

Teacher's aide charged with double murder

Murder

SJmn 10-19-01

The grand jury's indictment replaces earlier murder charges against Dennis Lee Richesin of Capitola. It opens the door to a death sentence if he is convicted of killing two young women and burying their bodies near the Watsonville-area school where he worked.

By David L. Beck
Mercury News

A Santa Cruz County grand jury this week indicted Dennis Lee Richesin, 40, in a double murder of which he was accused in May.

Richesin, a Watsonville teacher's aide who lives in Capitola, is accused of killing Kelly Ann Reber, 21, of San Jose, and Heather Nicole Pereira, 25, who had been living in Watsonville, and burying their bodies.

He is scheduled to appear in court today to answer to the new charges. The indictment includes a special circumstance — multiple murder — that opens the way for a death sentence.

Neither prosecutors nor investigators have publicly stated whether they believe there was a motive for the deaths. Richesin reportedly confessed and led investigators to the bodies.

Richesin, 40, pleaded not guilty

to the original charges in June but a series of legal glitches delayed his preliminary hearing.

Instead of waiting for the preliminary hearing, the prosecution decided to argue its case before a grand jury to speed things up, said Assistant District Attorney Christine McGuire.

"We didn't want to stall the criminal justice process," she said,

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THE VICTIMS



Heather Nicole Pereira, 25, left, disappeared in August 2000. Kelly Ann Reber, 21, right, disappeared in March. Their bodies were found near Renaissance High School.

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calling the indictments a "parallel track."

The original charges and plea will be vacated and a new case created, said defense attorney George J. Gigarjian.

"I don't know exactly what the indictment says," said Gigarjian, who will receive the "information document" today.

Like most members of the defense bar, Gigarjian has little good to say about the grand jury process, which excludes the defendant and his attorney.

"It's a secret proceeding. To me, it's patently lacking in due process, but the Legislature seems to allow things to proceed like that, with the theory

that the district attorney is required to present any exculpatory evidence."

Reber's disappearance in March — she was last seen at Richesin's house — led to an extensive public search. He was arrested May 4 after extensive questioning and a search of his house and his van.

Reber is believed to have been killed in March, and Pereira in August 2000. Pereira's body was found near Reber's, behind Renaissance High School near Watsonville, where Richesin worked. Pereira had attended Los Gatos High School.

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