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Auburn man pleads guilty in 2006 murder

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Feb 17, 2009 @ 10:24 PM

Last update Feb 18, 2009 @ 06:36 AM

An Auburn man who was arrested for the strangulation murder of Mark Lewis 2 1/2 years ago based on DNA evidence pleaded guilty Tuesday to second-degree murder.

James B. Campbell, 35, "had an unreasonable belief that he acted in self-defense" when he killed Lewis, first assistant state's attorney John Milhiser said.

Lewis, 36, a supervisor at Physicians Group Associates, was found dead inside his ransacked apartment on Hazel Dell Road just off West Lake Shore Drive on Sept. 29, 2006. Co-workers had gone to check on him when he didn't show up for work.

Lewis had last been seen at a downtown bar about 11 p.m. the night before. His missing Toyota Celica was found abandoned near railroad tracks in the 3700 block of Camp Butler Road about 1 a.m. Sept. 30.

Campbell was charged in March 2007, after DNA evidence from underneath Lewis' fingernails was compared to a national database by Sangamon County sheriff's detectives. Campbell's DNA had been entered into the database only after he was convicted of felony criminal damage to property.

A cigarette butt found inside Lewis' car also was tested for DNA and that also came back matching Campbell's DNA, Milhiser said.

He said Campbell met Lewis at a local bar on Sept. 28, and the two went to Lewis' home. A fight took place there, during which Campbell strangled Lewis, Milhiser said.

He said that Lewis' family was in agreement with the plea offer from the state.

Circuit Judge Leslie Graves set Campbell's sentencing for May 1. He could receive from four to 20 years in prison for second-degree murder. Charges of first-degree murder were dismissed as part of the plea.

Campbell was represented by Springfield attorneys Daniel Fultz and Mark Wykoff.

"We believed that second-degree murder was the right outcome from the beginning," Fultz said. "We commend the state's attorney's office for carefully examining the evidence and coming to the same conclusion."

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