

Lawyers in Trailside murder case 4-27-84 announce a last-minute change

SANTA CRUZ — On the eve of the Trailside Killer trial, one of defendant David Joseph Carpenter's two defense attorneys has been forced to leave the case for personal reasons.

Public Defender Gerry Christensen, who with his partner Larry Biggam has spent three years preparing for the case, has been replaced by Deputy Public Defender Steve Wright.

Wright, who two years ago won a verdict of not guilty by reason of insanity for Charles Christian Jones in the shooting of Watsonville grocer Bill Brandon, said Thursday he is working to catch up on the volumes of material gathered to defend Carpenter.

Carpenter, 53, is charged with two murders, one attempted murder, rape and attempted rape in the 1981 slayings of Ellen Hansen and Heather Scaggs and the shooting of Hansen's boyfriend, Steven Haertle.

His trial is scheduled to begin in Los Angeles May 14. Carpenter was granted a change of venue due to pretrial

publicity. He is also charged with five murders in Marin County.

Biggam said Thursday Carpenter had gone on the court record approving the change in attorneys. The 11th-hour substitution will not be an issue for an appeal, he said, and will not delay the trial further.

"It's a tremendous loss to lose an attorney who's worked for three years on a case," he said, "and to replace him with an attorney — a very good attorney — who's only worked on it for three weeks. But with a little extra energy, we can have the case ready.

"David said he wanted to proceed. He's aware of the problems (raised by the substitution), but we feel competent we'll be ready, and he shares that confidence."

Wright has been defending Kelly Anthony Graff, 28, the Bonny Doon man accused of stabbing and bludgeoning his estranged wife to death in January. After a preliminary hearing two weeks ago, Graff was ordered to stand trial in Superior Court on a charge of murder.