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Yogurt Shop Killings: The Suspects

Maurice Earl Pierce: 16-year-old told police in 1991 he had the weapon

By SUZANNE GAMMA

Two years ago, Maurice Pierce started building a future. He married a woman he'd known for a decade and set up a family with her and their young daughter.

But Wednesday the focus shifted to his past. Pierce was one of four men arrested and charged with capital murder. Arrested at his home in Lewisville, about 25 miles northwest of Dallas, the 24-year-old is a key player in the case, police say.

Michael James Scott: 'A decent kid' with a new family and a job

By DYLAN ROSS

Debrah Collins said she met Michael James Scott, a young man with some rudimentary mechanical skills, at a friend's barbecue in Burnet.

Robert Burns Springsteen Jr.: Police say he confessed to the killings

By JANEY JACOBS

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — A 23-year-old teen-ager who moved to West Virginia soon after the 1991 yogurt shop killings was one of four suspects arrested by police Wednesday.

Forrest Brook Welborn: Mechanic opened a business in Lockhart

By BRAD REAGAN

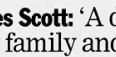
LOCKHART — August Boer thought his shopmate was "kind of the hippie type" but regarded young Forrest Welborn as a talented mechanic and a pretty good business partner.



In 1991

That the story was made up, Guillermo Gonzalez, Pierce's lawyer, confirmed Wednesday that Pierce was the person police had questioned. He was 16 at the time.

"They don't have the right person," said Kimberli Pierce, who identified herself as Pierce's wife. "I know my husband."



In 1992

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Middle School in 1989-90 as a seventh-grader. Austin school records show. He transferred to Doherty Middle School and later attended Robbins Academy. The school, now closed, served special education students, dropouts and students with discipline problems. He enrolled as a ninth-grader at Anderson High School but left after three months. The district has no later record of his enrollment.

Other records show Pierce lived in Austin through November 1997, although he also had used addresses in Lewisville and Flower Mead, another Dallas suburb. Kimberli Pierce said she and her husband have lived in Lewisville for four years.

Pierce was arrested in September 1992 in Austin and charged with misdemeanor drunken driving. He pleaded no contest and received a suspended sentence of two years probation. His lawyer in the case could not be reached for comment.

Kimberli Pierce said her husband has worked in warehouse with child care. Collins said.

At the time of the yogurt shop killings, Scott was a sophomore enrolled in special education classes at McCallum High School, school officials said. He repeated his sophomore year and dropped out of Austin schools 12 months after the killings, the officials said.

During his time at McCallum High School, Michael Scott was notably taller than his height — at least 6-foot — and his long straight blond hair, said assistant principal Charles Wiser.

Wiser said he was surprised to hear that Scott was a suspect.

He was the kind of kid who would talk to an adult in the hallway," Wiser said.

Staff writer Lisa Towner contacted to see if you may contact Peter Hines at dthines@statesman.com or 445-3825.

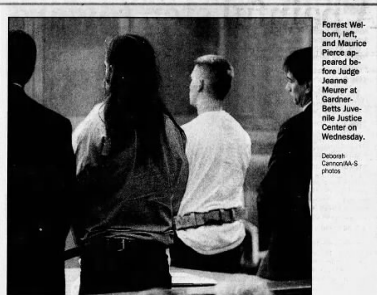
McDonald's restaurant. He got married last February on Valentine's Day, according to a former landlord, Patti Eagle. "They were drinking and they just went out and did it," she said.

"They were super," Eagle, 38, said of Springsteen and his then-girlfriend, Robin Moss. "You couldn't ask for better renters."

In August, Springsteen and Moss moved into the house where he was arrested. Moss's mother, Helen, lives across the street.

On Wednesday afternoon, the outside of the light-green house on Charleston's Palm Drive showed no hint of the drama that had occurred earlier in the day. The metal door knocker reads, "As for me and my house, we shall serve the Lord."

His crime includes molesting Tom Todd C. Frazier, Don Leno and Brad McDermott with the Chastillon Bay Boat.



Yogurt shop case could prove particularly difficult in court

By LEAH QUIN

Capital murder cases, which carry a sentence of death or life in prison, are some of the most complicated in the criminal justice system. But the case filed Wednesday against four men accused in the 1991 yogurt shop killings poses several additional legal hurdles.

Two of the men were juveniles, 15 and 16 years old, at the time of the killings, so they would not be subject to the death penalty if convicted. One man, charged as an adult, lives out of state.

In the eight years since the killings, police have heard countless complaints made on arrest but later released that suggested police renewed the investigation, their dropped suspects were two men in Mexico. But the pair were never charged or charged in the case after one recanted a confession in 1992.

"The fact that that happened is to say the least, a bit problematic," said Guillermo Gonzalez, lawyer for one of the accused men, Maurice Pierce. "At the time, you had two other guys as suspects who now appear to have had nothing to do with it."

For Pierce and Forrest Welborn, who appeared before a judge at Gardner-Butts Juvenile Justice Center on Wednesday, the first step will be a hearing, probably held within a month, to determine whether they should be tried as adults, since they are now 21 and 23, respectively.

Unlike most certification hearings, the judge only has the choice to certify them as adults or dismiss the cases. In Texas, the juvenile system loses its jurisdiction over suspects once they turn 17, said Robert Dawson, professor of law at the University of Texas.

"It's incredible to think the judge wouldn't certify them, considering the facts we know about this case," Dawson said. Pierce and Welborn are being held at the Travis County Jail, along with a third suspect.



During a hearing at Gardner-Butts Juvenile Justice Center on Wednesday, Forrest Welborn lifts a towel to his face and cries after prosecutors asked for \$5 million bail. The judge instead set Welborn's bail at \$1 million.

Michael Scott. A fourth, Robert Springsteen Jr., lives in West Virginia and will need to be extradited to Texas, a procedure that can be lengthy if a suspect fights it.

Documents filed in the case indicate that Springsteen and Scott confessed to police and named Pierce and Welborn as accomplices. However, in Texas, a person cannot be convicted solely on the word of another, Dawson said. Police are not saying what other evidence they have.

"It makes me wonder what evidence the police have," he added. In court records, police said Scott knew details about the case that have been left secret, including the material used to tie up the victims and the location of their bodies in the shop. If indicated, the four likely will be tried separately.

Further complicating the case is searing publicity that might prompt defense attorneys to try to get the trials moved to another county where jurors may have heard less about the case.

More than 1,200 people attended the funerals for Rizia Thomas, Amy Ayers and sisters Jennifer and Sarah Harrison, who were shot to death in the back of an I-Cent's Belaire 11's Yogurt store in Northwest Austin. And the girls' parents have since founded an organization to promote workplace safety.

Yet despite arguments for a jury pool that has heard little about the case, most capital murder cases from Travis County are tried locally, said state District Judge Bob Perkins. The last trial moved to a different county in recent memory was that of serial killer Kenneth McDuff in 1994.

Austin defense attorneys are usually reluctant to demand that a trial be moved from Travis County because of the city's reputation for having a more liberal population, said Robert Lombauer-Ramirez, Welborn's attorney.

"I don't know that that's true anymore, but that reputation still lingers," he said.

You may contact Leah Quin at lquin@statesman.com or 445-3821.

Forrest Welborn, left, and Maurice Pierce appeared before Judge Jeanne Meuser at Gardner-Butts Juvenile Justice Center on Wednesday.

Donna Cameron/S.A. photos



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