



Jury selection begins in 2007 killing of LSU students from India

Defense concerned news accounts taint jury pool

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Defense attorneys cited extensive pretrial publicity Monday in asking for a change of venue as jury selection began in the case of two Baton Rouge men accused in the 2007 killing of two LSU graduate students from India on the north side of campus.

State District Judge Chip Moore also imposed a gag order on the prosecution and defense teams for the duration of jury selection, which was scheduled to resume Tuesday and is expected to last several days.

Alleged triggerman Casey Jermaine Gathers, 25, and Michael Jermaine Lewis, 24, are both charged with two counts of second-degree murder in the Dec. 13, 2007, slaying of Kiran Kumar Allam, 33, and Chandrasekhar Reddy Komma, 31.

Allam, a chemistry student from Hyderabad, India, and Komma, a biology student from Kurnool, India, were found dead inside Allam's Edward Gay apartment.

Both men were shot in the head; one was bound. Allam's then-pregnant wife discovered the bodies.

Gathers' attorneys filed the change of venue motion, which has a copy of an article published Monday in *The Advocate* attached to it. The article traced the history of the case.

In the motion, the attorneys asked for an opportunity to question prospective jurors concerning publicity and, "upon proper presentation of prejudice," request a change of venue.

Of the first 30 potential jurors questioned by Moore, prosecutors and defense attorneys, about half said they had heard about the case but had only a vague recollection of the facts.

Several said they thought the case was over.

Gathers and Lewis face automatic sentences of life in prison if convicted as charged.

Gathers, Lewis and a third Baton Rouge man, Devin Jamell Parker, 24, were booked in May 2008 in the killings.

An East Baton Rouge Parish grand jury indicted Parker on second-degree murder charges in September 2008 but chose to neither charge nor clear Gathers and Lewis, and those two were released from Parish Prison.

After Parker pleaded guilty in June 2011 to charges of armed robbery and accessory after the fact to second-degree murder and testified in front of the grand jury, Gathers and Lewis were indicted on second-degree murder charges in July 2011.

Parker has told authorities he was with Gathers and Lewis when they forced Allam and Komma into the apartment.

Parker said he was inside the apartment and watched one of the students cry out for help moments before he was shot while trying to flee.

According to Parker's videotaped police statements, he ran from the apartment with that student's wallet and a cellphone he found in the apartment and was outside when the second student was shot.

Parker is set for sentencing Oct. 21.



Advocate staff photo by RICHARD ALAN HANNON - Prosecutor Steve Danielson, center, walks on Monday into the 19th Judicial District Courthouse in Baton Rouge for the start of the second-degree murder trial of Casey Gathers and Michael Lewis, accused in the December 2007 shooting deaths of two LSU graduate students (Kiran Kumar Allam and Chandrasekhar Reddy Komma) from India.