

AROUND THE LAKE

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Jury seated for manslaughter trial

Judge rules on victim's alleged violent past

BY ERIC LAUGHLIN

MOUNTAIN DEMOCRAT

PLACERVILLE — After a jury was seated Wednesday afternoon in the manslaughter case of _____ a judge Thursday ruled on motions made by both attorneys regarding which parts of the victim's alleged violent past could be introduced in the trial.

Testimony is to begin on Tuesday.

_____, 56, is a former South Lake Tahoe auto mechanic accused of manslaughter for allegedly killing a worker with a sledgehammer at his Strawberry ranch in Kyburz.

_____ has said he acted in self-defense killing Edward Ortega in July 2002, after the intoxicated Ortega pulled a box cutter on him at the Silver Fork Road ranch.

The prosecution has alleged _____ after killing Ortega, placed the body in Ortega's truck and drove to a location on Mormon Emigrant Trail south of Pollock Pines where he pushed the vehicle off an embankment in trying to disguise Ortega's death as a car accident.

In Thursday's hearing of the motions, _____ attorney William Routsis argued Ortega's extensive history of violence — which dates back to the 1970s — should be evaluated by the jury.

The incidents include one in 1975 when Ortega allegedly assaulted a man with a tire iron and a 1986 incident in which he was convicted of aggravated assault for slamming his truck into a taxi cab after getting into an argument with the driver. The most recent incident reportedly occurred at a Fourth of July party in 2001 in South Lake Tahoe, where Ortega was said to have made a drunken entrance, yelling obscenities and threatening to fight partygoers.

Prosecutor Worth Dikeman argued the events listed by Routsis are not comparable to the July 2002 incident.

"I'm not suggesting that (Ortega) was a



Krysten Kellum / Mountain Democrat

_____ left, and his lawyer, William Routsis, in court on Thursday. _____ is accused of manslaughter for his alleged killing of a worker with a sledgehammer in July 2002.

saint," Dikeman said. "But (the incidents of question) are quite dissimilar from the situation involved here."

Dikeman added the prior incidents consisted of Ortega being confronted with aggressiveness thus a physical response is used to defend himself or his family.

Dikeman also said that one of the victims the defense plans to call will likely provide testimony contrasting with what the victim originally told police officers 20 years ago.

Routsis disagreed the incidents were not comparable.

"This guy was the walking embodiment of who's wanted in America," Routsis said of Ortega.

Ortega served prison time in the 1980s and 1990s on at least two occasions. El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Eddie Besides the five incidents allowed into the trial, Keller ruled the others be dismissed, citing them as cumulative and remote.

Keller additionally ruled to allow a prosecution witness to testify against _____ char-

acter. In his argument for the man to testify, Dikeman said the witness was "run down" by _____ outside of _____ automotive shop in South Lake Tahoe called Rodney's Import Auto off D Street. Dikeman added that another confrontation between the two men resulted in a report being filed with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

Routsis responded that his client never once touched the man and it was the man who initiated the ongoing dispute.

Following the final draft of the witness list, Dikeman questioned Routsis' subpoena of Assistant District Attorney Paul Sutherland, who could be called to testify to what Routsis has claimed are discrepancies in testimony of two sheriff's officials.

Routsis told Keller sheriff's sergeant Tom Hoagland and former detective Paul Moskini, while under oath during a prior proceeding, denied ever seeing a video recording of _____ in a conference with Routsis. The denial, according to Routsis, clashed with another sheriff official's testi-

THEY SAID IT...

"This guy was the walking embodiment of who's wanted in America."

William Routsis

mony that he watched the recording in the presence of the two officials.

Sutherland immediately recused himself from prosecuting the case after accidentally watching part of the tape. Routsis told Keller that he only plans to bring the issue of the tape into play if absolutely necessary.

Dikeman said that the two officials did not break the law by watching the tape because they did not do so with intent. The trial is expected to last up to a month. Opening statements are expected to begin at 8:30 a.m. on Tuesday in Placerville.

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