

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 07, 2001

8/6 Mildred girl missing: Mother discovers child gone upon returning home

By JUSTIN LEWIS/Daily Sun Staff

MILDRED - Searchers were scheduled to continue their extensive manhunt of a 10-year-old Mildred girl this morning.

April Danielle Bryant, an incoming fifth grader in the Mildred school district, was reported missing around 4 a.m. Sunday morning when her mother discovered her gone.

The Amber Alert, an area-wide alert of missing children, was sounded Sunday morning as searchers looked for the girl.

"I came in from work and she was gone," Gale Zoch, Bryant's mother said.

Navarro County Sheriff's Deputies arrived at the residence on county road SE3020 shortly after the 3:45 a.m. call to 9-1-1.

"The mother came in from work and noticed that the child was missing," Sergeant Jimmy Johnson, NCSO detective, said. "She called around to friends and when nobody had seen her, she called us around 3:45.

"We had deputies on the scene in under 10 minutes and we have had an ongoing search ever since."

NCSO officials are not yet categorizing Bryant's disappearance as a kidnapping. There is no evidence to support foul play or an abduction, however, there is no evidence at this time to rule it out either.

"We know that a child is missing," Johnson said.

Numerous volunteers were on-hand to assist in the search for the blond-haired, green-eyed girl who had just gotten a new pair of glasses.

Bryant is described as being 5 feet tall and weighing almost 100 pounds.

"She has gained some weight since the pictures were taken," Zoch said of the pictures handed out to media and law enforcement personnel.

No description of what color or style of clothes Bryant was wearing at the time of her disappearance was available.

Bryant, who has lived in the Mildred area for approximately eight years, had just returned from spending time with her father in Waco.

"She knows the area and people," her mother said. "But she has never been one to wander off."

Texas Department of Criminal Justice tracking dogs and volunteers on foot canvassed the area looking for the missing girl. The dogs caught a faint trail during the afternoon, but soon lost scent.

In all, the dogs covered an area with about a mile radius with the house as the center.

A Texas Department of Public Safety helicopter, along with Corsicana Police Department K-9 Officer John Semetko and a private citizen with tracking dogs searched earlier Sunday.

Corsicana Emergency Corps and NCSO personnel stayed at the residence in Mildred throughout the day as volunteers looked for the girl and detectives talked to school officials and friends of the girl looking for clues as to her whereabouts.

One tip from a caller led to calls to the Greenville Police Department to check out a possible lead. This lead ultimately did not turn up anything.

Two finds that had hearts racing at the scene were two sets of footprints, one leading to a bridge over a dry creek bed not far from the house and one in the creek further on down.

Both were originally thought to be those of the missing girl, but were not found to be so.

Everyone at the scene was thankful for the help of all the volunteers and organizations who helped out.

"Several businesses donated food and the Salvation Army was out here all day long," Johnson said.

NCSO officials are continuing their investigation, checking on leads and possible suspects.

Volunteers were scheduled to resume their search this morning.

Anyone with any possible information on the whereabouts of April Bryant is asked to contact the Navarro County Sheriff's Department at 654-3002.

Justin Lewis may be reached via e-mail at jlewis@corsicanadailysun.com

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 07, 2001

8/7 MISSING GIRL FOUND DEAD: Suspect leads NCSO, FBI officials to body

By JUSTIN LEWIS/COPYRIGHT CORSICANA DAILY SUN

The search for a missing 10-year-old Mildred girl in southeast Navarro County came to a tragic end Monday night.

The body of 10-year-old April Danielle Bryant was found in a creek off of county road SW0030 in the area known as "Love Creek Road."

"We have recovered the body of April Danielle Bryant," Navarro County Sheriff Les Cotten said at a press conference late Monday night. "At this time we do have a suspect in this case."

Cotten refused to officially name a suspect until that suspect was formally charged. The arraignment was scheduled for this morning.

Navarro County Sheriff's Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials were led to the fairly remote area where the body was located by a suspect that is now in custody.

When asked how they found the body, Cotten replied "Information from the suspect."

Despite the fact that Cotten refused to officially name a suspect, the girl's stepfather, Michael Zoch was seen being led out of the Navarro County Justice Center by FBI agents and NCSO officials shortly before the body was discovered.

The stepfather of the 10-year-old Mildred girl missing since Sunday morning was arrested Monday afternoon by Navarro County Sheriff's deputies for violating a court order.

"We did take Michael Zoch into custody this afternoon for violation of a court order by going back onto Gale Zoch's property," Cotten said.

A protective order had been in place, banning Michael Zoch from the property on county road SE3020 in Mildred.

Navarro County Sheriff's Department officials are now considering this case as a capital case.

"We are now looking at capital murder charges in this case," Cotten said.

Zoch's arrest Monday afternoon followed two missed appointments with NCSO officials, one Sunday evening at his residence in Silver City and another Monday morning at the Navarro County Justice Center.

Sunday night, as the search for the missing child was winding down, Zoch was asked if he would meet a deputy at his residence in Silver City and agreed. Zoch, however, never showed up at that residence.

His Monday morning meeting with NCSO officials was also missed.

"We asked him to take a polygraph and he agreed," Cotten said. "We asked him to contact us this morning (Monday) and he did not call or show up."

A warrant for his arrest was then issued for violation of the court order.

NCSO Deputy Hank Bailey took Zoch into custody from a job site at Navarro College Monday afternoon without incident.

"We found him at his work and he was then taken into custody," Cotten said. "He has once again been asked to submit to a polygraph test."

Law enforcement officials were not originally calling the disappearance an abduction, but those views changed with the discovery of one item Sunday night, Bryant's eyeglasses.

According to the girl's mother, Gail Zoch, Bryant could not see very well without her glasses.

Bryant, who would have been an incoming fifth grader in the Mildred school district, was reported missing around 4 a.m. Sunday morning when her mother discovered her gone.

"The mother came in from work and noticed that the child was missing," Sergeant Jimmy Johnson, NCSO detective, said in an interview Sunday afternoon. "She called around to friends and when nobody had seen her, she called us around 3:45."

"We had deputies on the scene in under 10 minutes and we have had an ongoing search ever since."

The mother had been at work at The Mustang Club in Mustang Saturday evening into early Sunday morning, leaving the girl at home. Relatives who live next door to the residence on county road SE3020 were just 50 yards away when the abduction took place.

Monday saw more searching in the fields and wooded areas surrounding the family's residence. Corsicana Emergency Corps personnel, along with volunteers from all over the county combed the area on horseback, all-terrain vehicles and foot in search of the

girl.

NCSO personnel stepped up patrol Monday, canvassing the area and contacting numerous people.

"We called the evening shift in at noon," Cotten said. "We have been going around checking all the known child sex offenders in Corsicana and Navarro County to see if any of them might know something."

The Federal Bureau of Investigation had also been asked to assist NCSO officials in the investigation.

"We are here at the invitation of the sheriff and to assist in their investigation," Lori Bailey, FBI special agent, said. "We'll stay and help as long as we are needed."

Numerous alleged sightings of the girl had been called in to the Navarro County Sheriff's Department dispatch center as well as the Corsicana Police Department dispatch.

The mother and daughter, along with two other children, a 14-year old daughter and 2-year-old son, have lived in the Mildred area for several years.

Zoch didn't believe that her daughter just left unannounced.

"She knows the area and people," her mother said. "But she has never been one to wander off."

One tip from a caller led to calls to the Greenville Police Department to check out a possible lead Sunday afternoon. This lead ultimately did not turn up anything.

Two finds that had hearts racing at the scene Sunday were two separate occurrences of footprints, one leading to a bridge over a dry creek bed not far from the house and one in the creek further on down.

