

# Schoolyard murder jurors see machete

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS  
**NEWARK** — Forensic evidence dominated the third day of testimony Tuesday in the trial of a man charged in the brutal murders of three friends in a schoolyard in 2007, including a rusty machete allegedly used to slash two of the victims before they were shot.

Jurors whose most recent day in the courtroom was dominated by graphic testimony from a survivor of the attacks listened on Tuesday to a retired detective who oversaw the crime scene investigation.

Though much of Michael Bozsolak's testimony focused on descriptions of forensic techniques, it still packed an emotional punch for friends and family members in the gallery, particularly when Essex County Assistant Prosecutor Romesh Sukhdeo opened a cardboard box and displayed the 18-inch-long machete and later showed crime-scene photos to the jury.

The survivor told jurors last week how one of the assailants tried to "cut her neck off" with the machete after sexually assaulting her, and prosecutors say one of the other victims suffered severe slash wounds.

Nicaraguan national Rodolfo Godinez of Newark is the first of six defendants to go on trial for the killings. All face murder, attempted murder, robbery and weapons charges for the grisly August 2007 killings of Dashon Harvey and I-femi Hightower, both 20, and 18-year-old Terrance Aerial.

The survivor is not being named by The Associated Press because of sexual assault charges against two defendants.

All four victims were friends from Newark and students at Delaware State University or about to enroll. The slayings

lak described collecting evidence at the scene that included several beer bottles left near bleachers within feet of where the survivor was found and up a set of concrete stairs from where the three victims lay.

Fingerprints on the bottles matched those of Jose Carranza and Melvin Jovel, the first and last suspects arrested in the weeks after the killings.

No physical evidence has been introduced that places the then-24-year-old Godinez at the scene, and the survivor was unable to identify him, although she identified Carranza and Jovel in the days after the attacks.

Prosecutors are expected to introduce DNA evidence that links Godinez to one of the beer bottles as well as statements Godinez made to authorities after his arrest in Maryland in which he admitted being at the schoolyard that night.

The most emotional moment Tuesday came when Sukhdeo held up crime scene photos for Bozsolak to identify before showing them to the jury. Some family members closed their eyes, barely holding back tears, while others stared ahead grimly as jurors reviewed photos of the three victims lying in pools of blood.

# Jurors selected in Van Pelt case

## Ex-assemblyman's trial on bribe charges set to begin

By ERIK LARSEN  
 STAFF WRITER

TODAY

**TRENTON** — A jury of nine women and seven men will decide the fate of former Assemblyman Daniel M. Van Pelt, R-Ocean, after a marathon selection process that concluded Tuesday afternoon with the panel seated and ready to go this morning.

There are 12 jurors and four alternates from all over New Jersey. After filling out questionnaires Monday, reviewed by both the prosecution and defense teams, about 100 people summoned for jury duty at the Clarkson S. Fisher Building and U.S. Courthouse in Trenton were subject Tuesday to oral interviews by U.S. District Judge Joel A. Pisano.

Assistant U.S. Attorneys Rachael Honig and Dustin Chao, representing the federal government, and defense attorneys Robert R. Fuggi Jr. and Michael V. Gilberti also were permitted to ask questions of the jurors and later object to them outside their presence if necessary.

Some had commuted up to 90 minutes for jury duty. The Trenton Vicinage of the U.S. District of New Jersey serves Hunterdon, Mercer, Monmouth, Middlesex, Ocean, Somerset and Warren counties.

The trial of the United States of America v. Daniel Van Pelt begins today, now that jury selection has been completed. During court proceedings, both sides acknowledged that in addition to audio recordings of Van Pelt allegedly accepting a \$10,000 bribe there is also video that will be introduced as evidence.

Each potential juror was asked whether he or she could commit to serving without serious hardship to their personal or professional lives. The trial will run from 9 a.m. to about 3 p.m. each weekday except on Fridays for the next three weeks.

In groups of 10 seated in the jury box, Pisano called on each person to introduce themselves to the court as he silently read over a copy of their questionnaire. After they spoke briefly about themselves, Pisano pressed them on further details about their lives.

What was the nature of their work? Married or single? What did their spouse do for a living? Any hobbies? If there is a prior criminal or civil litigation matter involving themselves or a family member in the past, did they be-



Former Assemblyman Daniel Van Pelt is accused of accepting a \$10,000 bribe.

lieve they or their loved one had been treated fairly? In their view, would the sworn testimony of a law enforcement officer carry more credibility over the sworn testimony of a civilian witness? Did they know anything about the case? If so, could they be impartial despite that knowledge? Were they willing to follow legal instructions from the judge?

Some who would be disqualified were frank in their biases: One woman explained that she had an unflattering opinion of former real estate mogul Solomon Dwek, the undercover FBI informant who is expected to be the star witness in the case on behalf

of the prosecution. Dwek pleaded guilty last year to \$50 million bank fraud and admitted operating a real estate Ponzi scheme. He is cooperating with the federal government in other unrelated corruption trials as part of a plea agreement.

Another woman expressed a clear dislike for Dwek and added that her husband knew Ocean County Republican Chairman George R. Gilmore.

Another potential juror, who works as a Fort Monmouth comptroller, told the court his loyalty was to the troops and, by extension, the government.

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