

December 11, 2007

Trial opens in slaying

By Randall Beach, Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — John Jackson, charged with murder in the death of Desti Parnell, had planned to move out of her apartment on the day she was killed, according to testimony Monday during the first day of his trial. State's Attorney Michael Dearington wanted jurors to hear testimony that Parnell told Lawrence Jackson (no relation to the defendant) she wanted the locks changed on her apartment because she feared the defendant. "It's evidence of a deteriorating relationship," Dearington told Superior Court Judge William Holden while the jury was absent. "It provides a motive for homicide."

But defense attorney Walter Bansley III objected to the jury hearing "hearsay" prejudicial testimony. When Bansley also objected on the grounds of the testimony's relevance, Dearington replied, "It was her expectation he would leave. It's relevant in terms of how he might have responded to her expectation."

However, Holden sustained Bansley's objection. Jurors did hear Jackson and Parnell had arranged he would leave her apartment July 20, 2004, and that their relationship was over. But they heard nothing about her desire to have the locks changed. Prosecutors allege Jackson, now 36, beat and bound Parnell, 28, in her apartment at 672 Legion Ave. the afternoon of July 20. They had lived there four months, usually with their 6-year-old son, who was out of town the day of the slaying.

Lawrence Jackson acknowledged during his testimony he was romantically involved with Parnell at the time of her death. He said they spent the night together at his home on what would be the last night of her life, then dropped her off at her apartment at about 2:30 p.m. July 20. Police believe she was killed between 4 and 5 p.m. Jackson said he knew "Johnny" (the defendant) casually and that "Johnny" knew Parnell and he were dating. Lawrence Jackson testified he went to Parnell's apartment the night of July 21 because he had learned she had not shown up for her job at the New Haven Parking Authority. He said he knocked on the doors and windows but there was no response. At about 1:15 a.m. July 22, Jackson said, he called police.

Police Sgt. Richard Miller testified he responded to the scene and encountered Lawrence Jackson outside. "He said his friend lived there, that her boyfriend had gone to New York and had attempted to kill himself by jumping off a building," Miller testified. "He was afraid her life might be in danger."

Miller said he got inside through an unlocked first-floor window. "I went down the hallway and I observed a small amount of blood spatter on the (bedroom) door," Miller said. When he looked into the bedroom, Miller testified, he saw "a large pool of blood" on the floor.

"At the foot of the bed was a female lying on her stomach, hogtied, with a towel over her head," Miller said. He also said he saw a bloody claw-hammer in the bedroom.

In other testimony, Dr. Susan Williams, from the state chief medical examiner's office, said Parnell suffered stab wounds and blunt-force injuries to her head, neck, shoulder and back. She said Parnell was also strangled. Williams said the cause of death was multiple blunt traumatic head injuries.