Both were originally thought to be those of the missing girl, but were not found to be so.

The family was not available as of press time, but Cotten said that the family was visited by an un-named NCSO detective.

"I haven't spoken to the family, but one of the detectives went out to speak to them," Cotten said. "I think they are taking it pretty hard."

Justin Lewis may be reached via e-mail at jlewis@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 08, 2001

8/8 Obituaries

April Danielle Bryant

April Danielle Bryant, 10, of Mildred passed away Aug. 6, 2001.

Visitation will be held from 6 to 8 p.m. today at Griffin-Roughton Funeral Home.

Services will be 2 p.m. Thursday at Mildred Baptist Church with the Rev. Tony Neal officiating. Interment will follow at Oakwood Cemetery.

Pallbearers will be Asa Gallup, Duane Gallup, David Bell, Keith Martin, Charles Williams and Olin Williams.

April was born Jan. 14, 1991 in Corsicana.

She is survived by her father, Allan Bryant of Hewitt; mother, Gale Zoch of Mildred; Amanda McElhenney of Mildred; brother, Justin Zoch of Mildred; grandparents, Dr. Allen and Sharon Gallup of Corsicana and Brenda "BJ" Hamlin of Waco; great-grandparents, Lois and Tutor Bell of Eureka; aunts and uncles, Asa and Deanne Gallup of Corsicana, Duane and Barbara Gallup of Corsicana, Brian Brooks, Lillian and Jason Bell, Ted Marr, Tina Brooks, Sharon Minatrea of Wortham, Marsha and Dennis Dickerson of Mildred, Cathy and Mike Reeves of Wortham, and Brandon and Pam Minatra of Arlington.

Memorials may be made to the April Bryant Fund, in care of the Powell State Bank, P.O. Box 205, Powell, Texas 75153.

Arrangements by Griffin-Roughton Funeral Home of Corsicana.

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 08, 2001

8/8 Zoch charged in murder; death penalty will be persued

By JUSTIN LEWIS/Daily Sun Staff

Michael Paul Zoch was arraigned Tuesday morning on capital murder charges stemming from the abduction and murder of 10-year-old April Bryant.

Justice of the Peace for Precinct 2 Bob McQuary set Zoch's bail at \$500,000.

Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor told the Daily Sun that he himself would be trying the case when it came to trial and that they would seek the death penalty.

"Monday afternoon, Michael Paul Zoch, the ex-stepfather of April Dawn Bryant, was arrested by the Navarro County Sheriff's Department for violation of a protective order out of Judge John Jackson's 13th District Court," Les Cotten, Navarro County sheriff, said in a Tuesday press conference.

Bryant's body was recovered from an unnamed creek just north of "Love Bridge," a popular spot among area teenagers.

"Later on Monday afternoon, Zoch agreed to take a polygraph which was administered by a FBI polygraph expert," Cotten said. "He failed the polygraph and later admitted to the FBI that he killed April Bryant and disposed of her body by dumping it in an unnamed creek in southwest Navarro County.

"Later that night, he agreed to take NCSO and FBI officials to where the body was and we took him to that location," Cotten said. "That is when the body was found."

Navarro County Sheriff's Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials were led by Zoch around 9 p.m. Monday night to the remote area where the body was located.

The FBI's Evidence Response Team went to the scene and took over the recovery of the body. They recovered the body which was sent to the Southwest Institute of Forensic Sciences in Dallas for autopsy.

"I was called by the Navarro County Sheriff's Department around 11:05 p.m. and got to the scene on SW0030 where I was shown the body of April Bryant," McQuary said. "I ruled the death at 11:25 p.m. and released the body to the FBI."

Cotten said that Bryant's body was found partially nude laying in the bed of the creek.

Preliminary autopsy reports were not available as of press time, but McQuary ruled the manner of death as "homicide" at the scene.

Zoch has given sheriff's detectives a confession to the effect that he did kill Bryant Saturday evening.

Cotten told reporters at the press conference why Zoch said he killed the girl.

"He had performed sex on the girl and she said that she was going to tell her mother," Cotten said. "That is when he started choking her."

Cotten also reported that Zoch claimed he had lured the girl out of her house.

"He told her that he was going to take her to the club were her mother was working," Cotten said. "I do not believe his story."

According to NCSO officials, the assault and murder happened in roughly the same area in which the body was found.

Zoch has a well-documented history of violence. NCSO has dealt with him several times in the past.

Court records also show Zoch had a drug problem and had been convicted of family violence offenses in the past.

In April 2000, Gale Zoch filed an affidavit for a temporary restraining order, which said Michael Zoch ran into her with the couple's car while she was six months pregnant and threw a glass that hit April. The affidavit also said Michael Zoch had destroyed the inside of her house.

Bryant was scheduled to begin the fifth grade in the Mildred Independent School District Thursday. Instead, she will be laid to rest in Oakwood Cemetery in Corsicana.

Bryant was reported missing around 4 a.m. Sunday when her mother discovered her gone.

The mother had been at work at The Mustang Club Saturday evening into early Sunday morning, leaving the girl at home. Relatives who live next door to the residence on county road SE3020 were just 50 yards away when the abduction took place.

Law enforcement officials were not originally calling the disappearance an abduction, but their views changed with the discovery of one item Sunday night, Bryant's eyeglasses.

According to the girl's mother, Gail Zoch, Bryant could not see very well without her glasses.

Zoch's Monday arrest followed two missed appointments with NCSO officials, one Sunday evening at a residence he was watching in Silver City and another Monday morning at the Navarro County Justice Center.

Sunday night, as the search for the missing child was winding down, Zoch was asked if he would meet a deputy at his residence in Silver City and agreed. Zoch, however, never showed up at that residence.

His Monday morning meeting was also missed.

"We asked him to take a polygraph and he agreed," Cotten said. "We asked him to contact us this morning (Monday) and he did not call or show up."

A warrant for his arrest was then issued for violation of the court order.

Cotten described the toll the ordeal has taken on everyone.

"Something like this to me is probably the hardest part of law enforcement. It's hard to see a child treated this way," Cotten said. "I thought he might have been capable of doing something like this but I didn't think he'd do it to a child."

Justin Lewis may be reached via e-mail at jlewis@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

any • all phrase Find in Article Content

Perform Search

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002

10 results/page Perform Date Search

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

Home | About Us | News | Classifieds | Advertising | Contact | Privacy Policy | Terms of Service
 Search | Archives | Subscriptions | Community | Feedback | Advertise | Contact Us
 Privacy Policy | Terms of Service | Site Map | RSS Feeds | Copyright © 2001

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the express written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 08, 2001

8/9 Bryant autopsy gets priority; process begins slow progress

By JUSTIN LEWIS/Daily Sun Staff

The waiting has begun.

With the search for missing 10-year-old April Bryant tragically over and a suspect in custody and confession in hand, the slow process of preparing for a capital murder trial is getting underway.

"Right now, there is nothing new to report," Don Barron, Navarro County Sheriff's Department chief deputy said Wednesday afternoon. "All we can do now is wait."

NCSO officials were still waiting for the preliminary autopsy report Wednesday afternoon.

"We haven't heard anything yet," Jimmy Johnson, NCSO detective sergeant said. "But, they (Southwestern Institute of Forensic Science) have put this first. There is a rush on this case."

Autopsy results normally take several months to get into the waiting hands of law enforcement officials and prosecutors. Sources say that results from the autopsy of Bryant will return sooner.

Michael Paul Zoch was arraigned Tuesday morning on capital murder charges stemming from the abduction and murder Bryant, Zoch's ex-stepdaughter.

Justice of the Peace for Precinct 2 Bob McQuary set Zoch's bail at \$500,000.

Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor told the Daily Sun Tuesday that he himself would be trying the case when it came to trial and that they would seek the death penalty.

Bryant was reported missing around 4 a.m. Sunday when her mother discovered her gone.

An intense two-day search conducted by NCSO, Texas Ranger Steve Foster, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Corsicana Emergency Corps and volunteers from surrounding areas ended tragically with the discovery of Bryant's body Monday.

NCSO and FBI officials were led, by Zoch, to the remote area on Love Bridge Road where the body was located around 9 p.m. Monday night.

The FBI's Evidence Response Team came to the scene and took over the scene. They recovered the body which was sent to SWIFS for autopsy.

Zoch has given sheriff's detectives a confession to the effect that he killed Bryant Saturday evening.

Les Cotten, Navarro County sheriff told reporters at a press conference Tuesday why Zoch said he killed the girl.

"He had performed sex on the girl and she said that she was going to tell her mother," Cotten said. "That is when he started choking her."

Cotten also reported that Zoch claimed he had lured the girl out of her house.

"He told her that he was going to take her to the club were her mother was working," Cotten said. "I do not believe his story."

Funeral services for Bryant were scheduled for 2 p.m. today at Mildred Baptist Church. She will be laid to rest at Oakwood Cemetery following the service.

Two fundraisers have also been started for the family of the girl.

A memorial fundraiser cookout for April Bryant has been scheduled for 5 p.m. Saturday at the American Legion Post 22 in Corsicana.

A memorial fund has also been set up at the Powell State Bank to help with the cost of funeral services for Bryant.

"The fund will help us, the family, to pay for April's funeral," Allan Bryant, April's father, said in an interview with the Daily Sun Tuesday afternoon. "Anything not used for the funeral will be donated to a charity of some sort."

"It will probably be donated to a charity for missing or exploited children or one that helps family members cope with a tragedy like ours," Mr. Bryant added, fighting back tears. "Because I don't know how I am going to handle this."

Mr. Bryant fought back tears and pent up emotions as he discussed what he and the family were going through.

"It is impossible to describe the depth of our feelings right now," he said. "My baby was taken and horribly brutalized, killed and dumped."

"How can you describe how you feel about that?"

Cotten voiced similar feelings.

"Something like this to me is probably the hardest part of law enforcement. It's hard to see a child treated this way," Cotten said. "I thought he might have been capable of doing something like this but I didn't think he'd do it to a child."

Justin Lewis may be reached via e-mail at jlewis@corsicanadailysun.com^{1/4}

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content
Perform Search

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page Perform Date Search

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Birth Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Glossbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Store](#) | [Marketplace](#) | [Help](#) | [Privacy & Security](#) | [About Us](#) | [Feedback](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the explicit written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 08, 2001

8/9 Appointed defense attorney was 'next up'

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

The wheels are already turning for the next step down the judicial road for Michael Paul Zoch, who is charged with the capital murder of his former stepdaughter, 10-year-old April Danielle Bryant.

Local attorney Kerri Anderson-Donica has been named as Zoch's court-appointed attorney by Judge John Jackson of the 13th Judicial District Court.

"I guess they (district judge's office) were trying to be prepared, but they called my office to remind us that I was next up in the rotation," Anderson-Donica said.

Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor said Tuesday that Zoch's case will be presented the grand jury for indictment at its next session. Officials in the district attorney's office said Wednesday that session is scheduled for Thursday, Aug. 23.

Anderson-Donica, who spoke with the Daily Sun from San Antonio where she has been attending a legal seminar this week, said she hasn't had the opportunity to familiarize herself with the case.

She's not unfamiliar with this type of case. She said she has served as defense attorney in "six or seven" capital murder trials in the past.

Anderson-Donica was the defense attorney in the David Ovalle murder trial. Ovalle was found guilty and given the death penalty in that case, but Anderson-Donica's appeal of the sentence resulted in an appellate court ruling commuting the death sentence to life in prison.

The attorney said she is ambivalent about the death penalty.

"I have mixed emotions about us assuming the role of God and us being on the same level as those who do the crimes," Anderson-Donica said. "'Eye for an eye' isn't exactly a comfortable philosophy for me and I don't think (the death penalty) is a deterrent. I don't believe criminals stop and say, 'I better not do this, I could get the death penalty.'"

"I'm not sure what good it does."

The media hoopla surrounding the murder of the 10-year-old Mildred girl will make this particular case very visible. Anderson-Donica said her responsibility will be to focus on the legal process.

"You have to be careful in a high-profile case that you worry about your client rather than worry about taking care of all the things going on outside the case," Anderson-Donica said.

Regardless of her personal feelings on the possible penalty in the Zoch capital murder case, Anderson-Donica said she understands how the death of April Bryant has affected the residents of Mildred and Navarro County.

"It's obviously tragic, tragic circumstances," she said. "Every time you have a case like this there are a lot of people hurting."

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at lcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002

10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

HOME | LOCAL NEWS | SPORTS | LIFESTYLE | COMMUNITY | OPINION | ADVERTISE | SPECIAL SECTIONS
 MORE SECTIONS | ARCHIVES | SUBSCRIBE | CONTACT US | ABOUT US | RSS FEEDS
 STYLES | MOBILE PHONE | EMAIL | PRINT & ORDER | CONTACT US | ABOUT US

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the expre written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 09, 2001

8/10 MILDRED MOURNS APRIL: Family, area says goodbye

By JUSTIN LEWIS/Daily Sun Staff

CORSICANA - April Bryant, the 10-year-old Mildred girl reported missing and later found murdered, was laid to rest Thursday afternoon at Oakwood Cemetery in Corsicana.

About 60 people gathered at the graveside service in the 100-degree heat following the hour-long funeral service at Mildred Baptist Church.

The church, a fairly small country church located on U.S. Highway 287 in Mildred, was packed with family members, friends and members of the community which led an intense two-day search for the missing girl earlier this week. The chapel was standing-room only with hundreds more people outside.

The entire area was saddened when the search for April ended late Monday night after Michael Paul Zoch, April's ex-stepfather, confessed to kidnapping and murdering the girl. Zoch then led Navarro County Sheriff's Department and Federal Bureau of Investigation officials to the girl's body.

She had been missing since early Sunday morning.

A shiny blue casket and numerous flower arrangements and photos sat at the front of the church. Students of Mildred in attendance passed a basketball around, signing it for April.

The Rev. Tony Neal, April's pastor, made references throughout the service of her unending energy and love for everybody around her.

"She always had hugs for everyone," Neal said. "During bible school three weeks ago ... whenever I would ask a question, her hand would always shoot up in the air.

"I asked the group if anything significant had happened to them during the week, and her hand raised slowly and she replied, 'I asked Jesus into my life,'" Neal said. "I am just so glad that we taught the gospel so that she could understand it."

Sniffing and crying could be heard throughout the church during the service.

April's parents, Allan Bryant and Gale Zoch, were visibly upset.

"This is the hardest day of them all," her father said before the service. "I have to say good-bye. I am just not ready to do it."

Ms. Zoch, clutching a white teddy bear throughout the service and at graveside, did not speak during the service.

Flags at the Mildred ISD complex across the highway from the church flew at half mast Thursday in honor of April.

At graveside, Neal read a poem about April that Rachel Walker had written and given to him. It read:

In this world full of shame, people gently mention your name.

As you peer down at our faces, you are now in the Good Lord's graces. Young at heart, young at play, too early came your day.

If sin had not taken you away, your mother would still be holding you today.

Questions still unanswered, only wonders in our minds.

Deep down in our hearts, we will find you playing with the angels now.

And to us, you look down happily and free, and as our tears still slowly drip, we see you are where you earned to be.

