

Jury convicts ex-police officer of killing 19-year-old in Nome | Juneau Empire - Alaska's Capital City Online Newspaper

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

juneauempire.com

2003

KOTZEBUE - A former Nome police officer who testified he did not shoot Sonya Ivanoff was convicted Tuesday in the 19-year-old's death.

Matthew Owens, 30, was convicted of first-degree murder and tampering with evidence in the 2003 death of the young woman who had moved from the small village of Unalakleet to Nome about a year before her death.

"We're very grateful and happy that no other parents have to go through what we went through," said Maggie Ivanoff, the victim's mother.

While Owens showed no emotion when Judge Ben Esch read the verdict, Ivanoff family members hugged and cried. Defense attorney Jim McComas then requested that the jury be polled, and each said, "Guilty."

Immediately after, Owens was placed in handcuffs.

Once the courtroom cleared, Ivanoff family members shook hands with troopers and thanked Esch. Later, they were allowed into the jury room to personally convey their appreciation.

"This comes as a real relief," said state prosecutor Rick Svobodny. Owens' first trial earlier this year in Nome ended in a hung jury, and the second was moved to Kotzebue.

Svobodny said he kept Sonya Ivanoff's picture in his office as a constant reminder, until he had to admit it as evidence.

A sentencing date will be set during a status hearing on Dec. 15. Svobodny said he will ask that Owens be sentenced to 99 years in prison.

The 13-member jury deliberated more than three days before returning the verdict Tuesday afternoon in the small, crowded courtroom. A collective gasp was heard when Esch read the verdict.

Throughout the trial, defense lawyer McComas tried to pin the murder on three other suspects. He said his client was the suspect developed by police, and state authorities made the evidence fit Owens.

He also stressed how truthful Owens was, noting that he took the stand. "He didn't have to testify, but he did," McComas said in closing arguments.

McComas also claimed that Owens had no motive to kill Ivanoff.

Svobodny maintained throughout that the hard evidence of the 19-year-old clerical worker's death all pointed to Owens as the killer.
