



Robert Spedding pleaded innocent to a murder charge in court Friday.



Photos by Dan Coyro

Ernie King's father, Richard King, watches Spedding's arraignment.

Suspect in death pleads innocent

By MARK BERGSTROM
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SANTA CRUZ — A Summit-area man pleaded innocent Friday to murder in the death of Live Oak resident Ernie King.

Members of King's family were in court to see the legal process begin against Robert Anderson Spedding, 29.

Spedding has been charged with murder and attempted robbery in the case.

Mitchell Page, Spedding's court-appointed attorney, asked that Judge Tom Kelly set a hearing this week on a request to lower Spedding's bail, which now is set at \$500,000.

Kelly set a hearing for Tuesday at 8:30 a.m.

Outside court, District Attorney Art Danner said he not only will oppose any bail reduction but also may, in fact, ask

that no bail be allowed "because of the risk we believe he poses to the community."

Danner said he expects Spedding eventually to be tried separately from two co-defendants in the case, Brett Erickson and Gregory Kern, because of the difference in severity of the charges. Erickson is charged with leaving the scene of a fatal accident and Kern with assault with intent to cause great bodily injury.

King's father, Richard, spoke briefly with reporters after the arraignment hearing, saying he was very upset over his son's death and that he wanted to see Spedding brought to justice and punished to the full extent of the law.

In unsuccessfully arguing against allowing in-court photography of Spedding, Page said publicity in the case already had been "massive" and "mis-

leading."

He told Judge Kelly he found a big difference between what the District Attorney's Office had been telling the press and what the police reports reflected.

Authorities have said that Spedding "forced" or "pushed" King from the back of Erickson's pickup truck as it was traveling 35-40 miles an hour along Summit Road June 24.

Page said police reports he had been provided with so far indicated that eyewitnesses said King left the back of Erickson's truck "voluntarily."

"As in 'jumped?'" asked one reporter. "As in voluntarily," replied Page.

Authorities also said that King had been forced into the back of the truck after being beaten when he asked for a ride down Old San Jose Road from the park-and-ride lot at the summit.

"The same few reports I've gotten

indicate that he (King) got in for the purpose of a ride."

King, a well-known local resident who suffered impairment to his sight and hearing, rode to and from graduate classes at San Jose State University with a fellow student who lives at the summit. Detectives said it was King's custom to ask one of the commuters who used the park-and-ride lot for a ride down the Old San Jose Road or to call his wife to come pick him up.

Authorities said he apparently approached Spedding and two of his friends, who were standing there drinking, for a ride.

Detectives allege that after Spedding and Kern beat King, they coerced him into the back of Erickson's truck. They said Spedding pushed or forced King out the back of the truck after trying to rob King.