We hope your family lives with love and hope, while you are gone it is hard to cope; to lose a child is like losing your own life.

It will be awhile before they can completely rest, but as long as they understand that you are in God's hands, they can learn to trust again.

May God bless your family and friends.

"Being at graveside is the time when we say good-bye," Neal said. "Yet, saying good-bye is the hardest thing to do."

Justin Lewis may be reached via e-mail at jlewis@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

<http://www.corsicanadailysun.com/archives/index.inn?loc=detail&doc=/2001/August/09-1578...> 8/30/2002

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 18, 2001

8/19 Gale Zoch disputes rumors about self; choices made

By JUSTIN LEWIS/Daily Sun Staff

Gale Zoch has heard rumors spreading around town about her, the donations made in the name of her slain daughter and choices she has made. She wants to clear some of these things up.

She says that these rumors are hurting her and her family in their quest to mourn and recover from the loss of April Bryant, Zoch's 10-year-old daughter who was abducted and murdered by her former stepfather, Michael Zoch.

The first thing that Ms. Zoch spoke about in an interview with the Daily Sun Friday afternoon was the speculation that she had allowed Mr. Zoch back to her house.

"I did not let him come to my house," she said. "He was there when I got back from my full-time job in Ennis. I didn't know he was there, and I made him leave.

"He was actually in my house working on stuff. He got a little upset when I asked him to leave, but he got over that."

Ms. Zoch also said that she never let Mr. Zoch back after their divorce in 2000, and that when he did show up at her house, she made him leave.

"He called me quite a bit and he would come over," she said. "And every time we made him leave. The judge told me (at the time of their divorce) that Michael could have supervised visits (with his two-year-old son) and we would meet in a public place or in front of his parent's house."

Ms. Zoch went on to talk about the abusive relationship and the temper that she endured with Mr. Zoch.

"He totally destroyed my house, he did \$4,100 worth of damage to my car and he was put in jail for six or seven months," she said. "But he never showed any violence toward the children. He didn't even like to discipline the children. He couldn't stand to see them cry."

When asked whether or not she thought that Mr. Zoch abducted and killed her daughter to get back at her, Ms. Zoch replied, "Yes."

"It was me he was angry at," she said. "I always believed that he would hurt me eventually if given the opportunity. I think that he thinks that this is the worst way to hurt me, through my children."

Ms. Zoch is confused as to why, throughout all of the media scrutiny of her daughter's abduction, no mention was made of her full-time job, only her part-time job at the Mustang Club.

"I work 40 hours a week as a hair dresser in Ennis," Ms. Zoch said. "I drive back and forth from Mildred to Ennis everyday to work."

Ms. Zoch said that she took the job at the club to buy school supplies for her children.

Ms. Zoch also wants to clear up whether or not she is dating a convicted sex offender.

"I am not dating anyone," Ms. Zoch said. "A lady that I work with is dating a registered sex offender but when I found out about him, I told him to go away and not come around. His number is even blocked from my phone. I haven't dated anyone since Michael because I was scared of what he would do."

Ms. Zoch confirmed that she is looking for a new house to buy or rent in the Mildred area. She is also putting her current residence on the market.

Her family has lived in the Mildred area for about eight years and her oldest daughter has been in the Mildred school district since the first grade.

"I can't take her out of school here and away from her friends and support here," Ms. Zoch said. "He (Michael Zoch) took her sister from her, he is not going to take her friends and school from her."

Ms. Zoch said that she just wanted the rumors cleared up.

"I just want to get these things cleared up," Ms. Zoch said. "Yes, April was there a couple of time alone, but always with supervision next door with Otto and Gloria (Michael Zoch's parents). I am not a horrible person."

Ms. Zoch wants to start a ribbon campaign to remember April until Mr. Zoch goes to trial

"We want to start a ribbon campaign to run until April's murderer is convicted," Ms. Zoch said. "We want people to get angel pins and blue ribbons to wear or put on their cars until that monster is convicted."

Justin Lewis may be reached via e-mail at jlewis@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

July 26, 2002

7/27 Motion to remove judge from case denied

From Staff Reports

Attorneys for an area man preparing to stand trial for capital murder attempted unsuccessfully Thursday to have 13th Judicial District Court Judge John Jackson removed from the case.

In a hearing before a visiting district judge from Seguin, the defense team for Michael Paul Zoch made a three-point argument during a motion to recuse hearing in the court. All three arguments in the motion were denied.

The defense team, consisting of local attorneys Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins, argued that Jackson was a material witness in the case because he signed the order that had Zoch arrested for violating an order in his divorce case. The defense also claimed, among other things, Jackson showed bias against Zoch in the divorce case.

Jury selection for the Zoch case is scheduled to begin August 19, a little over two weeks to the year that the body of 10-year-old Mildred student April Bryant's body was found. Zoch is accused of sexually assaulting, strangling and dumping the body of Bryant - his stepdaughter.

Should it go forward as scheduled, Zoch's Navarro County trial would begin about a month after the capital murder trial of Ronnie Paul Threadgill. Threadgill was found guilty of capital murder in Jackson's courtroom last week and subsequently sentenced to die by lethal injection. Threadgill received an automatic appeal as required by state law in death penalty convictions.

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002

10 results/page

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 03, 2002

8/4 Trial looms as anniversary of murder approaches

By JAYSON LARSON/Daily Sun Staff

Last summer, Allen Bryant was continuing the process of making up for lost time with his daughter, April. He says he let a busy work schedule and a turbulent relationship with his ex-wife keep him away from April for far too long before he decided to change things.

This summer, he won't get another shot. Instead, he says he will sit inside a courtroom and hope for justice for the man accused of brutally killing his daughter.

"She was just probably the most loved child you'd ever meet," Bryant said. "She didn't know any strangers - she was always busy and she loved life.

"She was a good kid and she didn't deserve what she got."

April's stepfather, Michael Paul Zoch, will go on trial this month for her murder. Jury selection in the capital murder trial begins in Judge John Jackson's 13th Judicial District courtroom August 19.

On Tuesday, it will have been exactly one year since sheriff's department officials say Zoch led them to April's body in a ravine in a rural area just north of an area known as "Love Bridge."

If convicted, Zoch, 37, faces life in prison - a sentence of which he would have to serve at least 40 years before being eligible for parole - or the death penalty.

The first capital murder trial of the summer in Navarro County, that of Ronnie Paul Threadgill, resulted in a death sentence July 19. Threadgill's case, prosecuted by Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor and his assistant, Chris Martin, is now under automatic appeal. Batchelor will lead on the Zoch case and will be assisted by Christy Brown Dunn.

Zoch is not the first person to face capital murder charges for the death of his own child or stepchild in Navarro County. Cameron Todd Willingham was convicted of capital murder and handed a death sentence in August 1992 for setting a residential fire that killed his three children. He is on Texas Death Row.

Allen grew up in the same Mildred community that his daughter - who would have been heading into sixth grade this fall - did. He talks about Mildred in a way other small towns are often described - in other words, everybody knows everybody.

It is apparent the Mildred Independent School District is still reeling from the loss of a girl one administrator described not as merely a student, but a family member. That heavy sense of loss is weighed down with the dread that the trial will bring a bevy of media back to Navarro County as it did when county media was joined by Dallas newspaper, radio and television reporters during the search for April. The presence of media brought sometimes unwanted and uncomfortable questions, forcing members of the small community to face a shocking reality.

Assistant Superintendent Becky Burns said April will always be in the hearts and minds of administrators and students alike. Though Burns says the issue isn't brought up, it seems it will be hard for the issue to stay under wraps - potential jurors will begin filing into the 13th Judicial District Court for Zoch's trial on the same day Mildred students return to school from summer vacation.

