

Trials near for 2 murder defendants

By Casey Hana
staff writer

The wheels of justice move steadily — but slowly — for James Arnold Edwards and John Allen Vermulen — two men accused of first degree murder in Farmington Hills in separate incidents during 1985.

Both await trial in Oakland County Circuit Court on first degree murder charges. Both face a maximum penalty of life in prison if convicted. Edwards remains free on a \$5,000 cash bond one year after his wife's Oct. 14 death, while Vermulen remains incarcerated in the Oakland County Jail almost 10 months after the holiday shooting of a woman he

claims was his wife. No bond was set for Vermulen.

Prosecution and defense are gearing up for a trial for Edwards who is also accused of arson in his wife's death. The case is on standby in the Oakland County Circuit Courtroom of Judge John O'Brien, which means it could go to trial as early as mid-November, according to Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Allen Wolf.

Pre-trial conferences were completed Tuesday for Edwards, allowing defense attorney Nicholas Smith and Wolf to confer on the felony charges before going to trial.

FIRST-DEGREE murder and

first-degree felony murder counts were upheld, plus an added count of arson ordered by District Judge Margaret Schaeffer of Farmington at the conclusion of Edwards' preliminary examination in 47th District Court last March.

The examination transcript amounted to four volumes, which Wolf said has added to the court preparation time.

During the spring and summer months, several motions by the defense were denied by O'Brien, Wolf said. Key motions included a motion to dismiss the case and another to "make us choose on which count to try (Edwards). We think that's for the jury to decide," Wolf added.

The backlog of motions filed at the circuit court level has given investigators more time to interview witnesses and gather additional evidence in preparation for the trial, Farmington Hills Detective Danel Krause, investigator for the case, said. "Time is helping us."

Wolf said the extra time "hasn't been a disadvantage," and called the case "very complex."

WOLF SAID the extended time is not unusual with Edwards being out on bond. "Most judges give their priority to jail cases," he added. If the November court docket is heavy, the Edwards case may not be tried, he added.

"The prosecution has taken its own sweet time preparing its case," Smith said. "The circumstances are certainly complex enough. I daresay the prosecution has a lot more to get together. He (the prosecutor) is still wrestling with establishing the cause of death."

During more than three days of preliminary examination testimony, two expert pathology witnesses

could not agree on the cause of death, or the exact time of death, for Marlene F. Edwards, Edwards' wife who was discovered dead in the Edwards' Farmington Hills house following an arson fire Oct. 14, 1985. The fire caused about \$200,000 in damage to the two-story frame house near Halsted and Eight Mile. Edwards is presently living in Lakeport, a summer resort area near Port Huron, according to investigators. They believe he has retired from his Ford Motor Co. job in computer graphics.

IN THE case of Vermulen, pre-trial conferences or trial dates have not been scheduled, according to Detective David Lee of the Farmington Hills Police Department, investigator for the case.

Most of the investigative work is complete, he said. "There are a few things we need to tidy up, but nothing major. There are no real weaknesses in the case."

Still an issue is whether Vermulen's ex-wife of 21 years, Sharon Vermulen of Dearborn Heights, will

be allowed to testify against him in circuit court.

Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Fred Mesler will hear a prosecution motion Friday requesting Sharon Vermulen be allowed to testify. In addition, he will hear a defense motion asking that a bond be set, according to Oakland County Assistant Prosecutor Frederick Miller.

According to preliminary examination testimony in May, the two were still married when the defendant married Urline "Rena" Lewis and were married when Lewis was fatally shot Dec. 26, 1985, in the couple's Farmington Hills apartment.

Vermulen is charged with Lewis' death.

He was referred to and has returned from the Ypsilanti Center for Forensic Psychiatry, according to Miller. If necessary rulings are made by the judge, a trial date could be set as early as next month, he added.

Dana Wilson, Vermulen's court-appointed attorney from Hazel Park, did not return phone calls to discuss the case.

AIDS

Victim's estate awarded damages

Almost \$17,000 is expected to be awarded to the estate of a Farmington Hills man who claimed he was fired from his insurance sales job when his employer found out he had AIDS.

The award was ordered in an arbitration ruling earlier this month in the country's first reported AIDS lawsuit.

The \$5 million suit was filed shortly after insurance salesman Tim Trueman was fired in April 1984 from Advanced Underwriters Insurance Agency Inc. of Farmington Hills.

"The \$16,800 to Tim Trueman represents all lost wages," Ferndale Attorney David Piotrowsky said. "That figure in our opinion shows that Mr. Camden (owner of Advanced Underwriters) was responsible."

At the time of the suit, Camden denied he fired Trueman because he was homosexual and suffering from

acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Camden said he was unaware of Trueman's diagnosis until testimony before Oakland Circuit Judge John O'Brien in September 1984.

THE INSURANCE agency owner

cancelled Trueman's two-year contract because he was displeased with the salesman's work, Camden said.

Trueman, 32, died in February 1985 of Legionnaire's disease, a respiratory infection and complication related to AIDS.

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