

✓ Friends say murder suspect is not a violent man

By MAY WONG
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SANTA CRUZ — The defense for accused murderer David Turturici began presenting its case Thursday with testimony from friends who said they never saw Turturici get angry at others while driving.

One after another, the half-dozen friends — his business partner, some old buddies and a high school sweetheart — testified that Turturici was a "non-violent" man.

"Unequivocally," said Dominic Speno. "He's a calm, cool, collected individual."

Robert Gene Ciraulo, another friend, said Turturici was a "safe, cautious driver." Even at sporting events, Ciraulo said, Turturici would park his Mer-

cedes Benz far away from the stadium — to minimize the chances of dings.

"He's protective of his car, then?" chief Deputy District Attorney Jon Hopkins asked during a brief cross examination.

"Yes," Ciraulo said.

"Have you ever seen him get angry in a car?" Hopkins continued.

"No."

"So you don't know what he'd do if he got angry?"

"No."

All of the friends stressed how Turturici was not known to be a violent person. Under cross examination, though, all of them — except for the business partner — acknowledged that they did not know he owned or carried a loaded handgun. But that now well-es-

tablished fact did not change their opinion of Turturici, they said.

Turturici, 42, of Aptos, is on trial in Santa Cruz County Superior Court, charged with murder in the Feb. 8, 1996 freeway slaying of Rick E. Foster, a 38-year-old Summit area resident and software engineer. Turturici claims he shot Foster with a .380-caliber Colt semiautomatic he had in his car — in self defense — after being menaced by Foster on the highway for miles.

His sister's boyfriend, Mark Buford, testified he had advised Turturici to get a gun. Buford, twice robbed at gunpoint, said he thought it would be a good idea since Turturici often carried a large amount of cash to make deposits for restaurants Turturici co-owned — Dartanian's, which has since closed, and Bellino Restaurant and Bar.

Also Thursday, defense attorney Ben Rice called to the witness stand William Broad, a Los Gatos doctor who had prescribed anti-depressants to Foster eight days before his death. The doctor said Foster visited him that day and told him his relationship with a girlfriend had fallen apart and that he had gained some weight, and was having problems sleeping.

Broad said Foster told him another doctor had prescribed Prozac, another anti-depressant medication, to him several years before to help him with "impulse control." Broad said the issue of "impulse-control" was never raised in connection with the most recent prescription.

The trial continues next Tuesday before Municipal Court Judge Tom Kelly.