"It still hurts - it's always going to hurt - but we're getting on," Burns said.

Because of the intimacy created by Mildred's size, Allen said it was impossible not to know of a boy growing up in the same school a few grades back: Mike Zoch.

Allen said he knew of Zoch since he was in the third grade. The two remained in school together - although they remained nothing more than acquaintances - throughout Allen's senior year.

Allen says Zoch "never really struck you as the type to do something like this." He said he knew Zoch as a quiet person and that he also thinks Zoch suffered through abuse at home. That type of testimony may be presented by Zoch's defense team of Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins during the sentencing phase of the trial, should it get that far, as a mitigating circumstance that could shield him from the death penalty.

Whether it is such a circumstance would be one of two ultimate questions the jury would have to answer in deciding if Zoch's case warrants a death sentence. They could also be asked to determine if a defendant would be a future threat to society if allowed to live.

It was during Allen's high school years he first met April's mother and his future wife, Gale Zoch. Attempts to reach Ms. Zoch for this article were unsuccessful.

Allen said he and Gale lost touch after high school but began to see a lot of each other in the late 1980s. They were married in September 1990, and their only child, April, was born Jan. 14, 1991.

What followed was a rocky marriage, Allen said. The two had separated by February 1995 and completed their divorce that summer. He says he and Gale still do not speak very often these days. He now makes his home in Hewitt, near Waco.

Allen admits his relationship with April wasn't bad, but it could have been better had he

not been, in his own words, a weekend warrior. He decided to change that after staying away from April after the divorce, spending a good part of the summer and other holidays with her.

Now a year after her death, Allen says there are good days and bad days. Some days, he says, the hurt doesn't seem as strong as in the past. Other days, he spots something that belonged to her around the house.

"Some days you just sit around and bawl," he said. " ... I'm just ready to see that son of a gun get the justice he deserves."

Jayson Larson may be contacted via e-mail at jl Larson@corsicanadailysun.com.

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content
Perform Search

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page Perform Date Search

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the expre written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 07, 2002

8/8 Zoch murder trial stays here ... for now

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

With 11 days to go until the beginning of jury selection for the capital murder trial of Michael Paul Zoch, it seems that trial will be held in Navarro County.

Judge John Jackson of the 13th Judicial District Court ruled Wednesday that he will take into consideration copies of newspaper accounts and taped recordings of both television and radio coverage of the case.

However, Jackson said, he will withhold a final ruling until "sometime next week" and would take into consideration moving the case should problems with seating a jury make it necessary should he deny the motion.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin on Aug. 19.

Zoch's defense team - made up of local attorneys, Kerri Anderson-Donica and Damara Watkins - made the motion for a location change.

Anderson-Donica, acting as lead counsel, called both Zoch's mother and father.

"We had camera crews, lots of people around ..." Michael Zoch's mother, Gloria Zoch, said of the swarm of attention over the three days before April Bryant's body was located. "I still have ruts in my property."

Both she and Otto Zoch, Michael Zoch's father, said they didn't feel their son could receive a fair trial in Navarro County.

Zoch, 36, is charged with the capital murder of his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant. He remains in the Navarro County Justice Center under \$500,000 bond.

The defense also entered multiple copies of the Corsicana Daily Sun, issues that contained all types of coverage of the April Bryant murder - including news accounts, opinion columns and letters to the editor.

Anderson-Donica said subpoenas to other media outlets had dates of compliance for later in the afternoon Wednesday and on Thursday, Friday and Monday. She said KAND-AM radio accounts and Northland Cable News broadcasts, as well as broadcast

copies from Dallas media outlets were listed in the subpoenas.

Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor agreed to stipulate to, and admit, all of those accounts with the provision that the coverage area of Northland Cable News be defined after Anderson-Donica asked that all of those media outlets subpoenaed be considered as covering all of Navarro County.

Batchelor contended that the local cable news broadcast does not reach the entire county. Anderson-Donica said part of subpoena issued for the cable news broadcast included an outline of its coverage area.

During the prosecution's presentation on the location change issue, Batchelor called his chief investigator, Don Marshall, to the stand. Batchelor asked Marshall to relate other high-profile murder cases that had generated a large amount of media coverage.

Marshall cited coverage of the Ronnie Paul Threadgill capital murder trial in July.

"Are you telling me that all the Dallas media converged on Navarro County to cover the Threadgill trial?," Anderson-Donica asked.

"I don't know," Marshall responded.

Marshall had also listed the capital murder trials of James Richardson, Ernest Baldree and Cameron Todd Willingham.

Anderson-Donica, during cross-examination of Marshall, noted that in each case the jury assessed the death penalty.

Richardson and Baldree have since been executed, while Willingham remains on Texas Death Row.

Batchelor, on re-direct, brought up the 1993 Craig Thomas case, where Thomas died while in custody of the Corsicana Police Department. A medical autopsy later cited a combination of alcohol and cocaine, along with Thomas' exertion during an attempt to run from police, as the contributing factors to his death.

Anderson-Donica quickly counter-attacked, noting that the Thomas case never reached trial and had no bearing on the issue of affecting the possibility of seating a jury.

The media spotlight was focused on the August 2001 disappearance of April Bryant, beginning with the issuance of an "Amber Alert" on Aug. 5 of last year, after the 10-year-old was reported missing late the previous day.

The Amber Alert plan - in which media outlets inform the public of missing children situations - was developed to help locate missing children after the 1996 abduction and slaying of 9-year-old Amber Hagerman in Arlington.

The exhaustive attention of media outlets from the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, along with the curiosity of the general public, was likely a factor in Anderson-Donica's motion

yesterday to move the trial to another location.

Judge Jackson also ruled Wednesday on several ancillary motions connected with the Zoch trial, including a decision that prohibits prosecution and defense attorneys from talking to the media about the case.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002

10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the expre written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 20, 2002

8/20 FIRST JUROR SEATED: Zoch trial should start next week

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

Attorneys began jury selection Monday for the capital murder case against Michael Paul Zoch.

One down, 11 to go.

Prosecutors and defense attorneys spent the morning beginning the process by speaking to the pool of prospective jurors as a group, then all afternoon and into the early evening questioning jurors on a one-on-one basis.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 2001 abduction, sexual assault, and strangulation of his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant, a 10-year-old who would have been a fifth grader at Mildred Elementary School last year.

Authorities said Zoch led them to the body after confessing to murdering the 10-year-old. Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center under \$500,000 bond.

Jury selection was slow Monday after individual questioning began. Five potential jurors - three women and two men - were scheduled for the afternoon interviews and the rest dismissed until Tuesday or until they were notified of their interview time.

Attorneys were able to complete questioning of four of the five prospective jurors held over Monday, before District Judge John Jackson recessed just before 6 p.m.

Of the four prospective jurors interviewed, one was excused for "cause" (she told attorneys she had been the victim of sexual abuse and would likely be biased in the case).

The defense team of Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins used two of their 15 preemptory challenges - also known as "strikes" - in turning away two others.

The prosecution team of Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor and Christy Brown, an assistant district attorney, did not exercise any of their 15 strikes.

Preemptory challenges don't require a reason for refusing to use someone as a juror. After the 15 challenges (the prosecution and defense each have the same number, a

possible total of 30) are depleted, attorneys must show a legal cause for not selecting a juror.

Zoch sat quietly, showing little emotion during the afternoon session, on one occasion leaning over to Donica and speaking in low tones as Watkins interviewed a juror.

Lines of questioning from both sides shared some similarities, while both the prosecution and defense took some different tacks as well.

Batchelor took an instructional line in each of the four interviews, explaining different areas jurors have to understand in sitting on a panel judging the facts in a capital murder case.

