

# Jurors selected in Oberlin for murder trail

**By Stephanie DeCamp**  
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 The Decatur County courtroom was tense and quiet before the judge came in Monday morning, quiet, as if it were a library, and tense with the knowledge that Dylan Coryell was sitting right there – and just who would decide his fate remained unknown.

None looked more tense than Mr. Coryell himself, his Irish-red hair, pale skin and rosy cheeks set tight. He's been in jail for over a year now, awaiting this moment, and Monday had his first day in court after being charged with the killing of Airman Cory Cook on Oct. 22, 2011.

The defendant faces felony charges of murder in the first degree, aggravated battery and aggravated burglary, said District Judge Preston Pratt, who is presiding over the trial.

While Monday and Tuesday were designated for jury selection days, said Ron Keefover, education-information officer for the Kansas Judicial Department, only one day was needed. He said opening statements from the prosecution and defense would begin at 9 a.m. Tuesday. The jurors were to have been announced Tuesday as well.

Of 150 possible jurors, said Mr. Keefover, only 39 were in the final pool. Then defense and prosecution got to strike 13 names, leaving 13 behind. Twelve people will sit on the jury, with one remaining as an alternate.

After the opening statements Tuesday, Judge Pratt explained to

those assembled in court, he will give jury instructions. Both sides then will present their evidence in the case, which he said is expected to take over a week. After that will come more jury instructions, then the closing arguments by both sides. After that, the jury will deliberate.

The jury will have to make a unanimous decision about Mr. Coryell, and determine whether the state has proven beyond a reasonable doubt that he is guilty, Mr. Barrett said later.

Every person called to be interviewed as a juror was sworn in and testified that they were over age 18, a U.S. citizen, a resident of Decatur County, understood English as their primary language, were competent, had not been convicted of a felony within the last 10 years and were not breast feeding mothers.

Prosecutor, Assistant Attorney General Nicole Romine did the bulk of the questioning, with Justin Barrett using a more conversational tone to inquire into the juror's thoughts and beliefs. Many of Ms. Romine's questions centered on how well people knew the Coryell or Cook families and if they could listen to the evidence without prejudice or bias.

Many of those questioned said that they did know either or both of the families, but almost all of them said that they could still hear the evidence presented in court without also allowing outside information – anything they may have heard, read or watched about the trial

beforehand – to influence their decisions. Many also knew county law enforcement officials or were second or third cousins to parties involved in the case, but again, most said that would not affect their ability to serve.

Near the end of her questioning, Ms. Romine asked if anyone had already formed an opinion about the case, to which no one raised their hand. She then asked if those assembled could disregard news reports, rumors and gossip during the trial. One hand raised.

"I think living in a small town, we all should raise our hand," Karen Mann said. When asked if she could still remain fair and impartial as a juror, however, she said yes.

A quick survey of the first 25 also showed that 16 of them were

gun owners or users, 14 of those for hunting and the two for target practice. One person had a conceal-and-carry license. Two women raised their hands to say "they just didn't like guns."

When Mr. Barrett's turn came up, he spoke mostly about what it meant to come to a unanimous decision, how town gossip might affect people's thoughts and what "beyond a reasonable doubt" meant.

"What verdict would you give the court if you had to go back there and make a decision right now?" he asked.

A few of the jurors responded that they couldn't make a decision, that there would be no evidence to make a decision on.

"Wrong," said Mr. Barrett.

"You'd have to proclaim him not guilty, because the prosecution wouldn't have proved anything beyond a reasonable doubt."

The illustration seemed to weigh on the prospective jurors, but Mr. Barrett assured them that only once had he ever seen that question answered correctly.

When asked, two of the possible jurors said they had attended the Cook funeral, but none of them said they belonged to a Facebook group called "Prayers for the Cook Family."

Mr. Barrett's questions then

turned to the more philosophical: Can people believe and say something that isn't true? What does an innocent person look like? How do people act under the influence of alcohol, and how does that affect memory? How is memory affected over time in general? Does anyone remember what they were doing a year and a half ago?

But the most important question he had to ask, he said, was this: If you were sitting in the defendant's chair, would you want yourself as a juror?

## — Lines from the Library —

**By Pat Leibbrandt**  
 We have received the following new books at the library: *Private Berlin* by James Patterson; *Guilt* by Jonathan Kellerman; *Red Velvet Cupcake Murder* by Joanne Fluke; *Calculated in Death* by J.D. Robb; *Shadow Woman* by Linda Howard; *Alex Cross, Run* by James Patterson; *Betrayal* by Robin Lee Hatcher; *Big Sky River* by Linda Lael Miller; *Justice On The Prairie* by Michael H. Hoeflich.

The following new books have arrived in the children's


department: *Tiny Learns To Fish* by Craig Bartlett; *Ruby's New Home* by Tony Dungy; *Olivia And The Puppy Wedding* by Tina Gallo; *Splat The Cat: The Perfect Present For Mom and Dad* by Annie Auerbach; *Cam Jansen And The Graduation Day Mystery* by David A. Adler; *Cam Jansen And The Wedding Cake Mystery* by David A. Adler; *Annie And Snowball And The Magical House* by Cynthia Rylant; *Splat The Cat: Fishy Tales* by Annie Auerbach; *Then We Came To The End* by Joshua Ferris.

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