

# Judge considers declaring Piper mistrial

## Officer's testimony refers to 2 other motel murder cases

By Elizabeth Kutter  
Gazette staff writer

**CEDAR RAPIDS** — An Illinois police officer took the stand in the first-degree murder trial of Donald Piper Friday morning and referred to two other motel murder cases, including one in which Piper was convicted of murder.

That has prompted the judge to consider declaring a mistrial and starting all over.

Even before defense attorney Alfredo Parrish could object to officer Bryant Seraphin's testimony, Judge Linda Reade sent the jury out of the courtroom.

Piper, 40, is on trial for the Sept. 4, 1997, murder of Zurijeta Sakanovic, 21, who was working as a maid at the Budgetel Inn in Clive when she was stabbed to death.

Piper was convicted of another murder and has not been ruled out as a suspect in a third. However, those cases had been carefully kept from the

jury — until Friday.

Officer Seraphin testified that he had been asked by Iowa authorities to present photos of six men, including Piper, to Lonnie Mitchell of Champaign, Ill.

Mitchell had been a guest in the motel the night before Sakanovic was murdered and told police he met a man coming into the hotel as he was leaving between 7 and 8 a.m. on Sept. 4.

Polk County Assistant Attorney Steve Foritano asked Seraphin if he knew anything about the case. Seraphin said he knew "little about the case. Only that there was an investigation of a series of motel murders in Des Moines — two maids and one guest were killed."

With the jury out of the courtroom, Parrish rose to speak. "I am shocked and amazed; I cannot imagine that this had happened in this trial. I cannot imagine that the state did not take the time to alert the witness ... after we've worked so long.

"I think I have to ask for a mistrial," he said.



Small Sakanovic (left) father of Zurijeta Sakanovic, wipes his eyes after Assistant Polk County Attorney Nan Horvat showed him a picture of his daughter during testimony Friday in the first-degree murder trial of Donald Piper.

Gazette photo by Jim Slosiarek

The attorneys and judge had agreed in advance of the trial that no mention of other cases linked to Piper would be brought into the courtroom. All jurors who had any knowledge of Piper's June conviction in

the 1993 murder of University Park Holiday Inn guest Patricia Lange, 36, were excused.

Piper has not been ruled out as a suspect in a third, unsolved West Des Moines motel murder. In 1998, Ecuadoran im-

migrant Mariana Redroban, 15, was found stabbed to death at Walnut Creek Inn in West Des Moines, where she worked as a housekeeper.

The judge and attorneys agreed to consider a mistrial

and alternatives over the weekend.

Reade invited the jurors back into the courtroom. Parrish made an objection to Seraphin's last response and the judge sustained it.

Seraphin said Lonnie Mitchell could not identify with certainty any of the six photos shown to him. However, he said one of the men looked like the man he saw entering the motel on the morning of Sept. 4 as he was leaving. The photo Mitchell recognized was of Piper.

Also on Friday, Small Sakanovic, the father of a Zurijeta Sakanovic, testified about his daughter.

Speaking through an interpreter Sakanovic, 50, said he had been a construction worker in Bosnia before the family moved to the United States in 1996. "We came to U.S. because of the war. There was no life there.

"I came to live your life," he said.

Sakanovic said his daughter was a shy girl who did not go out except with her parents and her brother.

She was murdered after the family had been in Des Moines only 10 months.

"This case has happened," he said "and I have to continue my life in the United States."

Contact writer Betsy Kutter at (319) 398-8263 or betsyk@fjowa.com



Alfredo Parrish  
Defense lawyer  
wants mistrial



Donald Piper  
Charged in  
death of maid

## Piscopo's hip, but old-fashioned

By Diana Nollen  
Gazette staff writer

**CEDAR RAPIDS** — Joe Piscopo isn't just another face in the crowd. With the snap of a brim or a well-placed grimace, he becomes Frank Sinatra, James Brown or Bruce Springsteen.

And always, he's Joe Cool. Especially when he wails on a tenor sax. He was funny on

tower he saw fall.

He's just a nice guy.