Donica and Watkins, who took turns in posing questions, focused on possible connected with such areas as sexual assault allegations, religious and moral beliefs, and alcohol or drug addictions.

The defense team continued to probe the area of prior knowledge of the case, asking jurors if they had been exposed to the regional and local media coverage of the case last year and what, if anything, they remembered from those accounts.

On Aug. 7 Donica and Watkins made a motion to have the trial moved out of Navarro County, contending the media coverage of the case precludes a fair trial here. Judge Jackson has yet to rule on that motion, but said at that pre-trial hearing he would revisit it should it become apparent media coverage was affecting the ability to seat a jury.

One other crucial motion remains for Judge Jackson. In that same Aug. 7 pre-trial hearing, the defense team made a motion to suppress the confession authorities say Zoch gave them before leading them to April Bryant's remains.

As of press time, the judge had not scheduled arguments on that motion although it seems likely now they would take place between the completion of jury selection and the start of the trial.

Judge Jackson told the lone juror selected Monday that the trial "most likely" would begin sometime next week.

In the capital murder trial of Ronnie Threadgill last month, jury selection lasted six days, plus part of a seventh, before a panel could be seated.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

<input type="text"/>	10 results/page
<input type="radio"/> any <input checked="" type="radio"/> all <input type="radio"/> phrase	<input type="text"/> Find in Article Content
<input type="button" value="Perform Search"/>	

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 20, 2002

8/21 Third juror seated in Zoch capital murder case

By JAYSON LARSON/Daily Sun Staff

Two more jurors were seated Tuesday in the capital murder case of Michael Paul Zoch, but it appears the jury selection process is headed for familiar territory.

Just as the selection process took over a week in the capital murder case of Ronnie Paul Threadgill case in July, it looks as if Zoch's case may also take a week or more for the entire 12-person panel to be seated. One juror was seated Monday, the first day of the process, bringing the total number of jurors to three.

Zoch is accused of the kidnapping, sexual assault and murder of his former 10-year-old stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant. Bryant's body was found in a rural area near her home last August. Zoch has remained incarcerated at the Navarro County Jail in lieu of \$500,000 bond since his arrest.

Law enforcement officials have said Zoch, 36, confessed to the murder before leading them to Bryant's body.

A clean-shaven Zoch sat next to his defense team, Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins, as they took the typical step of questioning jurors about various items surrounding the case. Among those usually typical questions over the past two days, Donica and Watkins have questioned potential jurors about their knowledge of the case, which has been covered extensively by local media and attracted the interest of other regional media, as well.

Only in this case, the usually typical questions about knowledge stemming from media coverage is not so typical. The defense has a motion on file asking 13th Judicial District Judge John Jackson to move the trial from Navarro County citing the amount of media coverage given to the case. Jackson has yet to rule on that motion, or a motion to suppress Zoch's confession, but has said he would revisit the issue if it became apparent the coverage was affecting the ability to seat a jury.

Such questions were brought about Tuesday as individual examinations of the potential jurors continued. One juror revealed she has seen extensive media coverage of the case and that she and members of her church attended Bryant's funeral. She vowed she could hear all the evidence in the case despite having formed an opinion regarding Zoch's guilt, but she was excused from the panel nevertheless.

Another male juror was excused after it was discovered in his pre-selection questionnaire he went to school and church with Zoch. The potential juror also said he knew Bryant's father, Allen. The final potential juror of the day, a woman, was excused after telling Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor - who is being assisted by Christy Dunn on the case - she figured Zoch was guilty because she had heard he gave a confession.

The legality of that confession may be called to question by the defense during the trial.

Jayson Larson may be contacted via e-mail at jl Larson@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Special Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the expre written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 21, 2002

8/22 Jury seating in Zoch trial creeps along as fourth juror picked

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

Jury selection in the capital murder case of Michael Paul Zoch continued at a slow pace Wednesday, as attorneys selected the fourth juror of the eventual 12-person panel.

Wednesday's one-on-one interviews of prospective jurors marked the third day of such deliberations.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 2001 abduction, sexual assault, and strangulation of his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant. Authorities said Zoch led them to the body after confessing to murdering the 10-year-old.

Zoch has remained in the Navarro County Justice Center under \$500,000 bond since his arrest.

The issue of confessions became part of attorneys' questioning of jurors Wednesday. The defense team of Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins seemed to give an early indication of how they will attack the Zoch confession that the prosecution is expected to present.

Watkins asked one prospective juror if she couldn't disregard a confession if some of the requirements for using one as evidence - such as proper notification of the accused's rights, also known as the "Miranda rights" - were not satisfied.

Donica and Watkins still have a motion before the court to suppress that confession, a motion Judge John Jackson has yet to rule upon.

While the pace of selecting jurors has remained slow - one juror was selected Monday and two Tuesday, in addition to the single selection Wednesday - it could change once the preemptory challenges available to attorneys are exhausted.

The prosecution and defense each have 15 preemptory challenges, also known as "strikes." A challenge, or strike, allows either the prosecution or defense to dismiss a potential juror without giving a legal reason, such as bias, in doing so.

The prosecution has used only one preemptory challenge through the three days of jury selection to date, but the defense has already exercised seven of its total 15 strikes.

After the challenges are no longer available, the attorneys for the side out of strikes must prove a legal reason before they can turn away a juror that they perhaps do not want on the panel.

Six prospective jurors were interviewed Wednesday, with another asked to return Thursday after the interview process carried past the 5 o'clock hour.

Jury selection was scheduled to recommence at 8:30 a.m. today.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at lcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002

10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the express written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 22, 2002

8/23 Six jurors now selected in Zoch capital murder trial

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

Jury selection in the capital murder case against Michael Paul Zoch reached the halfway point Thursday after attorneys for the prosecution and defense agreed on two more jurors, bringing the week's total to six.

The day-long, one-on-one interviews of prospective jurors brought closer the end of the defense's availability of preemptory challenges, also known as "strikes."

The court-appointed defense team of Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins used three more of the strikes, which legal devices allowing attorneys to excuse a prospective juror without providing a legal reason. Donica and Watkins have exercised a total of 10 of their available 15 strikes.

The prosecution - made up of Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor and Christy Dunn, an assistant district attorney - exercised one strike on Thursday, running their total to two.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 5, 2001 abduction, sexual assault, and strangulation of his former stepdaughter, 10-year-old April Danielle Bryant. Authorities said Zoch led them to the body after confessing to the murder.

Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center under \$500,000 bond, held there since his arrest.

The defense seemed puzzled after their challenge to excuse one juror for legal reasons was denied by Judge John Jackson, who is presiding over the case. The juror said she felt Zoch was guilty. Donica also emphasized a connection the prospective juror had with a relative of the victim.

The juror continued to say, under redirect questioning by Batchelor, that she could base any decision on the case on the facts presented her, "If I'm forced to serve on the jury."

Donica challenged a second time the juror's suitability to serve on this jury panel. After he questioned her about her conflicting answers to prosecution and defense questions, Judge Jackson again ruled against Donica's challenge.

The defense attorney then used her 10th strike.

Batchelor used the prosecution's second strike before the questioning of another prospective juror could begin, indicating that he was not comfortable with the possibility of selecting that person. Batchelor also indicated he did not want to extend the selection process by questioning the prospective juror since he was ready to use the challenge.

With six jurors of the 12-person panel selected after four days of interviews, Judge Jackson indicated that the process would continue through Saturday before recessing until Monday.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Wedding Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the explicit written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 23, 2002

8/24 Eighth juror seated in Zoch trial

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

Prosecution and defense attorneys in the capital murder case against Michael Paul Zoch agreed on two more jurors Friday, bringing the total to eight in the five-day-old selection process.

