Smiling murder suspect pleads not guilty

By Lesha Hoffman
Tribune reporter

Diazien Hossencofft's eyes widened and a smile came across his face as he surveyed a courtroom full of spectators and reporters.

Then, as he entered not-guilty pleas to 27 criminal counts accusing the 34-year-old of kidnapping and killing his estranged wife, Hossencofft winked at Deputy District Attorney Julie Altwies.

"I was repulsed and I thought it was indicative of his attitude throughout this entire case," Altwies said after the hearing.

After months of investigation, Hossencofft was arraigned today in state District Court in Albuquerque on state charges in connection with the disappearance and presumed death of 36-year-old Girly Hossencofft.

Diazien Hossencofft's facial expressions in court and comments to reporters after the hearing highlighted what has become an increasingly bizarre homicide case -- one that centers around a victim whose body has yet to be found.

As he was led away by sheriff's deputies in handcuffs and a white jumpsuit, reporters asked Hossencofft why he smiled throughout his arraignment.

Hossencofft answered, "I have no reason not to smile."

State District Court Judge Frank Allen Jr. continued Hossencofft's $2.5 million cash-only bail, which was first set when Hossencofft was indicted in November.

Hossencofft also is being held without bail on a federal charge of making interstate threats to injure people who he reportedly thought had talked to Albuquerque police investigating the case.

The charge mirrors that of three separate counts alleged in the state indictment.

Assistant District Attorney Paul Spiers said Hossencofft will remain in federal custody in Estancia while the federal and state cases proceed simultaneously.

Today's arraignment means attorneys in the case can now begin delving into evidence through the discovery process.

Hossencofft's attorney, Ron Koch, has filed a motion to dismiss the indictment on a

technicality, claiming his client had not been arraigned within the time required by law. Koch said today he filed the motion in part to expedite arraignment so that the discovery process could begin.

"The state has had months to investigate this case," Koch said.

What that investigation has yet to turn up is a central component in the alleged crime -- Girly Hossencofft's body.

Search warrants in the case indicate police believe Diazlen Hossencofft and his girlfriend, Linda Henning, tried to hire someone to kill Girly Hossencofft. Police also found physical evidence at Girly Hossencofft's apartment and along U.S. 60 near Socorro, according to the search warrants.

Henning also is facing 20 criminal counts in connection with the case and is being held in City-County Jail on a $2.5 million cash-only bond.

Prosecutors this week filed notice that they intend to seek the death penalty against Hossencofft and Henning.

But Spiers said today he "can't rule out" the possibility that the state could offer Henning a deal to testify against Hossencofft.

He also indicated that the case is far from over.

"I would not be surprised if more arrests were pending," he said.

Meanwhile, Koch maintained his client had nothing to do with Girly Hossencofft's disappearance and said much of the information surrounding the case has been "rumor," not fact.

"He's intelligent, articulate," Koch said. ". . . He's a nice young man and, looking at him, I can't believe he's been charged with this."

When asked about his client's demeanor in court today, Koch said interpretations are "subjective" and that Hossencofft is upset by the charges.

Tribune reporter Joline Gutierrez Krueger contributed to this report.

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