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Slain woman's neighbor takes witness stand

By Randall Beach, Register Staff

NEW HAVEN — A woman who lived in the apartment above slaying victim Desti Parnell testified Tuesday she saw defendant John Jackson in Parnell's apartment shortly before she heard Parnell screaming.

A tearful Inez Alvarez also said she heard her friend and neighbor Parnell say, "Don't do this," and then heard Jackson say, "Get the (expletive) off me!"

Although Parnell said she did not see what was happening in the apartment below, she testified she recognized their voices.

The events occurred the afternoon of July 20, 2004, which is when police say Parnell, 28, was killed. Police allege Jackson, now 36 and facing a murder charge, beat and hog-tied Parnell in her first-floor apartment at 672 Legion Ave.

Alvarez testified Jackson had moved into Parnell's apartment in spring 2004. He is the father of Parnell's son, who was visiting his godmother in Virginia at the time of the slaying.

In testimony Monday, Lawrence Jackson (no relation to the defendant) said Jackson had planned to move out of the apartment the day of the slaying.

Alvarez said that an hour or two before the killing she had several conversations with Parnell and borrowed some of her cleaning products.

Alvarez said only the two of them were in Parnell's apartment. But she added, "As I was walking out, he (Jackson) was walking in." She said the time was about 4:45 p.m.

While she was cleaning her bathroom, Alvarez said, her niece came in and told her there was someone screaming. They then went into the hallway.

"I heard some screaming," she said. "It was Desti. She said, 'Don't do this.'" Alvarez said she then heard the obscenity from Jackson. "I figured it was just an argument," Alvarez said. "I didn't think anything of it. I went back into my apartment to finish what I was doing."

But she said shortly afterward she heard Parnell say, "Oh, my God, oh, my God." Alvarez said she went back downstairs and knocked on Parnell's door. There was no response. She said she called Parnell's cell phone a few times over the next 24 hours, but Parnell never answered.

Under cross-examination by defense attorney Walter Bansley IV, Alvarez said she never heard any banging, just voices. Bansley asked Alvarez, "You don't know what actually happened in that apartment, do you?" She replied, "At that point in time, no."