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## Despres now claims his son was triggerman

*Assertion is made during jury selection in murder-for-hire case*

By [Izaskun E. Larraneta](#) - [More Articles](#)  
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The confessed triggerman in an alleged murder-for-hire plot has recanted his statement and is now pointing the finger at his son.

Mark Despres, who had pleaded guilty to shooting former attorney Beth Carpenter's brother-in-law in 1994 and who was expected to testify for the prosecution in Carpenter's trial on murder and conspiracy charges, now claims that his son, Chris, pulled the trigger, according to New London State's Attorney Kevin Kane.

The revelation came Thursday afternoon in New London Superior Court, just before jury selection for the Carpenter trial was concluded.

Also Thursday, attorneys for Carpenter claimed that the younger Despres confessed to the shooting on Dr. Laura Schlessinger's radio call-in show.

The court began to hear arguments on the defense's request that Chris Despres be required to furnish a sample of his voice so that it could be compared to the voice on a recording of the radio show. The state provided the defense with a copy of the recording. The defense claims that the voice on the recording is that of Chris Despres.

Ron Murphy, Chris Despres' attorney, objected to the request, saying that granting it would put his client's rights in jeopardy.

"You (the court) are asking Despres to participate in an investigation that



*Beth Carpenter*

could lead him to be prosecuted," said Murphy. "Your honor doesn't have the authority."

Judge Robert Devlin Jr. disagreed, saying that providing a voice sample would not violate Chris Despres' Fifth Amendment privilege against self-incrimination. The judge, however, agreed to hear more arguments Feb. 5 before making a final decision.

Kane said the state's theory of the case did not depend on whether Mark or Chris Despres did the shooting.

Carpenter, 38, and her former lover, Haiman Clein, are accused of hiring Mark Despres, of Deep River, to kill Anson B. Clinton III in 1994. Carpenter claimed that Clinton was abusing her 3-year-old niece. She has denied any involvement in the plan to kill Clinton and has said that Clein hired Despres to impress her.

Carpenter is under house arrest at her parents' home in Ledyard on a \$150,000 bond. She spent three years in jail.

In 1997, Mark Despres pleaded guilty to murder and conspiracy to commit murder. He agreed to testify against Carpenter in exchange for the state dropping capital felony charges against him.

At that time, he admitted that he had never met Clinton and had identified him from family photographs provided by Clein. He told police he staked out Clinton's home and workplace and that he eventually lured Clinton to a deserted highway ramp under the pretense of buying a tow truck that Clinton was selling. Despres said he brought his son, Chris, then 15, along and offered the teen-ager a chance to pull the trigger. Despres said his son declined.

In June 1998 and May 2001, Despres tried to withdraw his guilty plea and renegotiate the bargain he'd struck with the state. The court denied both attempts.

Michael Fitzpatrick, Despres' attorney, said that his client's latest version of events should not affect his deal with the state.

"Under Connecticut law, a person charged as a principal in a murder could also be convicted as an accessory," said Fitzpatrick. "Thus, the revelation that his son is the triggerman does not necessarily void the plea and the plea agreement."

Attorneys Thursday picked the last juror for Carpenter's trial, which was supposed to begin Jan. 3. The jury panel includes 12 jurors and four alternates.

Defense attorney Tara Knight said it was hard to find jurors who had not been tainted by the media coverage of the case.

“When they were brought in individually, we asked them what they knew about the case,” said Knight. “Some have formed opinions or had inaccurate information about the case, and we had to bump them off.”

Last October, Knight and co-counsel Hugh Keefe asked the court to transfer the trial to Bridgeport because they said their client would not be able to receive a fair trial in New London County. The court denied the motion.

Kane would not comment on the jury selection.

Todd D. Fernow, a University of Connecticut law professor, said it was not unusual for jury selection to take so long.

“In a case like this, it takes as long as it takes to eliminate bias in the juror pool,” said Fernow. “Factually, this is a fairly complex case. It’s not a simple case of a bank robbery where everything is on camera. There are a lot of pieces to the case. The defense has to make sure that the jury was not tainted by the media.”

Carpenter has pleaded not guilty to charges of capital felony murder and conspiracy to commit murder. She is facing life in prison if found guilty.

Carpenter, who led police to Clein after he ran from authorities in 1997, was arrested in Ireland in November of the same year. She was held in an Irish prison for 19 months before she was brought to New London Superior Court to face charges.

A new trial date has been set for Feb. 6. Sources close to the trial said the defense, and possibly prosecutors, will travel next week to London and Ireland to depose potential witnesses.

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