whether charges will be filed in connection with the deaths of Maria Lehner, 27, an environmental coordinator from Belton, Mo., and Laura Watson-Dalton, a 29-year-old Creston paramedic.

IOWA CITY

The bodies of Lehner and Watson-Dalton were found after a March 19 explosion and fire in Apartment 4 at 427 S. Van Buren St. The apartment's residents were out of town.

Investigators said the women, who did not know each other, were bludgeoned and the fire was set to cover up the deaths.

Johnathon Memmer, 23, a Marshalltown man who had been in the Iowa City area last winter, is in custody. Authorities have said Memmer is a suspect in the women's deaths, but he has not been charged in the case.

Some media reports have indicated Iowa City police think they have a case ready for trial. But Lt. Rick Wyss, the department's lead investigator in this case, said that is not the case.

"The investigation is not complete yet," Wyss said.

Wyss said the DCI crime laboratory still is reviewing evidence. "It's difficult to put a timeline on this," he said. "We could get some information back from the lab that may expand this investigation."

Memmer is being held at the Iowa Medical and Classification Center at Oakdale on a conviction for a probation violation. His bail is \$1 million. He has been charged with breaking into the Van Buren Street apartment on March 15, stealing several items and pawing some. A February 2000 trial is set.

That, plus local bar and restaurant employees' reports that they saw Memmer with Lehner and Watson-Dalton days before their bodies were found, has attention focused on Memmer.

Memmer also faces forgery and theft charges unrelated to the double homicide case.

Contact Gazette Iowa City Editor Lyle Muller at (319) 339-3159 or lylem@iowa.com

A rock and a high place



AP photo

Racers from New Covenant Christian Church pull a 250-pound gypsum rock up Central Avenue on Saturday in Fort Dodge. From left to right are Steve Silfe, Teresa Shaver and Morris Stanley. The gypsum rock races were a part of the town's annual Fall Fest celebration. Gypsum is mined and used to manufacture various products, including wallboard.

Prosecution: Medical purpose missing for Shultice prescriptions

By Kevin Kane

News correspondent

CEDAR RAPIDS — There was "no legitimate medical purpose" for any of the 31 prescriptions at the crux of Cedar Rapids psychiatrist Robert Shultice's trial, a federal court jury was told Monday.

Expert witness David Houlihan, a practicing Dubuque psychiatrist, also told jurors he was concerned that Shultice was refilling prescriptions early and that there appeared to be "uncontrolled substance abuse" by six patients mentioned in a grand jury indictment.

The defense, meanwhile, continued to point out that all of the six patients were under severe stress and might have had legitimate needs for higher than normal amounts of controlled substances.

Shultice, 68, is charged with 31 counts of unlawfully dispensing controlled substances, one

count of obstruction of justice and one count of furnishing false and fraudulent information.

Jurors have been instructed that a finding that Shultice knowingly prescribing prescription medicines with "no legitimate medical purpose" is grounds for conviction on all 31 of the drug dispensing counts.

The government, which has four witnesses left to testify, is expected to rest its case today.

Houlihan, at the request of the government, reviewed both prescription records and case histories of the six patients. As part of that review, he said he looked at Shultice's progress notes and other records to attempt to determine medical rea-



Shultice

sons for the prescriptions.

He said he found nothing on the record, including a physical examination, to justify Shultice's prescription of Darvocet, a narcotic pain-killer, for Dorothy Donald (also known as Dottie Cole) on Aug. 23, 1996, the day before she died.

He also questioned the medical appropriateness of two prescriptions for Valium, a sedative, that Shultice gave Donald on Aug. 16 and Aug. 21, 1996. The 25-year-old woman was six months pregnant at the time.

Earlier testimony indicated that Donald died of a multiple drug overdose of cocaine, Valium and Darvocet on Aug. 24, 1996, in Marion.

Houlihan also expressed concern that Shultice appeared to ignore "a lot of warning signs" that Becky Bovero was a "fairly classic drug abuser" during a period in which he gave her

nine prescriptions for the stimulant Ritalin, between Dec. 20, 1995, and April 26, 1996.

Two of Bovero's last three prescriptions, including one dated the day before she died on April 27, 1996, also were written earlier than they should have been, Houlihan asserted.

The government witness also expressed concerns over:

- The amounts of Valium, Xanax, Fiorinal, Lortab and

Lorcet prescribed by Shultice for a 39-year-old male with a history of alcohol abuse between October 1993 and November 1995. Xanax, like Valium, is a sedative. Fiorinal, Lortab and Lorcet are pain relievers.

• Shultice's refilling of prescriptions for a 50-year-old woman on four occasions between November 1993 and April 1996 within one to three days after she was discharged from

the hospital following treatment for drug overdose. Drugs involved were Ritalin, Xanax and Lortab.

• The prescribing of large amounts of Tylenol-4, Lortab, codeine sulfate and Valium by Shultice for a 44-year-old woman without supporting information in progress notes between October 1994 and April 1995. Tylenol-4 and codeine sulfate are pain relievers.

Trial starts in 19-year-old murder case

By Rick Smith

Gazette staff writer

TIPTON — Nineteen years to the week after teen-ager Sandra Jo Pittman was beaten to death and her body discarded near Clarence, a 54-year-old man with a history of mental illness is going on trial here for her murder.

Opening arguments in Dean Ray Tumey's first-degree murder trial begin at 9 a.m. today. A jury of seven women and five men was selected Monday in Cedar County District Court.

Nothing in Monday's questioning of potential jurors shed

CEDAR COUNTY

light on the central questions: Why prosecute Tumey now and not before? What new evidence brings Tumey to trial now?

Tumey long has been a suspect in the case.

In a Gazette story in 1992 about the unsolved Pittman murder, Cedar County Sheriff Keith Whitlatch said the suspect was in a mental institution. At Tumey's arrest this May, Whitlatch acknowledged that Tumey was the suspect he had referred to in 1992.

On Monday, Tumey's attorney, Bradley Norton of Lowden, asked each of 36 potential jurors if they knew anyone who suffered from mental illness and if they understood that sufferers of paranoid schizophrenia can be dogged by delusions and hallucinations.

How Norton intends to use what he suggests is his client's mental illness is yet to be revealed. Norton has said that Tumey was at his mother's house in Muscatine the day Pittman was last seen and the day she was found dead. Pittman, of Bettendorf, was 17 years old when she was last seen Sept. 16, 1980, leaving the Catholic Worker House shelter in Davenport.

Contact reporter Rick Smith at (319) 398-8312 or ricks@iowa.com

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