

State of South Carolina

Charleston County
101 Meeting Street, Suite 400
Charleston, SC 29401
Phone (843) 958-1900
Fax (843) 958-1905



Berkeley County
300-B California Avenue
Moncks Corner, SC 29461
Phone (843) 723-3800 ext. 4529
Fax (843) 719-4588

SCARLETT A. WILSON
Solicitor, Ninth Judicial Circuit

Jury Convicts Charleston Man of Murder in the Old Village

Charleston, S.C.— Solicitor Scarlett Wilson announced today that a Charleston jury found Defendant Norman Philip Browne guilty of Murder and Grand Larceny following a trial that lasted over a week. Defendant Browne faced a minimum of 30 years and a maximum of Life in Prison on the charge of Murder. The Honorable Deadra L. Jefferson sentenced Browne to Life. He will not be eligible for parole.

Chief Deputy Solicitor Jennifer Shealy and Assistant Solicitor Elliott Barrow prosecuted the case against Browne, assisted by Chief Investigator Josh Cheney and Investigator Kristine Rivera. Mr. Browne elected to represent himself at trial, with assistance from standby counsel, Laree Hensley.

On Saturday, February 9, 2019, Mt. Pleasant Police Department Detectives entered victim Ann Witherspoon's house in the Old Village in Mt. Pleasant. Detectives discovered Ms. Witherspoon dead in her bed, with a gunshot entry wound to the back of the head at the base of the skull, and a large gash on top of her head. There was a revolver lying on Ms. Witherspoon's neck, positioned near her right hand. Defendant Browne insinuated that Ms. Witherspoon died by suicide.

The State presented testimony from three experienced professionals from separate disciplines—crime scene investigations, forensic pathology, and the Coroner's office—all of which strongly supported the conclusion that the crime scene had been staged to look like a suicide, that it would have been essentially impossible for a person to self-inflict the head injury and gunshot wound observed on Ms. Witherspoon, and that Ms. Witherspoon could not have died in the position in which her body was discovered. Testimony from her close friend and guitar teacher established that Ms. Witherspoon was left-handed, despite the gun being staged near her right hand. There was strong evidence, including the lack of any fingerprints at all, that indicated the gun had been wiped clean though Defendant Browne's DNA was on the grip of the gun and on the trigger. In a recorded jail call introduced at trial, Browne admitted he knew Ms. Witherspoon had a gun, but denied ever seeing it, let alone handling it.

The State introduced evidence showing that in late-2018, victim Ann Witherspoon loaned the Defendant \$20,000 for his newly established Matco Tools franchise, a traveling tool-sales business, which he operated in the Myrtle Beach and Conway areas. The money never made it

into the business accounts. Ms. Witherspoon considered Browne a friend; they had met when she took her car in for service at a Mt. Pleasant shop where Browne worked as a mechanic, and they struck up a casual friendship over a shared interest in cars. At the time she loaned him the money, Ms. Witherspoon did not insist on a written agreement, but in the following months, Browne began ignoring Ms. Witherspoon's inquiries regarding her investment and she decided to seek a writing memorializing the loan.

With evidence gathered by Mt. Pleasant Police Department, prosecutors built a comprehensive timeline of events leading to the discovery of Ms. Witherspoon's body at her home in the Old Village on Saturday, February 9, 2019. Key to establishing the timeline were cell phone location mapping and video surveillance from Wilmington to Myrtle Beach. When combined, the numerous surveillance videos and other evidence from sources in Wilmington provided a comprehensive account of Browne's whereabouts and proved his claims about his travels with Witherspoon were filled with lies. The DNA evidence combined with the Defendant's multiple lies helped prove that he murdered Ms. Witherspoon though a motive was never established.

The Ninth Circuit Solicitor's Office is thankful for the superb investigative efforts of the Mount Pleasant Police Department, particularly lead investigator Detective David Ivey, Officer Brian Frances, and Detectives Josh Ballentine, Danny Neese, and Stephanie Buono. Their thorough and tireless efforts investigating this case and gathering evidence in Mt. Pleasant, Myrtle Beach, Wilmington, NC, and elsewhere were key to the successful prosecution of this case.

###