

## After Upgrade, Not Guilty Plea

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The last of four people arraigned in the alleged for-hire killing of Nesconset lawyer James DiMartino pleaded not guilty yesterday in Riverhead to upgraded charges of first-degree murder and conspiracy.

Donovan Raysor, 20, stood handcuffed as his lawyer, Michael Brown, of Central Islip, entered his plea in Suffolk County Court. Judge C. Randall Hinrichs ordered Raysor held without bail and set his next court appearance for Jan. 13.

Raysor is accused of carrying out a murder plot prosecutors said was hatched by DiMartino's friend and business partner, Ronald Thornton, 37, of Nesconset.

DiMartino, 44, a specialist in home mortgages, had four children.

Prosecutors said Thornton approached a stripper he'd met at Shady Al's, a club on Jericho Turnpike, and asked for her help hiring DiMartino's killers. They said the dancer, Monique Randall, 20, enlisted her boyfriend, Raysor, along with Darnell Festus, 23, an acquaintance from the couple's St. Albans neighborhood. Then, prosecutors said, Thornton lured the victim to a meeting with Raysor and Festus, and Festus shot DiMartino in the head. Prosecutors said the fee for the job was \$8,000.

Outside court, Brown said Randall did approach his client, but Raysor's refusal forced her to look elsewhere for help. "My client wanted to have nothing to do with taking the life of another human being," Brown said. "It was at that point that Monique Randall suggested the idea to Mr. Festus, and the rest is history."

Festus' lawyer, Jason Bassett, of Central Islip, has insisted his client is innocent and knew nothing about the plot.

Randall pleaded guilty to second-degree murder in exchange for the minimum sentence of 15 years to life.

Thornton's lawyer, Steven Wilutis, of Miller Place, has said his client met Randall and Raysor to discuss renting a property to them, and that during that meeting, the couple overheard a phone call revealing DiMartino's plans to be in Commack carrying cash. Then, Wilutis said, the pair decided to carry out a

deadly armed robbery.

Prosecutors again declined to comment yesterday on Wilutis' assertions in court that his client had been cooperating with a district attorney's investigation into allegations that DiMartino had committed mortgage fraud.