



Genesee County Prosecutor's Office

David Leyton, Prosecutor

Clean sweep in court

Jury convicts third man in brutal slayings of 3 seniors in their homes

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Saturday, June 16, 2007

By Paul Janczewski

pjanczewski@flintjournal.com • 810.766.6333

FLINT - Henry Wedlow had a simple, joyous reaction after a jury convicted a third man Friday in the January 2006 slaying of his elderly brother and his brother's wife.

"Yes!" he said, thrusting his hands in the air, a smile covering his face.

Wedlow, 64 of Flint said there has not been much to smile about since his brother and sister-in-law, Green and Catherine Wedlow, were found dead in their York Avenue residence.

But with the jury convicting Demitray L. Hodge of 24 of 27 charges he faced, Henry Wedlow said closure can begin. "It's been a long 15 months, but we finally got justice," Henry Wedlow said.

Jon Vondrasek, 42, of Attica Township, the nephew of a third slaying victim, Robert Vondrasek, shared in the joy of seeing Hodge and two co-defendants convicted. "We'll be going to the cemetery today to pay our respects to Bob, and to tell him 'We got them,'" Jon Vondrasek said.

Hodge, Sherman M. Buggs, and Jerry O. Walker all face life in prison without parole at their July 10 sentencing before Genesee Circuit Judge Joseph J. Farah in the slayings of the Wedlows and Vondrasek.

Genesee County Prosecutor David Leyton called the trio "ruthless" and lauded his staff and police for putting together a cohesive and convincing courtroom presence that brought some relief to residents.

"Flint is a safer city tonight," Leyton said.

On Jan. 27, 2006, Catherine Wedlow, 74, and Green Wedlow, 75, were found shot to death. Two days later, Vondrasek, 75, was found with a fractured skull, eight knives embedded in his back, a slashed throat and 14 stab wounds. His E. Russell Avenue residence and his body were set on fire. Left behind was a taunting note to police from a person claiming to be the "22-cal killer." That note, coupled with the brutality of the slayings, energized Flint Sgts. Shawn Ellis and Jeff Collins to bring those killers to justice, Ellis said.

Hodge, 27, was acquitted on three weapons charges, but convicted of first-degree murder, felony murder, armed robbery, home invasion, conspiracy and weapons charges in the three homicides.

Juries convicted the other two defendants on several charges earlier this week.

Buggs, 24, of Flint was found guilty on more than two dozen similar counts, including six offenses carrying mandatory life terms, but the jury acquitted him of two of the 27 charges he faced.

Walker, 18, of Flint was convicted of 19 of the 25 charges he faced, including first-degree murder and felony murder.

While Walker gasped as he was convicted, Hodge sat idly, chewing his fingernails, as the verdicts were read.

Buggs stared intently as the jury foreman read the verdicts and smirked at one point.

"That's a glimpse into the character and mindsets" of the killers, Leyton said. "But they'll be smiling behind prison walls now."

Leyton also called this trial a "watershed event" in fighting Flint-area crime. He said that witnesses have often been reluctant to come forward in criminal matters. "But here, people came forward and wanted to assist (police and prosecutors)."

Attorney Neil C. Szabo, who represented Hodge with attorney Paul Vance, said it was a long hard case. "But it's not over yet," he said. "We have a lot of appealable issues." Attorney David Clark, who represented Buggs with attorney Sam Terry, and John Tosto, who represented Walker, also said issues will be raised on appeal. Each defendant had his own jury, but juries were shuffled in and out of court at times to hear certain evidence that was pertinent only to the case against an individual defendant.

###