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Man pleads guilty to gay student's murder

By Robert W. Black
The Associated Press

LARAMIE, Wyo. — One of two young men charged in the slaying of gay college student Matthew Shepard pleaded guilty today and was sentenced to two consecutive life terms in prison.

Russell Henderson, 21, a high school dropout and roofer, pleaded guilty to felony murder and kidnapping, avoiding a trial and the possibility of the death penalty.

Authorities said Henderson and Aaron McKinney, 21, posed as homosexuals and lured the 5-foot-2, 105-pound Shepard out of a bar last October, kidnapped and pistol-whipped him and left him tied to a fence in the cold. The 21-year-old University of Wyoming student died five days later at a hospital.

Henderson said he drove the truck and helped tie Shepard to the fence, but blamed McKinney for the beating. He said he tried to stop the beating, but McKinney struck him when he spoke up.

"Matthew looked really bad, so I told (McKinney) to stop, he's had enough," Henderson said.

Henderson then apologized to Shepard's parents, Judy and Dennis: "I'm very sorry for what I did, and I'm ready to pay my debt for what I did."

Judge Jeffrey A. Donnell dismissed his apology.

"This court does not believe you feel any remorse," Donnell said when he sentenced him. "The pain you have caused here, Mr. Henderson, will never go away. Never."

Henderson had been charged with first-degree murder, kidnapping and aggravated robbery in the beating death of Shepard.

The crime led to demands for stronger hate-crime laws around the country.

McKinney will be tried in Au-

gust. He could be sentenced to death.

There had been speculation that if Henderson entered a plea, he would end up testifying against his friend and co-defendant.

"If it's a plea bargain, the defense has to give something to the prosecution, such as his testimony against McKinney," said legal analyst Andrew Cohen.

Prosecutor Cal Rerucha opened jury selection by telling the prospective jurors that Shepard was "not the same as you and I" but that every individual should be treated equally under the Constitution.

But Henderson's attorney, Wyatt Skaggs, said his client merely watched while the other man delivered the fatal blows to Shepard. He also said the slaying was not premeditated.

Henderson's girlfriend is awaiting sentencing after pleading guilty Dec. 23 to accessory after the fact to murder. McKinney's girlfriend goes on trial in May.

The case has moved to action activists on both sides of the gay rights issue.

Early today, a dozen young people dressed as angels, with white sheets for wings, tried to block from view an anti-gay group demonstrating outside the courthouse.

The angels stood silently, but inside their human wall about a dozen anti-gay demonstrators from Kansas shouted slogans and waved signs, including one that said "God Hates Fags."

"These ... creatures are sending this nation to hell in a handbasket," said the Rev. Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church.

Phelps and members of his Westboro Baptist Church also picketed Shepard's funeral in Casper with anti-gay signs.

Marketing companies adopt new millennium

By Chris Albritton
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Memo to entrepreneurs looking to make a buck off millennium mania: You're too late.

The end of the century will be sponsored, patented, copyrighted and trademarked by several marketing companies.

While there are hundreds of individuals and companies cashing in on the date change, a few savvy companies have decided to get rich by licensing the phrases that define 2000.

Want to use "01-01-00" on a mug? Talk to Kenneth Walker. His company, Walker Group/Design, owns the trademark.

A "Y2K" throw pillow? Call Hanna Irwin of Looking Glass Partners in Indianapolis.

And "Year 2000" has been snapped up by Planet Marketing Inc., so don't get any ideas about that "I survived Year 2000, and all I got was this stupid T-shirt" T-shirt without first giving them a call.

"The beauty of '01-01-00' is that it does several things," said Walker. "It says Jan. 1, 2000. It's digital, the language of computers. And it represents the computer glitch."

The computer glitch is the so-called Y2K bug, which arises from the use in early computer programs of a two-digit format to express a year. Such computers could read the "00" of 2000 as 1900, which could cause a variety of failures.

Some computer experts say the problems probably will result in

isolated minor inconveniences at most. Others fear a global economic meltdown, accompanied by food shortages and the collapse of the nation's power grid.

However it all turns out, marketers know there's cash to be had by trademarking millennial phrases.

Walker's company has 28 trademarks filed or registered covering "01-01-00." Irwin has 45 trademarks filed or pending for "Y2K" and related phrases, including "The end of the world as we 00 it," and "Uh 00h." On its Web site, www.y2kstuff.com, the company says it has more than 550 categories of items trademarked for Y2K.

The phrase "millennium bug" has 18 trademarks against it, some held by Looking Glass.

Walker's company has licensed "01-01-00" to 55 licensees, as seen in Bloomingdale's, Sears and Penney's. He plans to expand to Wal-Mart, Kmart and Target.

"I knew that the millennium is not just another century," he said. "It's going to be the biggest celebration the world has ever seen, and it means different things to different people. For some, it's a summation of the past. For others it's an affirmation of the future."

"We look at it as a celebration." He'll have reason for a rosy outlook if his business plans work out. He projects about \$60 million in revenue by 12-31-99 — which no one has trademarked — yet.

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