His humor is hip in a good old-fashioned way. His jokes are equal parts groan and guffaw, especially when he's mocking his "dork man" ways in a voice reminiscent of Jerry Lewis.

He conjures up so many alter-egos that you might wonder which persona is really his.

He's at his best when he mixes his music with his muscle. His tribute to Sinatra ring-a-ding-dings the right bell, as does his soulful Springsteen. But when he raps, you roll — with laughter.

And when he plays the drums, you just say "wow."

Stan Stankos opened the show with his take on subtiles, game shows, the Internet and marriage — finding something extra in the ordinary.

Together these wise guys pack a one-two punch.



Joe Piscopo  
Former "SNL"  
performer visits  
Cedar Rapids

## Former rec boss pleads guilty to theft charge

By Kristophere Owens  
Gazette staff writer

**MARENGO** — Sue Norris, a former Williamsburg recreation director accused of taking more than \$2,600 in theme park tickets last summer, has pleaded guilty to second-degree theft.

Norris, 33, entered an Alford plea to the charge in Iowa County District Court. An Alford plea means the defendant doesn't admit to all aspects of a charge but concedes that prosecutors have enough evidence to get a conviction.

"She feels strongly that she never had any intention to use any tickets without paying for them, but she realizes that given the fact that she didn't do things in the right order, and that people don't trust her about it, that they certainly could find her guilty of theft," said Norris' attorney, Randy Larson of Iowa

City. "In her (Sue Norris) mind, it's a misunderstanding. She always had intended to pay for the tickets."

Randy Larson, attorney

Also during the Dec. 28 court appearance, Norris was sentenced to three years' probation and ordered to pay \$2,978.30 to the city of Williamsburg.

Williamsburg police charged Norris with second-degree theft July 27 after city officials found 105 tickets missing to Six Flags Great America in Gurnee, Ill., and to Noah's Ark Family Park in Wisconsin Dells, Wis.

The tickets — 50 adult and 30 children's tickets to Six Flags and 25 tickets to Noah's Ark — are valued at \$2,695.

Norris resigned July 9 after a short and rough four-month career with the city, where she earned \$25,000 annually.

She told The Gazette on July

11 that she had a general lack of support and cooperation from her co-workers and had to fight for every single activity she did.

Since her resignation, Norris has accepted a job offer outside Iowa and has moved there with the court's consent. Tammy Sinn of Williamsburg became the city's new recreation director Dec. 1.

Larson said although he and

his client were prepared to go to trial, Norris was concerned about the expense of proving her case. Also a concern was having a criminal record. Her record will be clean if she successfully completes probation. "She wants to put this behind her," Larson said. "In her mind, it's a misunderstanding. She always had intended to pay for the tickets."

Contact writer Kristophere Owens at (319) 398-8311 or kriso@fjowa.com

### COMEDY REVIEW

"Saturday Night Live," and he was even funnier Friday night live at Penguins Comedy Club.

He kicked off a weekend run that's mostly sold out, but you may be able to grab a ticket for Sunday's 7:30 p.m. show.

He breezed through an hour like a breath of fresh air. He didn't utter a single obscenity, he was nice to his audience, he shook hands with his fans, he even bought a couple of drinks for the guy in the front row who had just lost his job.

And he spoke most sincerely about the strength of America's spirit rising from the ashes of a

## Revamping delayed UI scoring of school tests

**CEDAR RAPIDS** — Area school districts have had to wait longer than usual for the results of standardized tests taken early this fall by students.

David Frisbie, associate director of the Iowa Testing Program at the University of Iowa, which produces the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Educational Development, said there was a delay in distributing results this year because the software needed to create the reports took longer than expected to create.

"This year we introduced our newest edition of the ITBS and ITED, and in doing that, we needed to revamp our scoring services," he said.

The test results reports are being generated by the Iowa Testing Programs' publisher, Riverside Publishing Co., located in Illinois.

Frisbie said reports began going out to schools last week for students who took the test more than two months ago.

Ordinarily the process takes about 15 working days, he said.

The Cedar Rapids school district received notice that its test results should be in by Jan. 18.

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