

# Man freed after killing Japanese student

**BATON ROUGE, La. (AP)** — A man who mistook a Japanese exchange student for a burglar and fatally shot him as he approached his house looking for a Halloween party was acquitted of manslaughter Sunday.

The jury deliberated for more than three hours before acquitting Rodney Peairs, 31, in a case that drew widespread interest in Japan, where guns are rare and most shootings are gang-related.

In closing arguments Sunday, the defense said that the way the student, Yoshi Hattori, was acting made it reasonable for Peairs to think his life was in danger.

Peairs acknowledged he fired the gun but said he had no choice because he feared for his family. Under Louisiana law, homicide can be justified under a variety of reasons, including what's known as the "shoot the burglar"

law that allows a resident to protect himself from an intruder.

Spectators applauded when the forewoman announced the unanimous verdict, but bailiffs quickly quieted them.

Peairs, who had faced a maximum sentence of 40 years, stood up for the verdict, his attorney holding him by the arm. He bounced into his chair and wiped away tears.

The student's father, Masaichi Hattori, was not in the courtroom.

Outside the courtroom, Peairs said he would no longer use guns and, in remarks intended for the teen's father, said, "I'm very sorry that any of this ever happened."

District Attorney Doug Moreau said of the verdict, "If they wanted to say that 'we approve of what occurred,' that's a bad message. If they are saying they weren't sure ..." He then

shrugged and dropped the thought.

Jury deliberations began shortly before 2 p.m. and ended soon after 5 p.m.

The events of Oct. 17 were hardly disputed during three days of testimony.

Hattori, of Nagoya, and his American host were invited to a party, but got lost and went to Peairs' door because the address was similar and the house was already decorated for Halloween, which was two weeks away.

They rang the front bell twice, but Bonnie Peairs answered the garage door. Hattori came around from the front - quickly, she said - and frightened her, so she slammed the door and yelled for her husband to get his gun.

"There was no thinking involved," Mrs. Peairs testified.

Peairs came to the door with his .44-caliber Magnum revolver. When he saw the teen, Peairs yelled "Freeze!" and possibly "Stop!" but Hattori kept coming. Hattori was not wearing his contact lenses and with his limited English may have misunderstood the word as "Please," according to testimony.

When Hattori was between four and eight feet away, Peairs fired, hitting him in the chest. Hattori was wearing a ruffled shirt and white tuxedo jacket like the John Travolta character in "Saturday Night Fever."

Defense lawyer Lewis Unglesby said it was reasonable for Peairs to think he was in danger. Hattori was running at the door, according to Peairs' testimony, waving something above his head, which turned out to be a camera.

# Know anyone named Bob? Send him to Avon

**AVON, Colo. (AP)** — The snow is melting and the skiers are gone and everyone's attention is turning once again to Bob.

Each spring in Avon, there's a Bobfest in Bob's honor. This year, there's hope that another Bob will show up.

Bob isn't a person. It's a bridge. Supporters say the name — picked from 186 entries in a contest to name the new bridge in 1991 — reflects the town's ethos of "ultimate OK-ness."

The four-lane span crossing the Eagle River and connecting Interstate 70 with U.S. Highway 6 doesn't have a nameplate. Offi-

cially, it is known as F10AG, the designation assigned by the state highway department.

Bobfest is being held the weekend of May 29-30 in Avon, a ski country town 70 miles west of Denver.

Last year's fest attracted 3,000 Bobs, Wannabobs, Married to a Bobs, Know a Bobs and I Wish I Was a Bobs, said Carol Frangos, spokeswoman for the Vail Valley Marketing Board.

The town is hoping entertainer Bob Hope will stop by this year's event to wish his namesake a happy second birthday, while he

accepts best wishes for his 90th birthday.

Among the attractions this year are: Bob's Petting Zoo, featuring the Bobby Llama; The Bob-B-Que, a western street dance; Bob, Bob Bobbing Along, a white-water rafting extravaganza that is free to "Bobs" if accompanied by a paying customer; and Gondola rides on Vail Mountain.

"It all kicks off the Vail Valley summer season and, while it's not the best anything, it's the best 'just OK' place to be that weekend," said Bobfest creator Tom "Call Me Bob" Britz, a marketing manager whose office is one block away from the bridge.

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