

Man on Trial for Ohio Craigslist Murders Called a 'False Prophet'

Richard Beasley, a self-proclaimed street preacher accused of murdering men who answered a Craigslist ad for a non-existent job, preyed on people who were down on their luck, a prosecutor said at his trial on Monday.

In opening statements, special prosecutor Emily Pelphrey, of the Ohio Attorney General's office, called Beasley a "false prophet" who took advantage of his victims by giving them "a message of hope and change and a new start in life."

Beasley, 53, is charged with the murder of three men, two of whom were apparently lured by the Craigslist ad. If convicted, he faces the death penalty in the murders of David Pauley, 51, of Norfolk, Va.; Ralph Geiger, 56, of Akron, Ohio; and Timothy Kern, 47, of Massillon, Ohio.

He is also charged with the attempted murder of Scott Davis, who answered the Craigslist ad and was shot in the arm while escaping after meeting Beasley and his teenage accomplice Brogan Rafferty.

The 17-year-old Rafferty was tried as an adult and sentenced to life in prison without parole in November for his role in the deadly scheme. He was 16 years old at the time of the crimes and not eligible for the death penalty.

According to court records, prosecutors have subpoenaed Rafferty but his attorney will not confirm if he will testify.

Prosecutors said Beasley lured his first victim, Geiger, with the offer of a non-existent caretaker job on a 680-acre ranch in rural Ohio, killed him, stole his identity and even changed

his appearance to look like Geiger.

Beasley then allegedly placed an ad on Craigslist, to attract other victims.

The attacks were among a series of incidents involving Craigslist and other social media in which people advertising goods for sale or responding to ads have been attacked and killed.

In 2009, a former medical student was accused of killing a masseuse he met through Craigslist. Last year, two men in Tennessee were accused of killing a man and a woman for “unfriending” the daughter of one of the suspects on Facebook.

Beasley, wearing a dark sport coat and sitting in a wheelchair, made frequent eye contact with jurors as his attorney described his client’s life working as a machinist until he was forced to take low-paying jobs when he was badly injured in a car accident.

Burdon admitted Beasley was “not a saint,” but said the killer was not Beasley but a member of an Ohio motorcycle club.

Burdon said that all the evidence against his client would be countered by witnesses under oath on the stand and, “not someone blathering to the media.”

Monday’s proceedings were attended by relatives of the victims. The trial continues on Tuesday. Davis, the surviving victim, is expected to be called sometime this week to testify.

Editing by Mary Wisniewski, Greg McCune and Bob Burgdorfer

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