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News

Rib Rack verdict revealed

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Man convicted of murder in Lathrup Village restaurant manager

A judge on Monday unsealed a guilty verdict in the case of a man accused in the October 2008 death of a restaurant manager.

Deandre Sturges, 20, looked straight ahead and showed no visible emotion as the jury foreperson announced that he was guilty of first-degree felony murder, conspiracy to commit armed robbery and possession of a firearm in the commission of a felony.

He faces a mandatory penalty of life in prison when he returns to court Jan. 12 for sentencing.

Sturges was charged in the death of Catherine Solinski-Blain, a 21-year-old Waterford Township resident who was fatally shot just before 11 p.m. Oct. 15, 2008, in her car outside the Rib Rack restaurant in Lathrup Village. She had just closed the restaurant for the night when she was shot.

Sturges was accused of being the getaway driver.

Jurors reached a verdict on Sept. 8, but Oakland Circuit Judge Leo Bowman ordered it sealed to avoid tainting co-defendant Jerome Hamilton's jury.

When the verdict was read late Monday afternoon, supporters of Sturges cried. Family members of Solinski-Blain hugged after the hearing.

"I just hate to see him go to jail for the rest of his life. It's a waste of his life, but it's what he chose," said Marc Blain of Clarkston, who was married to Solinski-Blain.

Oakland County Sheriff's Office Detective Sgt. David Wurtz said while justice was served, there are no winners.

"Nothing is going to bring Catherine Blain back," he said. "Both families have suffered a loss."

Chief Assistant Prosecutor Paul Walton, the spokesman for the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office, said Sturges was held accountable for his actions. He said he was pleased with the verdict.

Assistant Prosecutor Rob Novy prosecuted the case.

Defense attorney Arnold Reed said Sturges plans to appeal.

"They (the jury) reached their decision. I don't agree with it," he said.

Investigators said Sturges, Hamilton and a third person named Brandon Davis attempted a series of bungled robberies before going to the Rib Rack to rob the night manager.

The prosecution said Sturges, who drove to and from the Rib Rack, was guilty of aiding and abetting in Solinski-Blain's death. Sturges admitted to going to the Rib Rack, but his attorney said he didn't know what was going to happen and wasn't responsible for the crime.

Sturges was charged with open murder, meaning that jurors had the option of convicting him of first-degree felony murder or the lesser included offense of second-degree murder.

Davis agreed to cooperate with the prosecution and testified against both Hamilton and Sturges to avoid being charged with murder. He is expected to receive a sentence of 11 to 18 years in prison after pleading guilty to conspiracy to commit armed robbery, being an accessory after the fact to a felony and other charges.

While the jury in the Sturges case reached a verdict in September, Hamilton has been tried twice. Both trials ended in mistrials because of deadlocked juries. The second mistrial was declared earlier this month.

Hamilton, who is 16, has a pretrial hearing scheduled for Jan. 5.

Relatives of Solinski-Blain have spent hours sitting through both Hamilton's and Sturges' trials.

While Hamilton's third trial is on the horizon, Marc Blain said it was good to have the Sturges case resolved, especially before Christmas.

"It's a relief, in the sense that it's that much closer to being over," he said.

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