

# Man headed to trial in woman's death

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der in Oakland County Circuit Court. He faces one count of first-degree murder and a second count of possession of a firearm in the commission of a felony.

Upon conviction, the murder count carries a maximum penalty of life in prison; the firearms count carries a mandatory two-year prison term.

Hand ordered Vermeulen held without bond in the custody of the Oakland County Sheriff's Department, pending arraignment in Oakland County Circuit Court.

Prosecution witnesses were

sequestered at the request of assistant Oakland County prosecutor Harry Golski. The judge accepted an evaluation of Vermeulen by the Center for Forensic Psychiatry in Ypsilanti that determined he was competent to stand trial.

Vermeulen moved out of the family home in Redford Township in mid-September to live with Lewis, his ex-wife testified. The defendant filed a divorce action against her on Sept. 30 in Oakland County, and she and her 17-year-old son moved from Redford to Dearborn Heights on Oct. 10, according to testimony.

Vermeulen was a decorated war veteran, according to his son's testimony, and was a "very good shot."

He said his father had owned a "very powerful" .44-caliber Smith & Wesson magnum revolver for eight or 10 years, and usually kept five of the six chambers loaded. The gun had a "very light" trigger, the son said, which was "easily discharged without a lot of pressure. It wouldn't take much to squeeze off a round."

LEWIS DIED Dec. 26, 1985, of a gunshot wound to the chest, shot at a close-range distance of 1-2 feet, from right side to left through the

chest cavity, according to testimony from Oakland County chief medical examiner Bill Brooks.

Both lungs and her heart were perforated, causing "grave" damage, Brooks said. He estimated that she died instantaneously, sometime "mid-morning, probably about 6 a.m."

"The body appeared to be moved," he said, citing blood smears and droplets on the body "out of keeping with the wound."

Vermeulen's ex-wife testified that she tried to phone the defendant's apartment "several times" the morning of Dec. 26, but received no answer. Vermeulen and Lewis were scheduled to meet with a Farmington attorney that morning to talk about a divorce, according to previous testimony.

After taking her 17-year-old son to work on Dec. 26 at 1 p.m., Vermeulen's wife of 21 years visited the Farmington Hills apartment on Verdant Drive. After knocking on the

door for several minutes, she entered the apartment, using a key Vermeulen had given her a few days earlier, she said.

Upon seeing a partially nude female body lying on the apartment floor, she "altered the door and left. I didn't think she was dead — I thought she was drunk," Sharon Vermeulen said. Vermeulen's ex-wife had never met or talked with Lewis, according to testimony.

SHE DROVE to a nearby phone booth and after making two calls to a friend, and her sister-in-law, Sharon Vermeulen again attempted to call the Hills apartment. This time, the defendant answered. She then called the Farmington Hills Police, she testified.

Police and emergency medical personnel found both Lewis and Vermeulen on the floor of the Mulwood apartment at about 4 p.m. Dec. 26. According to witnesses, the two were next to each other, facing the same direction. Vermeulen was still alive

and Lewis was already dead. According to testimony, Lewis' body was "in the advanced stages of rigor mortis" when police discovered her.

Vermeulen was transported to Botolph General Hospital in Farmington Hills, where he remained in intensive care for several days with two allegedly self-inflicted gunshot wounds to the chest. He was arraigned at bedside by Hand on Dec. 31.

Testifying from the Hills police department were investigating officer David Lee, Sgt. James Whitcomb and Officer James Jarrett, the first officer to arrive at the scene.

According to police testimony, there was no evidence of any type of struggle in the apartment. A .44-caliber Smith & Wesson magnum revolver, registered to Vermeulen, was found with the cylinder open under Vermeulen's right leg with three spent casings. A speed loader, bullets and an empty gun holster were also found in the apartment.

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## Schools award bid

In order to prepare for the 1986-87 school year, the Farmington school board voted Tuesday, May 6, to spend \$241,620 for bus chassis and bodies.

The money was appropriated from the proposed 1986-87 budget, which will not be adopted until June 5.

Eight General Motors chassis will be purchased from Red Holman GMC of Westland for \$128,403 and the bus bodies from Hoekstra Truck and Equipment Co. of Grand Rapids. The local purchase was bid

through Farmington Public Schools, while the cut-off-low purchase was bid through a county bid system, according to Michael Flanagan, assistant superintendent for finance.

"This is an area we've done a very good job on," he said about the bus maintenance and rotation schedule.

Also awarded Tuesday was a \$13,049.50 low bid to Robert Cabinets of Plymouth for renovation of the home economics kitchen at Duncel Middle School.

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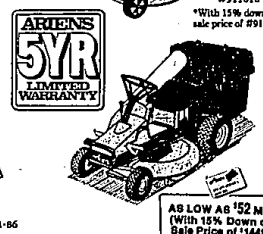
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