

Atwater man goes on trial in 'hit'

- Ex-boyfriend accused of paying \$200 to have Alliance woman killed

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CANTON: Ten months after a young mother of five boys was slain in her Alliance home, the man accused of paying a hit man \$200 to kill her goes on trial tomorrow.

David G. Thorne, 27, of Porter Road in Atwater faces a possible death sentence if convicted of complicity to aggravated murder because the case involves a murder-for-hire plot, according to Stark County prosecutors and Alliance police, who charged Thorne.

The defendant is accused of paying a friend, Joe I. Wilkes, 19, of Ravenna, to murder Yvonne C. Layne, 27. Wilkes had met Layne once before, according to testimony at a preliminary hearing in Alliance last summer.

Layne was nearly decapitated in her Devine Street residence as four of her five sons slept in nearby rooms late March 31 or early April 1. The other son was staying with Layne's parents.

Thorne is Layne's ex-boyfriend and the father of her fourth son, Brandon, now 3. The child has been with his paternal grandparents since Layne's body was found by her mother when she stopped to visit April 1.

Alliance police said the slaying was arranged by Thorne to avoid paying child support.

Wilkes accepted a plea bargain from prosecutors and was sentenced to life in prison with parole eligibility after 30 years. As part of his plea agreement, he must testify against Thorne.

Thorne has been in Stark County Jail since July 14. He was arrested at another woman's home a short time after Wilkes was taken into custody. Wilkes is in Portage County Jail.

According to testimony at the hearing, Thorne took Wilkes to Alliance and left him at a paid-for West State Street motel room several hours prior to the slaying. Wilkes then walked to the Layne home and talked with her as they

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sat on a couch. He then pulled a knife and slit her throat from ear to ear before leaving her slumped on the floor in a pool of blood.

Assistant Stark County Prosecutor Jonathan S. Baumel, who will handle the state's case with Assistant Prosecutor Chyrisa N.

Hartnett, said jury selection is to begin tomorrow morning before Common Pleas Judge Richard D. Reinbold Jr.

Jury selection is expected to continue into Thursday and could last until Friday.

Because the court will be closed Monday for Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Reinbold said opening arguments and testimony won't start until next Tuesday morning, no matter when jury selection is completed. The trial is expected to last up to two weeks.

Jury Commissioner Thea Tripp said 275 prospective jurors have been summoned for the trial.