

Accused killer of OU student found fit to stand trial

BY MARGARET O'BRIEN
STAFF WRITER

Southfield native Kenneth Ray Tranchida could face trial as early as March on first degree murder charges in the death of Oakland University student Tina Biggar.

Oakland County Circuit Court Judge Rudy J. Nichols ruled Jan. 5 that Tranchida was mentally competent to stand trial in the

death of the 23-year-old psychology student, which prosecutor believes occurred Aug. 23 in Tranchida's Southfield apartment on Shiawassee.

Biggar lived in Farmington Hills at the time of her death. Nichols based his ruling on the report of a psychiatric examination conducted by a court appointed psychiatrist. The examination found that Tranchida,

though depressed, is in touch with reality and is mentally competent enough to assist in his defense.

Tranchida's court appointed attorney Michael Modelski did not object to the report or the ruling, but said he planned to have Tranchida evaluated by a private psychiatrist.

"There is a difference between being criminally responsible for

your actions and being competent to stand trial," Modelski said. "Competence is irrelevant in determining whether or not someone is legally insane at the time of the crime."

The trial is tentatively set to begin at 8:30 a.m. March 1 in Judge Nichols' courtroom at the Oakland County court house in Pontiac.

Tranchida, 41, confessed in

open court to killing Biggar at his Sept. 28 arraignment on first degree murder charges.

"Would it be possible to waive this to circuit court now? I'm asking you — gentleman to gentleman sort of speaking," Tranchida asked 46th District Court Judge Bryan Levy at his arraignment. "I've plead guilty already your honor, I'm willing to face my duty."

Levy set the exam, since Tranchida made the statement without the advice of an attorney. Modelski said he plans to file

motions before the trial to bar that statement and others Tranchida made to police without the advice of counsel. At Tranchida's preliminary exam, Modelski also indicated that Tranchida had not been informed of his rights.

Tranchida was arrested Sept. 26 in a Detroit apartment, ending a nationwide manhunt that began a few days earlier with Biggar's body was found behind some bushes at a house on Nine Mile near Lahser — a house where Tranchida's aunt once lived.



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