

Pathologist tells court about Michelle Barnoski's death

Jury hears about gunshot wounds to victim's head

BY PEG MCCARTHY

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PETERBOROUGH — Graphically-described forensic evidence about the nature of gunshot wounds to the head of Michelle Barnoski was presented in court on Nov. 12.

The jury heard the testimony of Dr. Michael Sven Pollannen, chief forensic pathologist for Ontario, who concluded Ms. Barnoski died from eight gunshot wounds to the head and neck. He also described other injuries sustained by the victim.

Ms. Barnoski disappeared on May 27, 2008. Her red Sunfire was found in a farmer's field near Warkworth soon after. On June 12, a school bus was pulled over and her 14-year-old son was arrested and charged with second-degree murder, a charge that was later upgraded to first-degree.

“It was a hot, humid night and I heard the report of a rifle being fired. Roger Brummell

Ms. Barnoski's body was found the next day buried in her backyard. She had been shot eight times, Crown Attorney David Thompson told court last week.

Dr. Pollannen began with instruction on the nature of autopsies and their general systematic process, noting forensic pathologists examine the scene as well as the exterior and interior of the deceased's body, and perform tests on tissue and bone samples where necessary, before they make their conclusions.

The pathologist also discussed types of

injuries and putrefaction — the changes in the body after death as it decomposes.

A post-mortem was conducted on Ms. Barnoski's body on June 14, 2008, and Dr. Pollannen told jurors the advanced state of decomposition of the body made certain determinations difficult, such as whether

certain gunshot wounds occurred before or after death. He did tell the jury that other injuries showed evidence of bleeding, which helped him determine they occurred before her death. These injuries included blunt force trauma to the back of the head, a broken bone in the right hand, and horizontally fractured femur and ulna in the right forearm. The latter two were consistent with defensive moves by the victim, said the doctor, and, when asked by Crown Attorney Nancy Rae, added the last injury could have been inflicted while the arm was resting on a support.

He described the victim as being wrapped in a Harry Potter blanket and comforter that were both stained by fluids from the decomposing body, which was past the rigor mortis stage.

Dr. Pollannen said there were seven distinct gunshot wounds to the head — in the forehead, right side of the face, left side near the temple, and behind the right ear, with some bullet fragments still in the brain.

“I cannot determine sequence,” he said, and added he could also not determine the range of the firearm due to advanced decomposition of the body.

A wound at the upper back neck area may have affected the spinal cord, the doctor speculated, but could not say for certain.

The jury also heard from another witness, Roger Brummell, who lived one street away from 116 Concession St., the Warkworth home of the victim and the accused.



MICHELLE BARNOSKI

Mr. Brummell, a former corrections officer with some firearms training and knowledge, said he heard a single gunshot on Tuesday, May 27, around 10:45 p.m., while standing on his porch.

“It was a hot, humid night and I heard the report of a rifle being fired,” he told the crown.

Defense counsel Howard Goldkind asked the witness if he could differentiate between the sounds of various firearms, and Mr. Brummell replied he was quite sure the shot was fired from a high calibre firearm.

“Definitely a long gun, a rifle,” said the witness. “It was a loud, sharp crack... very close.”

Mr. Brummell said he went to bed around 11 p.m. and did not hear any other gunshots.

OPP Constable and identification officer Keith Creighton also testified about various items and objects around the murder scene. Present at the post mortem, Const. Creighton photographed the tarp, blanket and comforter used to wrap the victim, along with the ropes and bungee cords used to secure the wrappings. The officer also identified other photographs showing the interior of the Warkworth home, along with small bloodstains on a lamp and the

walls, and bottles of cleaning fluids around the house.

He also produced a receipt for a jug of Javex purchased locally on May 28, 2008.

The officer said bungee cords found in the back of a truck owned by Marc Vickers, Ms. Barnoski's landlord who also lived in the home and who is currently charged with second-degree murder and awaiting trial, were consistent with the ones used to secure the tarp around the body of Ms. Barnoski.

Mr. Goldkind asked Const. Creighton about the knots used around the victim. The officer described “two circles of cord connected by a long section,” that were further randomly secured by the bungee cords.

“Were there specific knots?” asked the defense.

“Nothing specific. ‘If you can't tie a knot, then tie a lot,’” replied the officer.

“And it's obvious the place has been cleaned? There's no doubt that something terrible happened?” asked Mr. Goldkind.

“Yes,” said Const. Creighton.

The trial resumes Friday, Nov. 13.

For nightly updates and to get

caught up on the trial's happenings:

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Northumberland arts sector gets boost with loan program

BY MOYA DILLON

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NORTHUMBERLAND — A new loan program aims to make borrowing easier for artists working in the cultural sector.

The Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation's (CFDC) recently launched the Cultural Sector Loan program, which offers flexible options for artists who might find it difficult to borrow money from banking institutions.

“From talking with the cultural sector, it was clear there is opportunity to finance business growth in the arts sector,” said Paul Portelli, the CFDC's business development manager.

Mr. Portelli, who is an artist himself and understands the difficulties they can face, cites a recent survey of local artisans, which found that over 80 per cent were considering investing in their business and 55 per cent felt that capital infusion would lead to business growth. However, the majority of artists surveyed, from organizations such as Spirit of the Hills, the Brighton Arts Council (BAC) and the Art Council of Northumberland, had experienced difficulty trying to obtain financing.

“We feel strongly that the Northumberland CFDC has a role to play through its lending mandate to support the creative sector,” Mr. Portelli explained. “Our strategy is to look at artist studios as businesses and



BILL TREMBLAY / METROLAND

COLBORNE — Local artist Barb Smith works in her newly-renovated home studio in Colborne. The renovations were made possible through the Northumberland Community Futures Development Corporation's new loan program aimed at the cultural sector in Northumberland.

create new sector-specific financial instruments to focus on innovation and on continued Canadian quality, build on our artists and craftspersons strengths, and assist to achieve a competitive advantage.

“We're confident that banking on our culture can stimulate and encourage new approaches to expanding local cultural economies.”

Colborne painter Barb Smith decided to

said. “This was much more straightforward.”

She said the program offered her greater flexibility during the application process and in creating a payment plan.

“As an artist, it's hard to go to a bank and say I want to borrow money, because of all the rules and regulations. But the CFDC was very flexible, they understood I couldn't afford to lose a whole winter of production, I needed to get up and running ASAP.”

Ms. Smith approached Mr. Portelli and the CFDC in September after learning of the program from a seminar held in May. She received funding in October and is currently finishing renovations on her studio, which she expects to have up and running by Christmas.

“I think this is a win-win for everyone,” she said of the program, which she credits for the quick turnaround.

“Arts and culture are so spread out in Northumberland, it's nice to have an organization that can kind of bring some viability to the cultural sector in Northumberland and connect us.”

For more information on the CFDC's culture loans program, visit www.northumberlandcfdc.ca or contact Mr. Portelli at 905-372-8315.