

Hodges sentenced to die

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Willie Hodges was sentenced to die by lethal injection.

Hodges was convicted in March 2008 in the death of Patricia Belanger who was found dead in her Clio Drive home in the Mayfair neighborhood by family members.

A jury later recommended 10-2 that Hodges be put to death.

Hodges did not respond as Circuit Judge Terry Terrell announced his decision. Belanger's daughter bowed her head, and a victim's advocate touched her on the left shoulder as they learned the decision.

The 58-year-old grandmother was beaten on the head with a hammer and stabbed in the neck and throat with a steak knife hours before she was to leave on a Christmas vacation to Idaho with relatives and friends.

When Belanger's daughter came to her mother's home to take her to the airport, she saw a man flee from the house and enter a nearby swamp.

During the trial, prosecutor John Molchan cited fingerprints, DNA evidence, hair, carpet fibers and other clues that linked Hodges to the killing.

Hodges wasn't charged for two years until evidence led investigators to him. By then, he was jailed on an unrelated burglary charge.

Hodges, of Epes, Ala., also is accused of slayings in Cincinnati and Sumter County, Ala.

Prosecutors in those cases have said they would await the outcome of the Escambia County case before proceeding.