

Slaying trial begins in D.M.

Several Polk County District Court jurors were excused from the Keenan Stewart murder trial Wednesday because they remembered news reports about Stewart in connection with the stabbing death of Kristi Jo Skidmore.

Stewart is charged with first-degree murder in the April death of Skidmore, 24. Her partly clothed body was found March 24 in her bedroom. She had been stabbed several times.

According to police, Stewart and Skidmore were both clerical workers at the R.G. Dickinson & Co. investment firm. Police allege that Stewart attended a party at Skidmore's south-side apartment, returned after the party and killed her, then reported her death to police the next morning.

Attorneys in the case spent Wednesday screening potential jurors. Fifteen who said they remembered news reports about the killing were interviewed in private in the chambers of District Judge Theodore Miller. Afterward, several jurors were excused from the panel.

Testimony in the case is expected to begin today.

Jury ponders murder trial

By ELIZABETH FLANSBURG

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A Polk County jury began deliberating Thursday in the murder trial of Keenan Stewart, who is accused of stabbing to death a Des Moines woman in her apartment.

Stewart, 23, is accused of stabbing to death Kristi Skidmore, 24, in her water bed at her south-side apartment March 25 following a late-night party.

Des Moines lawyer Jose Olvera argued Thursday that there were several other people who previously had threatened Skidmore and who had greater motives to kill her than Stewart.

Police testified earlier that Stewart changed his story several times when he was questioned about the murder. Stewart first claimed he was looking for a friend when Skidmore was slain, then changed his story and said he stabbed her by accident. Later, after he was arrested, Stewart told police he saw another man fleeing Skidmore's apartment after she was stabbed.

Olvera said during his closing arguments Thursday that Stewart lied to police because he was scared, not because he was trying to cover up the murder.

Olvera argued that because Stewart is a "big black man when a white woman had just been brutally killed" he lied about what happened because he thought he would be automatically suspect.

Prosecutor Cathie Thune complimented Olvera's closing argument, but told jurors not to be fooled by it.

"Mr. Olvera's asking you to hunt for doubt," Thune said. "But Mr. Olvera can't change the facts in the case," which Thune said prove Stewart murdered Skidmore.

If Stewart is convicted, he faces life in prison.