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Four jurors picked in Evans murder trial

By JENNIFER L. SAUNDERS

Democrat Staff Writer

DOVER — The first day of jury selection for the Chad Evans murder trial yielded four confirmed jurors, and if today goes as smoothly the trial could begin Dec. 4.

A pool of 100 potential jurors arrived Tuesday at Strafford County Superior Court for the 9 a.m. start of the selection. Although the individuals were chosen at random, the group was assembled as a special panel strictly for the Evans trial. Any jurors dismissed from service will not have to report for any other Superior Court trials this month.

Chad E. Evans, 30, formerly of Milton Road in Rochester and Sullivan Street in Keene, is facing a charge of second-degree murder and eight counts of felony assault for allegedly causing the death of his girlfriend's daughter, 21-month-old Kassidy Bortner.

Kassidy died in November 2000 from what court documents describe as a blunt-force injury to her head.

While meeting with the potential jurors Tuesday morning, Judge Tina Nadeau stressed that each individual avoid all discussion of the pending case and news accounts detailing the past year's events or the upcoming trial.

"Keep an open mind throughout the entire process until you've heard all the evidence ... It's a very profound matter and we you to be free from any outside influence," she told the group that packed Courtroom 1 to hear her preliminary instructions.

Following preliminary instructions, the judge read a lengthy list of potential witnesses and posed several general questions about the case. She asked each juror to indicate whether they had any issues that would impede their service based on those questions. About 55 indicated they did not feel they had any issues that needed to be resolved and were excused to be scheduled for individual questioning by the state, defense and Nadeau.

The remaining jurors — approximately 45 — approached the bench one by one to discuss their concerns, whether personal or

related to the case. After Nadeau and attorneys for both sides heard each potential juror, 39 were excused from service and remaining few were scheduled for the next phase of the process.

After lunch, eight potential jurors had individual interviews with Nadeau and the attorneys. Representing the state are N. William Delker and Simon Brown of the New Hampshire attorney general's office. Evans is being represented by Mark Sisti and Alan Cronheim of the firm Twomey and Sisti.

Evans, dressed in a dark suit and yellow shirt, sat with his attorneys and appeared calm as he listened to the responses from potential jurors. His attorneys repeatedly asked potential jurors if they could tell Evans they would be fair and impartial through the trial.

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During each interview, Nadeau asked the potential jurors how much they knew about the case, and whether they had read about the case in the newspapers. She then asked each juror if they could be fair and impartial and make their decisions based solely on the evidence presented during trial.

Each team of attorneys then had the opportunity to ask questions related to the case. For example, the jurors were asked about their views on physical punishment of children, their past experience related to criminal trials, their opinions of law enforcement officials and whether they could remain objective after viewing the "very, very graphic photographs" taken during Cassidy's autopsy.

Of the eight interviewed, four were accepted as jurors for the upcoming trial and four were excused. Both the state and the defense are allowed three peremptory challenges to use to dismiss a potential juror. The defense team used two of its three Tuesday afternoon. The state has not used any of its challenges.

Jury selection was scheduled to resume at 9 a.m. today with additional individual questioning. Based on how quickly the remaining eight jurors and three alternates are selected, the evidentiary portion of the trial could begin as early as Dec. 4. The trial, not including jury selection, is expected to last two weeks.

Democrat Staff Writer Jennifer L. Saunders can be reached at 1-207-363-4413 or jlsaunders@fosters.com