Attorneys must still agree on four more jurors from the jury pool to round out the 12-person panel. They will continue with one-on-one juror interviews Saturday.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 2001 abduction, sexual assault and strangulation of his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant. Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center jail under \$500,000 bond, where he has been held since he was arrested.

Authorities said he confessed to the murder before leading sheriff's department deputies to her body.

The prosecution - consisting of Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor and Christy Dunn, an assistant district attorney - exercised their third preemptory challenge of the selection process.

A preemptory challenge, also known as a "strike," allows either the prosecution or the defense to excuse a witness without giving a legal reason. Each side, in a capital murder case, is allotted 15 strikes although a judge has the discretion to grant additional challenges.

Court-appointed attorneys Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins exercised their 12th strike Friday, leaving the defense duo with three remaining challenges.

Batchelor continued his instructional line of juror questioning, making sure they understood several key points to the judicial process connected specifically with the charge of capital murder. He also touched on general issues.

Some of those points included:

n The fact that capital murder sentencing, should the jury find the defendant guilty, is limited to life in prison or the death penalty. Other cases carry a range of punishment. A "regular" murder (one that does not satisfy the special circumstances required to have

the death penalty as a possible punishment) carries a possible sentence of five to 99 years, or life, in prison.

n That the jury does not actually "write in" life or death in determining punishment in a capital murder case - it's how the jury answers two, yes-or-no questions during jury room deliberations.

n Those two questions have to be answered in a certain way - "yes" on one, "no" on the other - in order to have the death penalty assessed. If the questions are answered in any other way, then life in prison is the sentence.

n The judge is the person who actually assesses the death penalty or life in prison, depending on how the jury answers the two specific questions put to it.

Donica and Watkins also continued to probe potential jurors as they attempted to determine what effect, if any, regional and local media coverage of the Aug. 5, 2001 murder might have had on jurors' ability to start a trial presuming Zoch innocent until proven otherwise.

Attorneys for both sides remain under a gag order issued by District Judge John Jackson prohibiting them from speaking to the media.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content
Perform Search

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page Perform Date Search

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the express written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 23, 2001

8/24 Zoch indicted for killing of former stepdaughter

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

A Navarro County grand jury indicted Michael Paul Zoch, 36, for capital murder in connection with the Aug. 6 death of 10-year-old April Danielle Bryant.

The grand jury returned its decision as it held its monthly session Thursday to consider indictments presented by the district attorney's office.

Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor has pledged to seek the death penalty for Zoch.

"You certainly had to consider some shocking and violent crimes today," said Judge John Jackson, of the 13th Judicial District Court, as he dismissed the grand jury. "You are to be commended for your service."

The panel has one more session, in September, to serve before a new grand jury is seated for the final quarter of 2001.

April Bryant was reported missing from her Mildred-area home in the early morning hours of Aug. 5 after her mother returned from work and couldn't locate her. A massive two-day search followed with friends, neighbors, family members, and local law enforcement combing a one-mile radius from the home.

A region-wide Amber Alert was broadcast via television and radio, with media coverage intensifying as the longer the 10-year-old remained missing.

The girl's body was found late in the evening of Aug. 6 in a ravine just to the north of an area known locally as "Love Bridge."

During a Nov. 7 press conference, Navarro County Sheriff Les Cotten told assembled reporters that Zoch, the former stepfather of the victim, had confessed to kidnapping, sexually assaulting and strangling the Mildred Elementary School student. The sheriff said that Zoch led deputies to the girl's body.

Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center under a \$500,000 bond. If found guilty of capital murder, he would face either life in prison or death by lethal injection.

Thursday's decision was one of two capital murder indictments returned by the grand jury. The panel also indicted 28-year-old Ronnie Paul Threadgill on the same charge. Batchelor has said he will seek the death penalty in Threadgill's case as well.

The presence of two pending capital murder trials for the district court's docket presents considerations other than judicial for the county. With both almost certainly to be held well after Oct. 1, the beginning of the county's fiscal year, officials working on the budget will have to take into consideration additional costs for the court's next budget.

"I've let the auditor and the county judge know that I expect there will be considerable additional expense for next year," Judge Jackson said Thursday afternoon.

Based on the expenses incurred for similar cases, it is estimated that the trials of Zoch and Threadgill will cost approximately \$50,000 each.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at lcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content
Perform Search

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page Perform Date Search

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classified](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the express written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun online

August 24, 2002

8/25 Attorneys pick three jurors, need one more for Zoch jury

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

In their most active - and shortest - day of the selection process, attorneys in the capital murder trial of Michael Paul Zoch agreed upon three more jurors during Saturday deliberations.

The attorney's fruitful work day brought the total number of jurors to 11, just one shy of the number needed for a full jury panel.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 2001 abduction, sexual assault, and strangulation his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant, a 10-year-old who would have been a fifth grader at Mildred Elementary School in Mildred last year.

Authorities said Zoch led them to the body after confessing to murdering the 10-year-old. Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center under \$500,000 bond.

Should he be convicted, Zoch faces either death by lethal injection or life in prison.

Prosecution and defense attorneys began work at 9 a.m. Saturday. District Judge John Jackson recessed the one-on-one interviews with the six prospective jurors at approximately 2:30 p.m.

Attorneys were able to interview all six prospective jurors scheduled for interviews Saturday during the shorter-than-usual day of deliberations. Juror interviews have been extended as late as 6 p.m. this week, although generally Judge Jackson has recessed the selection process around the 5 o'clock hour most days.

Saturday was the sixth day of jury selection. The search for the final juror for the 12-person panel will begin Monday.

Judge Jackson has yet to rule on two motions filed by court-appointed defense attorneys Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins during a pre-trial hearing on Aug. 7.

The prosecution is led by Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor. Christy Dunn, assistant district attorney, is also part of the state's prosecutorial effort.

Donica and Watkins want Judge Jackson to throw out the confession Zoch gave Navarro

County Sheriff's Office law enforcement officials. From their line of questions while interviewing prospective jurors, it seems defense attorneys feel all the rights against self-incrimination were not followed in obtaining the confession.

Defense attorneys also still have a motion on the table for a change of venue - moving the trial to another location - contending that heavy regional and local surrounding the Aug. 5, 2001 murder makes it impossible for Zoch to receive a fair trial.

Judge Jackson has accepted evidence connected with that motion - newspapers and videotapes of television news broadcasts - but has yet to rule on the motion. At the Aug. 7 pre-trial hearing, Judge Jackson said he would hold his decision to see what effect media coverage might have on the difficulty of the jury selection process.

Given how close attorneys are to selecting that jury would make it appear unlikely the judge would agree to a new location for the trial at this point.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

All rights reserved. Copyright 2001 Corsicana Daily Sun and Community Newspaper Holdings, Inc.,. Content on this may not be archived, retransmitted, saved in a database, or used for any commercial purpose without the expre written permission of the Corsicana Daily Sun and CNHI.

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 26, 2002

8/27 TRIAL STARTS WEDNESDAY: Jury seated in Zoch capital murder case

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

And on the seventh day they rested ... attorneys connected with the capital murder case against Michael Paul Zoch.

On Monday - Day No. 7 of one-on-one interviews with prospective jurors - prosecution and defense attorneys agreed on the final juror needed to complete the 12-person panel which will be made up of nine women and three men.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 2001 abduction, sexual assault, and strangulation of his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant, a 10-year-old who would have been a fifth grader at Mildred Elementary School in Mildred last year.

Should he be convicted, Zoch faces either death by lethal injection or life in prison.

Judge John Jackson said Zoch's trial will begin at 9 a.m. Wednesday.

