

Suspect facing murder charge in King death

King, Ernie 1171-88
SANTA CRUZ — Robert Spedding will face trial on charges of murder and robbery in the death of Live Oak resident Ernie King, Judge Tom Kelly ruled Monday at the close of a pretrial hearing.

The prosecution contends that Spedding forced King from the back of a moving pickup truck after attempting to rob him June 25. King fell to his death on Summit Road.

King, 38, a family man who was legally blind, was on his way home after attending classes at San Jose State University. King approached Spedding at a Summit parking lot and asked for a ride.

Witnesses said Spedding and another man began beating King. After the beating, King got into the back of a pickup truck with Spedding and was driven away, falling to his death a few minutes later.

Mitchell Page, Spedding's court-appointed attorney, asked Kelly to reduce the charges to involuntary manslaughter, saying that the evidence did not show that Spedding intended to kill King.

"We are all mystified as to why this series of events took place," Page said. "There is no doubt my client was involved, but there was no intent (to kill King). Manslaughter is what he deserves to be tried for."