

Associate says suspect told friends of killing 3

By Joyce Gemperlein
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Ralph Trent Stokes told his friends March 11 that he had robbed and killed three people at Smokin' Joe's Corner restaurant earlier that day, and then he went to get a haircut and a drink, according to a statement given to homicide detectives by a man accused of being Stokes' accomplice.

The statement from Donald Jackson, 26, of the 800 block of Wynnewood Road, was read by Detective Daniel Lynch during a hearing yesterday. After the hearing, Municipal Court Judge Meyer Rose ordered Jackson held for trial on three counts each of murder, theft, conspiracy, robbery, receiving stolen property and possession of an instrument of crime.

Jackson's statement identified Stokes, 19, of the 5400 block of Morse Street, as the man who actually did the shooting in the triple slaying. Stokes was held for trial last week on similar charges.

Two restaurant employees — Mary Louise Figueroa, 38, the restaurant's co-manager, and Eugene Jefferson, 35 — were fatally shot in the head. Two armed men wearing ski masks had entered the restaurant on City Avenue about noon. Peter Santangelo, 23, a mailman, was also fatally shot in the head.

Jackson said Stokes had recruited him for the robbery and tried to reassure him by claiming to know the best time and manner to rob it because he had worked there. Jackson said Stokes killed the three despite Jackson's attempts to stop him.

Jackson said he went to a part of the restaurant during the robbery and saw Stokes "with his mask up." Jackson said he was surprised and asked Stokes why he was permitting



Ralph Trent Stokes
Accused in Smokin' Joe's slayings

Mrs. Figueroa to see his face.

"She knows me; she knows me. . . I got to off [kill] them man; they know me," Jackson said he was told by Stokes.

Jackson also told the homicide detective in his statement that the two fled the scene of the killings and went to a friend's house in the 3100 block of Dickinson Street, where Stokes called other friends and a girlfriend to tell them what had happened.

Jackson said the two then had haircuts and went to a neighborhood bar.

"All the way he was arguing," Jackson said in his statement. "He told me not to worry, that he had done it. I was telling him about the electric chair."

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