Judge Jackson also set a 9 a.m. pre-trial hearing for Tuesday to take up a motion made by the court-appointed defense team of Kerri Anderson Donica and Damara Watkins to suppress Zoch's confession.

Authorities said Zoch led them to the body after confessing to murdering the 10-year-old. Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center under \$500,000 bond.

Donica and Watkins agreed to the last juror even though they had four preemptory challenges remaining - a point that takes away one area of Zoch's rights on appeal of a conviction in this case.

A preemptory challenge, also known as a "strike," allows either the prosecution or the defense to excuse a witness without giving a legal reason. Each side in a capital murder case is allotted 15 strikes, although a judge has the discretion to grant additional challenges. In this case, Judge Jackson had granted the defense an additional two strikes.

Under the law, since his lawyers did not use all of the strikes available to them, Zoch loses the right to appeal based on the presence of an unsuitable juror that was selected to the panel.

Since the defense did have four strikes left, court rulings to date seem to indicate an attorney had the opportunity to rid themselves of that unsuitable juror and removes the issue from consideration.

On the record, Zoch said Donica and Watkins had explained that possibility and the final juror selected was acceptable with him.

Donica, also on the record, cited strategic reasons in the juror selection process as the defense's reason for acceding to the final juror.

The victim's father, Allen Bryant, said he's relieved that the final jury panel has been selected and that he will attend the trial.

"Nothing will ever bring her back, but I'm ready to see justice served," Bryant said. "It's stirred up a lot of bad memories of course, but I'm looking forward to getting (the trial) started.

"It's going to be hard listening to some of the things that'll come up but I'm ready to get this behind me and get on with my life."

April Bryant's body was found in a ravine in an area known as "Love Bridge." The discovery followed a three-day search for the missing girl, a search that was triggered an Amber Alert.

An Amber Alert is a media agreement with law enforcement made in recent years to broadcast over television and radio outlets a missing child bulletin.

The alert brought a wave of regional and local media coverage of the search and subsequent discovery of April Bryant's body.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page
☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002
10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun

[Home](#) | [Local News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Classifieds](#) | [Obituaries](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Lifestyles](#) | [Special Sections](#)
[Bridal Section](#) | [Archives](#) | [Subscribe](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Guestbook](#) | [Place an Ad](#)
[Stocks](#) | [World News](#) | [Health](#) | [Music & Culture](#) | [Town Hall](#) | [About Us](#)

Corsicana Daily Sun

online

August 27, 2002

8/28 Zoch trial starts today as jurors will hear about accused's confession

By LOYD COOK/Daily Sun Staff

A confession to murder made by Michael Paul Zoch and recorded by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Navarro County Sheriff's Office will be a part of evidence presented in Zoch's capital murder trial, set to begin today.

Judge John Jackson of the 13th Judicial District Court of Navarro County denied a motion to suppress that confession in a ruling he issued Tuesday after a nearly day-long pre-trial hearing.

Zoch, 36, is accused of the August 2001 abduction, sexual assault and strangulation of his former stepdaughter, April Danielle Bryant. Zoch remains in the Navarro County Justice Center jail under \$500,000 bond, where he has been held since he was arrested.

Should Zoch be convicted, he faces either death by lethal injection or life in prison.

Brenda "B.J." Hamlin, April Bryant's grandmother, said she was relieved about the ruling.

"That was my main concern, that the confession be used," Hamlin said. "(The decision) makes me feel like the prosecution is doing their job. I have a lot of faith in (district attorney) Pat Batchelor."

Arguments during Tuesday's hearing revolved around the issue of whether Zoch was legally or illegally arrested on Aug. 6, the day he confessed to the murder and the day after the murder was committed.

Under law, an illegal arrest would make any evidence - including the confession - inadmissible in court.

Navarro County District Attorney Pat Batchelor called four witnesses to the stand - Detective Sgt. Jimmy Johnson and Deputy Hank Bailey from the sheriff's office, Texas Ranger Steve Foster and Special Agent Michael Poche from the Dallas office of the FBI.

Batchelor took each through the legal procedures they followed in their part of Zoch's arrest and subsequent confession. Prosecution efforts would revolve around their

assertion that Zoch's arrest was made under civil, not criminal, law.

Zoch was initially detained for violating a restraining order present from his divorce from the victim's mother. Johnson said he presented an affidavit concerning the violation to Judge Jackson on Aug. 6 of last year with the judge issuing an order for his arrest.

Damara Watkins, a local attorney court-appointed along with Kerri Anderson Donica to defend Zoch, attacked the legality of how that order was followed. She contended it was a civil order and that the Texas Penal Code does not allow for the same arrest procedure.

Johnson said he did not bring Zoch before Judge Jackson as the order set out, after Watkins read the order's wording, although he said he could not remember if the judge was immediately available to hold a hearing on the restraining order violation.

The detective also said that after capital murder charges were filed on Aug. 7, law enforcement officials did not believe it necessary to follow up on the violation for which Zoch was initially detained.

Poche, who is a certified polygraph examiner for the FBI, said he was initially called to Corsicana in order to administer a lie detector test to Zoch. Batchelor asked Poche if he had read Zoch his rights, taking him through each individual question.

"Did you ask (Zoch) if he understood his rights," Batchelor asked the FBI agent.

"I asked him specifically and he said he did," Poche responded.

Later in his questioning, Batchelor asked the agent about the confession.

"Did, at some time, did the defendant confess to the murder and sexual assault of April Bryant," Batchelor asked Poche.

"He did," Poche answered.

Watkins asked Poche about polygraph procedures, leading the agent through the timeline of events. Poche said that Zoch failed the polygraph, which was given during Zoch's second interview with law enforcement officials.

After the lie detector test, Poche said he informed Zoch that the test showed Zoch "had been deceptive" and talked to him about it.

Using Poche's answers to questions about the timeline of events, Watkins established that conversation lasted about two hours.

"If you want me to reconstruct that conversation, I can," Poche told Watkins after she seemed to express some doubt on the necessity of the length of the interview that resulted in the confession. "But it'll take up about two hours."

Watkins changed directions, directing Poche to his own, hand-written notes on a report

that listed alcohol and drug issues - including the use of Paxil, a prescription drug used to combat depression.

Much of the defense's strategy during Tuesday's session seemed directed toward setting grounds for an appeal. On several occasions, Watkins asked the court to take "judicial notice" of different issues, including their inability to call Judge Jackson himself to the stand.

Watkins had spent some time with Detective Johnson on the meeting he had with the judge in obtaining the initial order for arrest, as she established no official court records existed.

Watkins again made a motion to recuse Judge Jackson from presiding on the trial, saying it precluded her from calling the judge as a witness concerning his meeting with Johnson. She said that denied Zoch the right to a fair trial.

In a July 26 hearing before a visiting district judge from Seguin, the Zoch's defense team made a three-point argument - including their contention Judge Jackson was a material witness - during a motion to recuse hearing in the court. All three arguments in the motion were denied.

Tuesday, Judge Jackson said he is prohibited by law against ruling on motions to remove himself from a case. He said he would let the ruling by the visiting judge "speak for itself."

All of the judicial wrangling can't end soon enough for the victim's grandmother, who said Tuesday that she feels like the trial will end with a guilty verdict and assessment of the death penalty.

Hamlin said she wants to witness the execution.

"I'm 57 years old and I hope I live long enough to see it," she said.

Loyd Cook may be contacted via e-mail at loydcook@corsicanadailysun.com

Search for articles by keyword(s):

10 results/page

☐ any ☒ all ☐ phrase Find in Article Content

Search for articles by date range:

January 01 1999 - August 29 2002

10 results/page

E-mail the Corsicana Daily Sun