

fate in the hands of jury: Final statements made in court Thursday

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MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT

PLACERVILLE — Attorneys in a manslaughter case with ties to South Lake Tahoe had their final chance to sell their side to jurors in a closing argument session Thursday that lasted several hours.

Prosecutor Worth Dikeman, who has argued defendant _____ had intent to kill Edward Ortega following a confrontation on the evening of July 31, 2002, told jurors that the only person claiming the death was self-defense is _____ and they would have to believe the 56-year-old ranch owner's story to return a not guilty verdict.

"There's no doubt Mr. _____ has been a successful businessman who's been active in his community," Dikeman said. "A handful of his friends even testified they found him to be honest and non-violent. But they would not be in any position to tell us how he would react in a fight."

Dikeman also told jurors that Ortega's last words of "I'm gonna shoot your ass" do not justify the use of deadly force.

He went on to say that _____ story did not match up with the defense's claim — backed by a pathologist it hired — that a fall to the ground, and not a sledgehammer strike, was what caused the skull fracture that ended Ortega's life within seconds or minutes.



Sency left, talks with his lawyer, William Routsis, in court on June 21. Sency is accused of manslaughter for his alleged killing of a worker with a sledgehammer in 2002.

Krystan Kellum / Mountain Democrat

Dikeman said he did not wish to defend any of the several instances of violent behavior on behalf of victim Ortega, but said the outbursts arose when Ortega believed he or his family was in danger.

Judge Eddie T. Keller allowed five of the past Ortega outbursts into the trial, which included one in which the former Arizona man beat another man with a tire jack and broke the man's nose after mistaking him for someone else. Another was an incident where Ortega assaulted a sleeping cab driver in the 1980s.

_____ 56, has maintained he acted in self-defense in the violent episode that led to the death of 45-year-old Ortega, who had worked on _____ ranch as a mason. _____ testified this week that he hit Ortega with

the handle of a sledgehammer only after Ortega came after him with a knife and said he was going to kill him.

In his closing argument, _____ attorney William Routsis said the case is about character. The attorney cited a California law that states if a person's character is found to be incapable of violence, that in itself is sufficient to render a not guilty verdict.

Routsis said his client's past, as made evident by the handful of character witnesses, shows he could not have acted with intent to kill Ortega. Routsis cited his description of his client's gentleman-like cooperation with law enforcement and the fact that charges were not filed until a year after the incident.

"The prosecutor even had a video _____ made of him walking around (the

site of the incident) and telling what happened," Routsis said. "But they didn't use it. And you know why they didn't use it? Because they were concerned about _____'s credibility."

"What you have here is a violent ex-con armed with a knife who comes at a man on his own property," the Reno-based attorney went on to say. "A man in that predicament has every right to protect himself."

Near the end of his statement Routsis raised eyebrows in the courtroom when he actually told jurors they should convict his client on one of the lesser charges, illegally moving the body.

"I think you need to convict him on that charge," he said. "I think that lesson is one of the most difficult lessons _____ will learn."

Near the end of his statement Routsis, for the last time, highlighted one of his key arguments used throughout the trial, that Ortega was a violent man.

"He was a raging psychopath," Routsis said. "In a funny way he brought about his own death."

Dikeman was still offering up his rebuttal statement at press time in front of a packed courtroom of supporters from both sides. After a final series of instructions by Judge Keller, jurors will decide whether or not _____ is guilty of the manslaughter charge, which carries a state prison term of three to 11 years.