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The Herald-Sun

Evidence in Abaroa case found locked in cabinet

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DURHAM — Will newly rediscovered evidence in the trial of Raven Abaroa reveal the truth about what happened the night Janet Abaroa was stabbed to death on April 26, 2005?

On Thursday morning, after receiving information about the location of evidence in the Raven Abaroa trial, Detective Charles Sole of the Durham Police Department went to the department's forensic office, unlocked a cabinet and found evidence from the Abaroa case stored there, said Assistant District Attorney Charlene Coggins-Franks Thursday.

The evidence included some handwritten notes from the police department's computer analyst, the hard drive from Janet Abaroa's work computer and a Palm Pilot, which is believed to have belonged to Raven Abaroa. The Palm Pilot was recovered from the Dodge Durango that Abaroa drove on the night of the murder.

The items were apparently placed in the locked cabinet years ago and never analyzed.

Raven Abaroa, 33, is on trial in Durham County Criminal Superior Court for first-degree murder in the stabbing death of his wife, Janet Marie Christiansen Abaroa, 25. The state has presented nearly all of its evidence, but the discovery of the evidence from the cabinet will delay the trial at least until Monday morning while prosecutors and defense attorneys study the information taken from the two devices.

Early on in the trial, there was mention of the devices and that the computer technician had obtained the hard drive from Janet Abaroa's work computer. Defense attorney Amos Tyndall asked a number of witnesses throughout the trial if they knew what happened to the hard drive from Janet's work computer, but no one seemed to know the answer.

Superior Court Judge Orlando Hudson discussed the evidence with the attorneys before the jurors were brought back in the courtroom, and Tyndall told the judge he thought it was appropriate for the information to be reviewed. But Tyndall warned that he would object to it being introduced if it negatively affects his defense of Abaroa.

"We prepared a defense based on what we had," Tyndall said. "We're way long into it."

Hudson, Tyndall and Coggins-Franks agreed they should take the day off from the trial Friday to review the material.

When the jury was brought back into the courtroom, they heard from ophthalmologist Charles Zwerling, who examined Janet Abaroa's eyes after her body was exhumed in July 2012 from her grave in Pennsylvania.

Zwerling testified that he found fragments of contact lenses in Janet Abaroa's eyes.

Earlier in the trial, several people testified that Janet always took out her contact lenses before she went to sleep at night.

Abaroa told at least one officer at the scene that when he left that night to play soccer, his wife was getting ready for bed. Abaroa said that he found his dead wife's body when he returned home from the soccer game.

The trial is expected to resume Monday morning with testimony from the Durham Police Department's computer analyst. The state may rest its case shortly after that.

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